

Members

Sen. Ron Alting, Chairperson
Sen. Robert Jackman
Sen. Rose Ann Antich
Sen. Allie Craycraft
Rep. Dan Stevenson
Rep. Claire Leuck
Rep. Robert Alderman
Rep. John Ulmer



RAIL CORRIDOR SAFETY COMMITTEE

LSA Staff:

Anne Haley, Attorney for the Committee
Jim Sperlik, Fiscal Analyst for the Committee

Authority: P.L. 28-2000

Legislative Services Agency
200 West Washington Street, Suite 301
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2789
Tel: (317) 232-9588 Fax: (317) 232-2554

MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: October 18, 2000
Meeting Time: 10:00 A.M.
Meeting Place: City Hall, 20 N. 6th St., City Council Chamber
Meeting City: Lafayette, Indiana
Meeting Number: 3

Members Present: Sen. Ron Alting, Chairperson; Sen. Rose Ann Antich; Rep. Dan Stevenson; Rep. Claire Leuck.

Members Absent: Sen. Robert Jackman; Sen. Allie Craycraft; Rep. Robert Alderman; Rep. John Ulmer.

Sen. Alting called the meeting to order at 10:18 a.m. He explained that since there was not a quorum present, the Committee could not take official action, but could take testimony.

(1) Presentation by Rep. P. Eric Turner concerning citizen efforts to install street lights and stop signs.

Rep. Turner explained that his involvement with rail safety began after a tragic car-train accident which resulted in the death of Megan Hicks, a 16 year old student at Alexandria High School. Rep. Turner provided materials for members concerning the accident. (See Exhibit 1.) Rep. Turner explained that Ms. Hicks and the driver of the

¹ Exhibits and other materials referenced in these minutes can be inspected and copied in the Legislative Information Center in Room 230 of the State House in Indianapolis, Indiana. Requests for copies may be mailed to the Legislative Information Center, Legislative Services Agency, 200 West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2789. A fee of \$0.15 per page and mailing costs will be charged for copies. These minutes are also available on the Internet at the General Assembly homepage. The URL address of the General Assembly homepage is <http://www.ai.org/legislative/>. No fee is charged for viewing, downloading, or printing minutes from the Internet.

vehicle were driving down a rural road at night and ran into a train that was stopped at a railroad grade crossing. Since the crossing was unlighted, the driver did not see the train until he was a few feet from the crossing. Alexandria High School students met with Rep. Turner and Sen. David Ford about the railroad crossing. As a result of a conference call with Cristine Klicka, Commissioner of the Indiana Department of Transportation (InDOT), the students decided to illuminate the crossing by installing a streetlight, recognizing that this was an effective but less costly alternative to installing railroad flashing lights and gates. The students raised \$3500 to pay for the cost of ongoing maintenance of the streetlight, while InDOT paid for its installation. Rep. Turner indicated that he would like to duplicate this effort for every rural crossing in the state. Toward this end, he will introduce a bill requiring InDOT to pay for the cost of installing a streetlight at a crossing if a local unit is willing to pay for the electricity and maintenance of the light.²

Kelly Hicks, sister of Megan Hicks, related the impact that losing her sister has had on her life. Ms. Hicks introduced her sisters Michelle Hicks and Tiffany Hicks. Kelly indicated that trains frequently obstructed the crossing where her sister was killed for hours at a time. Maria Diruzza, a student at Alexandria High School, explained to the Committee how the streetlight project has helped the students deal with the loss of Megan, because they feel they were able to make a difference. She stated that she would like to improve the safety at other railroad crossings. Brenda Jackson, a parent who assisted the Alexandria High School students in the streetlight project, explained that the community considered the crossing where Megan Hicks was killed to be hazardous before the accident. She stated that the increase in train traffic both locally and nationwide requires a stronger railroad safety effort. Since 60% of car-train accidents are due to driver error, education programs such as Operation Lifesaver are needed. She stated that something must be done about the 40% of accidents that are not driver-related. Since rural crossings do not have the high vehicular traffic that InDOT values in determining which crossings receive lights and gates, she proposes two other alternatives for rural crossings: (1) install dusk to dawn streetlights; and (2) install stop signs. She stated that since the streetlight was installed at the crossing, stopped trains are visible from half a mile away.

Ron Thomas, Railroad Section Manager, Intermodal Division, InDOT, applauded the efforts of the students and Brenda Jackson. Mr. Thomas stated that he wanted to clarify for the Committee that InDOT works for rail safety. He explained to the Committee that money in the rail grade crossing fund is available to local units for installation of illumination and signage. He remarked that the accident occurred in Madison County, which has received money from the fund in the past, but has never applied for funds to improve the crossing where the accident occurred. He stated that he supports leaving it to the discretion of the local units as to what safety measures are appropriate for these crossings.

(2) Testimony concerning the potential impact of the Lafayette to Delphi segment of the Hoosier Heartland Industrial Corridor on Railroad Safety.

Kathy Noland, Director, Office of Communications, InDOT, distributed materials concerning the Hoosier Heartland Industrial Corridor. (See Exhibit 2.). Ms. Noland introduced the Committee to Chris Baynes, Project Manager of the Hoosier Heartland SR 25 project. Ms. Baynes informed the Committee that the project is in the stage of creating

² Rep. Turner introduced this bill during the 2000 session of the General Assembly. The bill number of the 2000 bill is HB 1367.

the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Currently four alternative alignments have been proposed for the segment from Lafayette to Delphi and two alternative alignments proposed for the segment from Delphi to Logansport. She stated that there is no preferred alternative alignment until the EIS is approved by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and a public meeting has been held. InDOT is building a four lane divided highway. She indicated that there are currently four grade crossings with lights along the railway. Regardless of the alignment that is selected, the roadway will be located a maximum 1000 feet from the railway at the crossings. The maximum 1000 feet of space between railway and roadway will provide room for vehicles to stop at a crossing without extending out into the roadway. She explained that the EIS will address not only the impact on nature, such as the effect on endangered species and wetlands, but also the impact on historic buildings, historic districts, and social impacts. In response to a question from Rep. Leuck, Ms. Baynes stated that they will be looking at the corridor's effect on farmland.

Jim Hawley, Executive Director of the Tippecanoe Area Plan Commission, stated that none of the proposed alternative alignments address rail safety because they are too far away from the railway. Mr. Hawley distributed an inventory of railroad warning devices and grade crossing accidents in the corridor (See Exhibit 3.) Mr. Hawley explained that all of the alternative alignments proposed by InDOT are located 1000 feet north or south of the rail corridor. He said that it does not make sense in terms of crop production to create two 1000 foot corridors with farmland in between; he proposes instead an alignment located as close to the railway as possible. Mr. Hawley distributed materials showing the alignment proposed by the Tippecanoe Area Plan Commission that has received local support. (See Exhibit 4). The Commission's proposed alignment would result in the closing of as many as 11 railroad crossings and the construction of bridges for the remaining crossings. He criticized InDOT's alternative alignment located south of the railway on the grounds that the railroad would periodically cut off the access of the fire department at Buck Creek. He also pointed out the advantage of crossing at a narrow point of the creek next to the railway instead of to the north of the railway as one of InDOT's alternative alignments suggests. In response to a question concerning how the new high speed rail would affect the Hoosier Heartland Corridor, Mr. Hawley stated that the corridor would not be affected because the high speed rail route extends from Cincinnati to Indianapolis; the route will be used by CSX Railroad, not Norfolk Southern Railroad. He pointed out that when train traffic increases due to high speed rail, something will need to be done about the grade crossings.

Chris Baynes, Project Manager, InDOT, clarified that the roadway would be located 1000 feet away from the railway only at railroad crossing sites, while the remainder of the roadway would be located alongside the rail bed. She stated that some of these grade rail crossings would probably be closed and any new crossings would be on bridges not at grade. Sen. Alting asked about any problems she perceived with Mr. Hawley's proposed alignment. Ms. Baynes stated that because she just received the proposal she could not comment on it. She did state that InDOT does not mix intersection types, because this increases the number of accidents at grade. She emphasized that there is no preferred alternative alignment. After a preferred alternative alignment is developed in April or May of 2001, InDOT will start narrowing down the details and will even have an opportunity to make changes during the design phase. For additional information about the project, Ms. Baynes referred to the project website at www.sr25.study.com

Mike Scime, Manager of Public Affairs, Norfolk Southern Railroad, stated that InDOT involved Norfolk Southern in the project from the beginning. Mr. Scime stated that Norfolk Southern approves of locating the grade crossings as far from the roadway as possible to avoid vehicles from extending into the roadway when stopped at the crossing. He approved of Mr. Hawley's proposed alignment in the sense that it creates one major

corridor. In addition, the proposal would solve safety problems by building bridges at crossings and closing other crossings and would allow InDOT to access Federal funds for making those improvements.

(3) Testimony concerning the development of high speed rail in Indiana.

Larry Goode, Division Chief, Division of Intermodal Transportation, InDOT, distributed to members the executive report of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative. (see Exhibit 5.) Mr. Goode explained that Indiana is part of a nine state initiative to provide high speed rail to the Midwest. There is currently one designated route from Cincinnati to Indianapolis to Chicago and a recent application was approved for a route from Indianapolis to Louisville. The FRA is currently testing positive train control systems for the corridor from St. Louis to Chicago. He informed the Committee that there is a bill in Congress to provide a \$10 billion bonding authority for Amtrak to build the infrastructure. The bill would require 80% of the funds to come from bonding and 20% to be provided by the state. Mr. Jim Sperlik, Fiscal Analyst for the Committee, Legislative Services Agency, informed the Committee that the Northwest Indiana Transportation Study Commission is looking at the high speed rail issue.

Senator Alting asked the audience for any further comments. Rep. Sue Scholer stated that she appreciated the Committee looking at the Hoosier Heartland Corridor in terms of rail safety. She stated that it is the appropriate time to be making comments and she was glad the Committee heard the plan for high speed rail. She asked the Committee to look at the proposed alignment Mr. Hawley submitted to InDOT. Rep. Sheila Klinker said that she agreed with the comments made by Rep. Scholer. Rep. Klinker stated that she was pleased that the Committee is discussing rail safety and the issue of high speed rail. Norbert Fisher, Councilman, Lafayette City Council, District 5, indicated that the Lafayette City Council passed a resolution supporting high speed rail and forwarded the resolution to Indiana's congressional representatives. He stated that he believes the corridor will lead to development of the area within his district. Mr. Fisher opposes InDOT's alternative alignment that would cut through the abandoned airport property, because a foundation has purchased the property to develop a grade, middle, and high school on it.

Sen. Alting announced that this would be the last meeting of the Committee. The meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m.