## 2022 *Stop. Trains Can’t.*

## FACT SHEET

From September 12 through December 14, 2022, the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are teaming up for the *Stop. Trains Can’t.* safety campaign. The campaign kicks off Rail Safety Week, which is September 19-25, 2022. The *Stop. Trains Can’t.* campaign aims to remind drivers to yield or stop at highway-rail grade crossings and to be alert for approaching light rail transit. The campaign focuses on reducing collisions, deaths, and injuries at freight and commuter train and rail transit train crossings. NHTSA wants drivers to understand that it’s their responsibility to know and obey their state and local rail crossing laws. Read on for more safety tips and facts.

**Freight and Commuter Trains**

* Between 2017 and 2021, there were 7,919 collisions between freight and commuter trains and motor vehicles, resulting in 620 fatalities and 2,965 people injured at public rail grade crossings.
* In 2021 alone, there were 1,627 motor vehicle collisions at public rail grade crossings, resulting in 126 fatalities and 505 people injured.
* Freight and commuter train incidents and fatalities have declined dramatically for decades, but many drivers have disregarded warning signs or circumnavigated active warning devices in recent years. From 2017 to 2021, 1,679 collisions occurred when drivers went around or through a lowered gate, accounting for 21% of all collisions. These deaths were largely preventable and caused by risky driving behaviors and poor decision-making.

**Rail Transit Trains (Light Rail and Passenger Rail)**

* In 2020, there were 449 motor vehicle collisions at rail transit train crossings, resulting in 7 fatalities and 139 people injured.
* Between 2015 and 2020, there were 4,046 collisions between rail transit trains and motor vehicles, resulting in 83 motor vehicle fatalities and 1,267 people injured.

**Right-of-Way for Vehicles**

* By law, all freight trains have the right-of-way at all at-grade rail crossings. State highway traffic safety laws require all drivers to slow, yield, or stop until the train has cleared the roadway and it is safe to proceed. It is illegal in most states to go around a lowered crossing gate or to ignore signs or flashing lights posted at a railroad or light rail crossing.
* Since light or passenger rail grade crossings can be located at intersections or midblock locations, including public and private driveways, the right-of-way rules vary. When the crossing is separated by something like a bridge or underpass, or protected by a fence or traffic barrier, and there are no traffic control devices, motor vehicles and other traffic are prohibited. However, if the light or passenger train operates within a separate traveled way or along a street or railroad where motor vehicles have limited access and cross at designated grade crossing locations only, the light rail vehicles usually have the right-of-way over other roadway users. Finally, when the light rail or passenger vehicle operates in mixed traffic where the roadway is shared with all types of road users, the light or passenger rail vehicles do not have the right-of-way over other roadway users at grade crossings and intersections. Instead, they are usually controlled with the same devices used by general traffic.

**Know the Laws**

* Of the approximately 125,500 public rail grade crossings in the United States, roughly 56% are equipped with “active” warning devices, such as automated gates, bells, or flashing lights to alert drivers of an approaching train. The remaining public grade crossings are equipped with “passive” advance warning signs, such as crossbucks, yield, or stop signs.
* Motorists must yield or come to a complete stop at least 15 feet from a rail grade track if 1) flashing red lights are activated, 2) a crossing gate is lowered, 3) a flagman or law enforcement officer signals you to stop, 4) a stop sign is posted, or 5) a train is visible or a train whistle is audible.
* Rail transit trains have the same rights and responsibilities on public roadways as other vehicles. To increase motorists’ safety, be mindful of where rail transit trains operate; never turn in front of an approaching train; be aware that buildings, trees, etc., cause blind spots for the rail transit operator; and maintain a safe distance from the train if it shares a street with vehicular traffic.

**Use Caution at Every Freight, Commuter, or Rail Transit Crossing**

* Freight and light rail trains cannot swerve, stop quickly, or change direction to avert collisions. The average passenger car traveling at 55 miles per hour can make an emergency stop in about 200 feet, whereas a light rail train may require about 600 feet — the length of two football fields — to stop. An average-length freight train traveling at 55 miles per hour may take the length of 18 football fields to stop.
* Ignoring rail signage or attempting to go around a lowered crossing gate can have deadly consequences. It is never worth risking your life or the lives of your passengers, train crew and their passengers, or others nearby by ignoring the law or racing a train.
* When approaching a grade crossing, slow down, look, and listen for a train on the tracks, especially at “passive” crossings.
* Look carefully in both directions before crossing a track — even during the day.
* Do not rely on past experiences to guess when a train is coming. Trains can approach from either direction at any time, especially in locations with multiple tracks.
* Never race a train. Due to optical effects, most people misjudge an approaching train’s speed and distance from the crossing, just as guessing the height or speed of an airplane in the sky is difficult.
* Before driving over a rail crossing, be certain there is enough room on the other side of the tracks for your vehicle to fully clear the crossing. Be aware that you may need to cross multiple sets of tracks at some railroad crossings.
* Never stop on the tracks. Keep moving once you have entered the crossing and, to avoid stalling, never shift gears on the tracks. If your vehicle does stall on a rail track — even if you don’t see a train coming — quickly move all occupants out and away from your vehicle and the track. Run toward the train and away from the tracks. If you run in the same direction that the train is traveling, you could be hit by flying debris when the train hits your car. When it’s safe to do so, call the number on the blue Emergency Notification System sign. If the sign is not visible to you, dial 911 for help.

For more information, visit [www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/get-materials/rail-grade-crossing](http://www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/get-materials/rail-grade-crossing).