



ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION

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Commissioners Vote to Create Two New Railroad Inspector Positions Commission Focusing on Fixing Problems at High Incident Crossings

(Phoenix) The Arizona Corporation Commissioners voted to create two new railroad inspector positions in the Safety Division to increase railroad safety.

There are currently six inspectors who inspect railroad operations statewide. Each has a designated practice; mechanical equipment, tracks, crossings, hazardous materials, operating practices, and signals statewide. One of the new positions would be assigned to track inspection, the other one to crossing inspections.

“In my visits to rural Arizona I had the opportunity to see the Commission’s Railroad Safety Division down at the border in Nogales and also learned of the dangerous Kearney railroad crossing problem,” said Commissioner Andy Tobin. “With only one Commission Staffer responsible for more than 3,000 miles of rail that cross our state, it became obvious we needed to more appropriately allocate resources and address current and long-term railroad safety needs. Thank you to the Commission’s Rail Safety Division for supporting this priority and my fellow Commissioners who voted to make Arizona railroads safer.”

Arizona Corporation Commission Chairman Doug Little recently opened a docket to investigate crossing safety after a federal report identified five railroad crossings in the Phoenix metro area as among the most dangerous in the country.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) released data last month on railroad crossings with the most incidents in the country over the past decade. The 1st, 2nd, and 5th most dangerous are in Phoenix. Two others that ranked 3rd and 12th are in Glendale. Fortunately, there have been no fatalities at those crossings.

FRA representatives held a meeting this week with Commission Staff, Commissioners and their policy advisors, representatives from the railroads, the cities, and the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT).

The ACC did order upgrades at several of those crossings in previous Commission orders but the improvements still have not been made.

“We need to understand what is preventing safety upgrades from getting completed and take immediate steps to streamline the process to ensure needed upgrades are made in a timely fashion,” said Chairman Doug Little. “The meeting and the docket investigation are the first steps to coordinate our efforts with the railroads, federal, state and city government agencies responsible for these crossings. I am prepared to do everything in my power to ensure the safety of Arizona citizens.”

The FRA also conducts safety inspections throughout the state. Every year, the ACC in

collaboration with ADOT and municipalities identify crossings that are eligible for federal funding for crossing upgrades. The funding, from the Federal Highway Administration, provides significant financial relief to municipalities. Four of the five crossings listed on the FRA report have been included on the ACC's array dating back to 2005. In addition to those grants, the FRA announced new grant money is available this year that could help pay for the upgrades.

“Our staff works diligently to protect Arizona residents,” said Little. “We cannot wait until tragedy occurs.”

The crossings listed are:

- West Thomas Road, just east of North 27th Ave., Phoenix
- North 35th Avenue, just south of U.S. 60 and West Indian School Road, Phoenix
- North 43rd Avenue, just south of U.S. 60, Glendale
- North 27th Avenue, just north of West Thomas Road, Phoenix
- 5100 block of West Bethany Home Road, Glendale

The docket in the investigation number is RR-00000E-16-0152 and can be found on the Commission's website by going to eDocket. A workshop will also be scheduled next month.

The two new positions will help staff cover the state and handle inspections more efficiently.