



Council Communication

Office of the City Manager

Date	April 12, 2010
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Agenda Item No.	61
Roll Call No.	<u>10-</u>
Communication No.	<u>10-183</u>
Submitted by:	Jeb E. Brewer, P.E. City Engineer

AGENDA HEADING:

Authorization for the Mayor to send a letter to the Union Pacific Railroad regarding trains blocking at-grade crossings.

SYNOPSIS:

Recommend approval of sending a letter to the Union Pacific Railroad regarding trains that block traffic at at-grade crossings. The City of Des Moines has a number of railroad at-grade crossings. When these crossings are blocked by stopped or slow moving trains for long periods of time, there is significant impact to the traveling public. The proposed letter requests the Union Pacific Railroad representatives to meet with the City to address the problem of trains blocking streets for long periods of time.

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE

Amount: N/A

Funding Source: N/A

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Many communities throughout the United States, including Des Moines, have at-grade railroad crossings. These crossings are necessary as both vehicle (automobile/truck/bus/bicycle) and railroad transportation networks, and are important components in the local and national economies. Over the years, there have been efforts by government jurisdictions and railroads to reduce the number of at-grade crossings, and also to improve the safety at existing at-grade crossings.

In recent years, the increased price of fuel has made shipping by trains more economically competitive with trucks for long distance hauling of freight and bulk commodities. This increase in rail shipping has increased the number and length of trains, which results in longer blockages of the at-grade crossings. Of particular concern is the north-south Union Pacific (UP) Railroad line in the area from Hull Avenue south to Maury Street. This section is part of the main north-south UP line between Minneapolis and Kansas City. In addition to approximately ten through trains per day, street crossings in this area are blocked by local switching movements between the Hull Avenue railroad yards, located north of Easton Boulevard, and the Short Line yard east of SE 18th street. Deliveries of rail cars are made to/from local businesses (ADM, Firestone, etc.) through these rail yards.

Through this section of rail line between Hull Avenue and Maury Street, there are two grade separations, where Guthrie Avenue goes over the UP rail line and Hull yard, and where East University Avenue

(Iowa 163) goes under the rail line. The Guthrie overpass provides reasonable access to a grade separation for the area north of University Avenue. The grade separation at East University Avenue provides for uninterrupted traffic on University, but there is very limited access for traffic on other streets that may be blocked south of University (Hubbell Avenue, Grand Avenue, Walnut Street, etc.) to use this grade separation. Therefore, vehicles on these streets are generally blocked for the time a train is passing through, or stopped at, an at-grade crossing. This is especially difficult for heavy commuter traffic if the blockage occurs during the peak traffic times, but also for local traffic and emergency vehicles whenever the blockage occurs.

A grade separation structure to take one of the major cross streets over the railroad is a potential solution, but it would be very expensive and the long sloping sections on each end of the overpass would eliminate access and be very disruptive to all of the properties adjacent to the existing street. A grade separation for this railroad line is planned to be constructed as part of the SE Connector project, which will greatly improve access to a large area, including the planned Agrimergent Park. However, construction of this segment of the SE Connector is years in the future, and will not resolve all of the train/vehicle conflicts that currently exist.

There is a desire to work with the Union Pacific Railroad to identify possible solutions to the at-grade crossing issues that could enhance safety and minimize the delays and access problems created by trains blocking crossings. This letter will express these current issues and request the railroad to participate in a process to seek solutions.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S): NONE

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S): NONE

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

Meeting with the Railroad and working to implement reduce time of blockage.

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