



U.S Department of Transportation
Office of Public Affairs
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590
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News

FRA 03-22

February 23, 2022

Contact: FRA Public Affairs

Tel.: (202) 493-6024

FRAPA@DOT.gov

FRA Hosts Rail Safety Town Hall in South Florida

Boynton Beach, Fla. — Concerned with the recent spate of grade-crossing and pedestrian fatalities in South Florida, Federal Railroad Administration officials today hosted a town hall meeting in Boynton Beach to discuss best practices and strategies to reduce grade-crossing and trespass injuries and deaths.

“Grade crossing collisions and trespassing remain the most common causes of death and injury in rail environments. Tragically, they are also the most preventable,” FRA Administrator Amit Bose said. “I’m deeply concerned with the lives lost each year. Safety is FRA’s top priority, and President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law invests heavily to advance safety initiatives.”

Paired with local, state and private investments, the infrastructure law will help close the financial gaps that often impair safety advancements. “We can’t solely focus on pedestrian and driver behavior,” Bose said. “We must also fulfill our shared responsibility by reducing safety risks and limiting the possibility of collision.”

“We have a shared responsibility with our federal, state and local partners and with the railroads to address grade crossing safety with both education and infrastructure investment,” said Federal Highway Administration Deputy Administrator Stephanie Pollack. “At the federal level, we are committed to partnering with all stakeholders to prevent these tragic collisions.”

In sending top officials to this forum, Bose noted that Florida logs a five-year average of 2.84 incidents per grade crossing, compared to 1.51 nationally.

“It’s going to take all of us to fix this problem,” FRA Staff Director of Grade Crossing and Trespass Outreach James Payne told the group gathered at the Boynton Beach Police Department. “This is a shared responsibility.”

Payne, FRA's Chief Safety Officer Karl Alexy and the Federal Highway Administration's Associate Administrator for Highway Safety Cheryl Walker led a series of presentations and conversations with regional city and county officials and representatives from Brightline, Florida East Coast Railway, South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, Amtrak and CSX.

Leaders discussed lessons learned, prevention measures and areas for improvement. Understanding that cost is sometimes a barrier, FRA officials also encouraged those present to begin thinking about applying for grant money that will be available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which authorizes up to \$5.5 billion over five years to eliminate grade crossings and improve safety through the new Railroad Crossing Elimination program. The new infrastructure law also provides up to an additional \$10 billion for FRA's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Grants, a competitive program that funds numerous types of rail improvements, including making grade crossings safer and funding trespasser prevention efforts.

FRA Administrator Bose announced this partnership last month in a letter he and the heads of the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration sent to regional stakeholders. Demonstrating shared responsibility, the multi-agency group will work as a team to help implement new practices and programs.

"The Sunshine State's warm weather affords more outdoor opportunities," Bose said, stressing, "and we must discourage trespassing and encourage pedestrians and motorists to always obey signs and signals along the railroad right of way and to always expect a train. We must work as *one* to save lives."

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