

# Train Talks

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*Informal discussions by the Pennsylvania Railroad with its patrons on matters of mutual interest and concern.*

AUGUST, 1935

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## Grade Crossings . . .

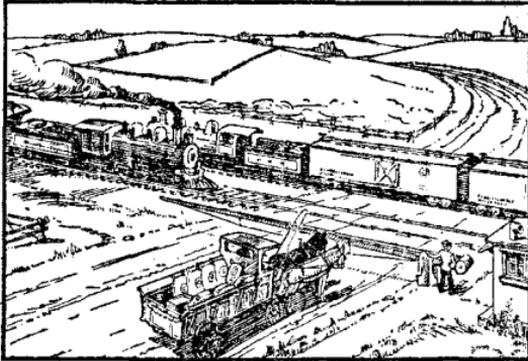
### **Their Elimination a Public Responsibility**

**I**N THE early days of America, the public roads were built chiefly at local expense and used for local travel. Railroads were later built across these highways at grade, and with all their incalculable benefits brought also the hazard of the grade crossing. When a crossing was to be removed it seemed natural for the railroad, as the only important transportation agency involved, to bear the cost.

With the coming of the motor vehicle, hard-surfaced highways began to displace the dirt roads. Highway travel stretched out into longer and longer distances and began to include much commercial as well as pleasure transport. It was in time seen that the counties, townships and other public authorities which were building and extending these highways properly ought to share with the railroads the expense of crossing eliminations, and this became the general practice.

Now that era, in turn, has practically run its course. The building of county and township roads is coming to an end. State and Nation are the highway builders of today





and tomorrow. Highways and super-highways are being flung across the country in every direction for general transportation purposes.

Highways have expanded into a stupendous national transportation system, surpassing the railroads in property investment, and serving every section from coast to

coast and border to border. Grade crossing removals are no longer merely local benefits. A grade separation on the Atlantic seaboard may benefit a motorist from the Pacific coast.

### **The Changed Transportation Picture**

Highway traffic has grown by leaps and bounds until now the vehicles which cross railroad lines at grade throughout the country, in a day, are thousands of times greater in number than the units of train traffic which cross the highways.

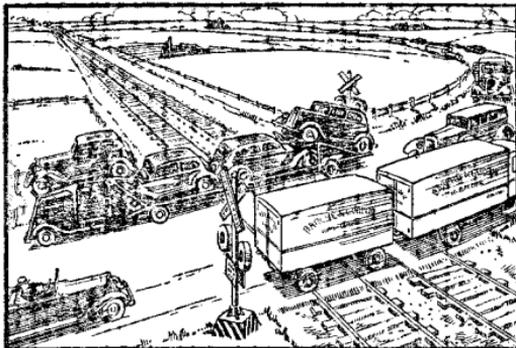
The number of railroad trains operated has been materially reduced in recent years. Railroad mileage has not increased since the close of the World War. Grade crossing eliminations have ceased to be of measurable benefit to the railroads.

The entire transportation picture in America has been so completely transformed by the motor vehicle that every consideration of logic and justice now requires that grade crossing eliminations shall cease to be treated as railroad responsibilities at all. They have become highway improvements, pure and simple, just as much so as the surfacing of an old highway or the building of a new one. As such, they are rightfully public responsibilities to be met at public expense.

This view was strikingly confirmed by the recent action of the National Administration in setting aside \$200,000,000 of Federal work relief money for grade crossing removals. That the trend of progressive legal thought is in the same direction is indicated by

the following statement of Mr. Justice Brandeis in a recent decision of the United States Supreme Court:

“The main purpose of grade separation therefore is now the furtherance of uninterrupted, rapid movement by motor vehicles. In this respect grade separation is a desirable engineering feature comparable to removal of grades and curves, to widening the highway, to strengthening and draining it, to shortening distance, to setting up guard rails, and to bridging streams.”

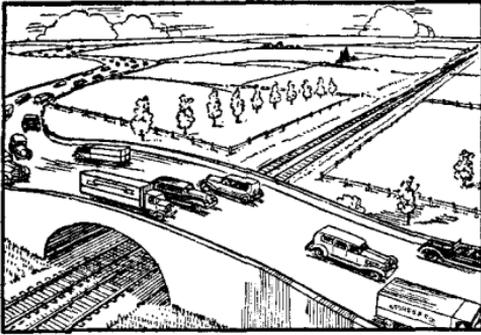


With grade crossing elimination definitely established as a public responsibility, this most important feature of highway improvement work will be in a position to go forward upon a new and economically sound basis. States, in budgeting their highway expenditures, should consider the wisdom of ear-marking liberal proportions for grade separation purposes. Similarly, Federal highway aid appropriations should include specific provisions for removing crossings on important highways carrying interstate traffic.

## **240,000 Grade Crossings in Country**

In view of the very large highway mileage already built, it is conceivable that many instances may arise in which the public welfare would be better served by clearing a major traffic artery entirely of grade crossings than by spending money on new highway construction in anticipation of future traffic growth.

The only completely safe crossing is a crossing eliminated, but, in view of the fact that there are 240,000 in the country, removal of even the greater part of them must be the work of years. In the meantime, the need for caution continues, and on the part of motorists it will be greater in the future than in the past. Automobiles are



being built for constantly higher speeds, and the desire to get over the road in the shortest possible time has become one of the most important factors in causing motor accidents.

Deaths and injuries on the highways are creating national alarm. So grave

is the situation that the adoption of all practicable measures to lessen the number of these accidents has plainly become imperative. During 1934 American highway casualties cost 36,000 lives and injured 1,000,000 people. In five years the toll of fatalities alone has been more than 160,000. It seems indisputable that drivers bent upon making speed over the road have created a condition in which they must be saved from themselves.

### **Required in Fairness to Motorists**

Modern highways are concededly built to permit and encourage high speeds in travel. Fairness to the motorist, and frank recognition of present day motoring practices, therefore require that such highways be freed from grade crossings as an integral feature of their design and construction.

A thousand or more crossings are being eliminated in the United States every year, but highway extensions have created new crossings so rapidly that the present number is actually greater than ten years ago.

**A**CCCEPTANCE by Federal and State authorities of full responsibility for grade crossing eliminations, as part of the country's highway building program, has become the only effective solution to this problem.