



February 20, 2023

The Honorable Thomas Patton
Chairman
Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation

SUBJ: Ohio House Bill 23

Dear Chairman Patton:

The Ohio Railroad Association is pleased to submit this testimony in support of HB 23's language supporting Ohio's continuing investments in grade crossing safety. Since the late 1980s, the comprehensive efforts to reduce crashes at highway-rail grade crossings have reduced crashes from nearly 900 per year to 64 in 2021. According to the most recent data, approximately 69% of Ohio's public grade crossings provide an active warning to motorists and pedestrians of an approaching train. These achievements have been accomplished because of strong and continuing support from past Administrations and General Assemblies.

Railroad-Highway Grade Crossing Safety

Ohio's extensive roadway and railroad networks intersect at more than 5,600 at-grade public crossings. That is more than one crossing for every mile of track (Ohio has less than 5,200 miles of active railroad tracks.) Many crossings are less than one mile apart.

Given the density of crossings and the freight rail network, Ohio's crossing inventory is the fourth largest in the country (behind Texas, Illinois, and California). The number of incidents at railroad-highway crossings in Ohio has fallen significantly over time, a public safety success story. These results can be traced to decades of diligent work to improve warning devices, eliminate at-grade crossings through closure or grade separation, and driver education for the traveling public. While crashes have been dramatically reduced, Ohio continues to see roughly 81% of crashes happen at crossings with active warning devices. This percentage of crashes (where there are active warning devices alerting the motorist of an approaching train) is about 20% higher than the national average. Nonetheless, crash reduction is continuing to happen here, and that is due to the comprehensive and persistent approach taken by the involved parties.

House Bill 23 maintains funding for the Rail Commission's grade crossing safety improvement program at prior years' levels. This program will continue to primarily focus on upgrade of passive warning devices (crossbucks) to active warning devices (lights and gates and/or from flashing lights to lights and gates). As mentioned in the ORDC'S testimony last week, the state is continuing to use data to address the problem, and by continuing to implement other warning device improvements, install queue



management features, reconstruct roadway surfaces, educate motorists, and eliminate crossings, we all believe we will see further reduction in the numbers of these preventable crashes.

Funding for the Rail Commission's Grade Crossing Safety Programs is as follows:

Funding Source	(Fund, ALI)	FY 2024	FY 2025
Highway Construction – State	(7002, 772421)	\$1,100,000	\$1,100,000
Grade Crossings –	Federal (7002, 776462)	\$14,068,961	\$14,068,961

HB 23 also contains language supporting the operations of the ORDC, its loan program, and oversight of federal funds the ORDC has been awarded via competitive rail infrastructure programs. The ORDC has proven to be an effective public agency in both delivering results via public safety projects as well as leveraging private investment in rail infrastructure.

The Ohio Railroad Association urges the Committee's support for the bill.

Sincerely,



Arthur Arnold

Executive Director
The Ohio Railroad Association

