



APTA RT-RGC-RP-002-02, Rev. 3

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Rail Grade Crossing Working Group

Rail Transit Grade Crossing and Trespass Prevention Public Education

Abstract: This recommended practice provides guidelines for developing rail transit grade crossing public safety and trespass prevention education programs.

Keywords: public education, rail grade crossing education, rail trespass prevention, safety

Summary: This document establishes recommended guidelines for establishing or enhancing rail transit grade crossing public safety outreach and education programs that can be applied to encourage the safe behavior of passengers, pedestrians and motorists who come in contact with rail transit systems at grade crossings and along rail transit rights-of-way.



Foreword

The American Public Transportation Association is a standards development organization in North America. The process of developing standards is managed by the APTA Standards Program's Standards Development Oversight Council (SDOC). These activities are carried out through several standards policy and planning committees that have been established to address specific transportation modes, safety and security requirements, interoperability, and other topics.

APTA used a consensus-based process to develop this document and its continued maintenance, which is detailed in the [manual for the APTA Standards Program](#). This document was drafted in accordance with the approval criteria and editorial policy as described. Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

This document was prepared by the Rail Grade Crossing Working Group as directed by the Rail Standards Policy and Planning Committee.

This document represents a common viewpoint of those parties concerned with its provisions, namely transit operating/planning agencies, manufacturers, consultants, engineers and general interest groups. The application of any recommended practices or guidelines contained herein is voluntary. APTA standards are mandatory to the extent incorporated by an applicable statute or regulation. In some cases, federal and/or state regulations govern portions of a transit agency's operations. In cases where there is a conflict or contradiction between an applicable law or regulation and this document, consult with a legal adviser to determine which document takes precedence.

This document supersedes APTA RT-RGC-RP-002-02, Rev. 2, which has been revised. Below is a summary of changes from the previous document version:

- Title changed from "Rail Transit Grade Crossing Public Education" to "Rail Transit Grade Crossing and Trespass Prevention Public Education."
- Reformatted to align with the new APTA Rail Transit standards format.
- Committee membership updated.
- FTA statistics updated.
- Included information on Operation Lifesaver Canada.



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Participants

The American Public Transportation Association greatly appreciates the contributions of the **Rail Grade Crossing Working Group**, which provided the primary effort in the drafting of this document.

At the time this standard was completed, the working group included the following members:

Seth Daphne Esmeson, *Sound Transit*, Chair

John Ayers, *Onyx Rail Safety Solutions*

Matthew Baccitich, *TriMet*

Mitch Bennett, *Niagara Frontier Transit*

Mohammed Boukhriess, *Houston Metro*

Kevin Carney, *Chicago Transit Authority*

Ritu Chawla, *Wi-Tronix*

Andrew Clapham, *Network Rail Consulting*

Bret Clayborne, *Dallas Area Rapid Transit*

Wende Corcoran, *Operation Lifesaver*

Robert Cotter, *Charlotte Area Transit System*

Shawn Crighton, *Dallas Area Rapid Transit*

Alan Danaher, *WSP*

David Esquibel, *Cordoba Corporation*

Deepika Gangwani, *Toronto Transit Commission*

Brian Gilleran, *Federal Railroad Administration*

Alex Goff, *Junction Rail Consulting*

Carlton Gonsalves, *Frauscher Sensor Technology*

Donna Johnson, *Dallas Area Rapid Transit*

James Joyce, *Dallas Area Rapid Transit*

Srinivas Kumar Katreddi, *WSP*

Harold Kirman, *DB E.C.O. North America*

Justin Lee, *TriMet*

Thomas Maher

Michael McArdle, *Vanasse Hangen Brustlin*

William McClellan, *ACI*

Aderemi Omotayo, *LA Metro*

Brent Ogden, *Kimley-Horn and Associates*

Michael Puplett, *Toronto Transit Commission*

Fausto Reyes, *ACI*

Bruce Smith, *Rock Region METRO*

Mike Smith, *Regional Transit Authority*

Joseph Tassiello, *NJ Transit*

Project team

Bryan Sooter, *American Public Transportation Association*

Tytus Suchotinunt, *American Public Transportation Association*

Introduction

This introduction is not part of APTA RT-RGC-RP-002-02, “Rail Transit Grade Crossing and Trespass Prevention Public Education.”

APTA recommends this recommended practice for:

- individuals or organizations that inspect, maintain and/or operate rail transit agencies;
- individuals or organizations that contract with others for the inspection, maintenance and/or operation of rail transit agencies;
- individuals or organizations that influence how rail transit and commuter rail systems are inspected, maintained and/or operated (including but not limited to consultants, designers and contractors); and
- individuals involved with rail transit and commuter rail safety, public outreach, and other public informational programs.

The application of any recommended practices or guidelines contained herein is voluntary. In some cases, federal and/or state/provincial regulations govern portions of how a rail transit system operates. In such cases, the government regulations override any conflicting practices this document recommends.



Scope and purpose

For maximum impact and effectiveness, individual rail transit systems are encouraged, to the fullest extent possible, to deliver similar safety messages nationwide, although some adjustments for local circumstances may be unavoidable. The purpose of this recommended practice is to provide guidance to help rail transit systems reduce the number of collisions, deaths and injuries at grade crossings and along rail transit rights-of-way involving the public by ensuring that passengers, pedestrians and motorists understand the inherent dangers involved in rail transit operations and their own critical role in making safe decisions around tracks and trains.

Rail Transit Grade Crossing and Trespass Prevention Public Education

1. Background

According to statistics compiled by the Federal Transit Administration, from 2016 through 2023 there were 4,369 collisions at rail transit grade crossings in the United States, including 116 fatalities and 814 injuries. The transit rail grade crossing collision rate per train mile hit a low in 2020 but has increased every year since, reaching 106.17 collisions per 100 million train miles in 2023. Rail transit agencies reported 595 fatalities due to suicides and 209 fatalities due to trespassing. The risk of a fatality or injury to employees, pedestrians, patrons, highway vehicle operators and passengers is significant, and rail transit systems have a responsibility to address this issue.

There is a rich history of experience that rail transit systems can draw upon to address this concern. Most if not all rail transit agencies participate in Operation Lifesaver (OL), which is a public education and awareness campaign that originated in 1972 on the Union Pacific Railroad as a six-week public awareness educational campaign in Idaho. OL has since grown, and there are permanent national programs in Canada and the United States known as Operation Lifesaver Canada and Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (OLI), respectively. These programs have contributed to an extraordinary reduction in fatalities and injuries at highway rail grade crossings, and this program is a model for rail incident prevention, public education and outreach programs.

Rail transit agencies should make the most of their experience, knowledge, history and resources, and should reach out to other rail systems, as well as OL and state or provincial coordinators. Connecting with these organizations can help rail transit agencies share best practices, learn from successful safety initiatives, and leverage valuable resources and expertise. Additionally, collaboration can enhance public education efforts on rail safety, ultimately creating a safer environment for both transit systems and the community. Furthermore, rail transit agencies have adopted federally mandated safety plans that undergo rigorous audits by federal, state and provincial authorities. When combined with a comprehensive public transit safety education program, these measures can potentially further enhance safety and reduce overall risks to both the transit system and the public.

See Appendix A, which contains additional grade crossing safety resources, and Appendix B, which contains examples of educational safety materials.

2. Public education

2.1 Public education programs

Each rail transit agency should address rail transit grade crossing and rail passenger/pedestrian issues related to its transit operations. Consideration should be given to promoting partnerships with local municipalities, transit and local police, fire and emergency responders, trucking and bus companies, and schools and universities that operate along the transit right-of-way when addressing public education programs, as well as the state Operation Lifesaver program.

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To accomplish a rail transit grade crossing and trespass prevention public education program, an organizational analysis should be conducted to examine the short- and long-term public outreach and education goals of the organization, as well as the trends that are likely to affect these goals.

Often, this analysis requires that upper-level management examine its expectations concerning the program. The following core elements of a rail transit safety public education program should be considered:

- An ongoing, permanent public safety education program. (Many existing programs are under the authority of the rail transit agency safety office, in close cooperation with the public affairs office.)
- “New-start” education programs that commence at least six months prior to the start of any new service, or a “new startup” designed to encourage the safe behavior of passengers, pedestrians and road users on and around rail transit operations. If the education audience is large and resources are limited, it may be advisable to begin outreach efforts up to a year prior to the new start.
- Periodic evaluation of the program and any incidents to ensure that the intended audience is meeting behavioral objectives.
- Information about the meaning of warning signs and traffic signals related to rail transit operations; the applicability of general traffic and trespass laws; and the consequences of unsafe choices around the rails, including trespassing on the right-of-way.

To set priorities and use resources effectively, each rail transit agency should take responsibility for identifying its own high-risk locations, corridors and groups (by age, gender and other demographic information). It is possible that the target locations and groups for public safety outreach and education may vary for passengers, pedestrians and motor vehicle operators. In addition to using locations where collisions, fatalities or injuries have occurred, factors for identifying target audiences might include the following:

- **Passengers:** Determine the demographics of the train riders. Identify the heaviest use locations and times. Identify the locations representing the greatest risk. For example, do large groups of riders work or go to school at a single location on the transit system? Are there particular locations where passenger queuing is a problem?
- **Pedestrians:** Identify high-volume areas of the transit system. Possible sources are operating data and schedules, fare collection data, and police reports.
- **Road user:** Determine the type of street and highway traffic and its origin (public and school buses, trucks, emergency vehicles, hazardous materials) crossing the rails. Identify whether the rail transit system can partner with other organizations to deliver public safety education to these groups. Determine whether the system can provide additional highway rail grade crossing public education information.

2.2 Pedestrian and roadway user plan

Each rail transit agency should develop a program plan for its public outreach and education program or new-start program. Such plans should be included in the applicable rail transit agency safety plan or equivalent. These become important as jurisdictions pursue transit-oriented development, infill, and other development along or near rail rights-of-way.

The rail transit agency education plan should describe the responsibilities for developing or selecting training curricula, developing and managing educational materials, and the planning of activities for the next year, based on identified target locations and audiences. Rail transit agencies should be prepared to update this plan quarterly.

Based on the activities planned, financial, educational material and personnel resource needs must also be planned and budgeted, so that all necessary resources are available in time to meet the demands of scheduled activities.

It is recommended that rail transit agency employees be identified and trained in Operation Lifesaver programs to make regular safety presentations to the system's service area communities as part of the rail transit agency safety plan or equivalent.

3. Public outreach

3.1 Target audience

The audience targeted for education should be determined by assessing the demographics of the pedestrian and highway/street user population encountered by or near the transit operation. Typical target pedestrian subgroups would include transit system passengers; elementary, secondary and higher education students; local industry employees; shoppers; and tourists. Highway/street user targets would include operators of passenger vehicles; both light and heavy trucks (including hazardous material carriers); city and tourist buses; school buses; and special-purpose vehicles such as ambulances, fire equipment, public utilities vehicles, construction equipment, etc.

It is important to determine the origin of the pedestrian and highway/street traffic so that the education programs can be focused at the source of these individuals and vehicles (e.g., in schools, workplaces, bus terminals or truck depots) as well as provide educational material (billboards, signs) near or en route to the transit operation. It is also important to assess any language requirements of the educational messages if a significant number of pedestrians and highway/street users' first language may not be English.

Appendix B depicts some of the tools to accomplish this task.

3.2 Educational materials

Operation Lifesaver, Inc. and various rail transit agencies have developed a wide range of educational materials to accompany their public outreach programs. Existing OL and transit agency materials include print brochures and key audience inserts; videos; video modules (including instructor guides, student handbooks and tests); and public service announcements for television, radio, internet and print media (billboards, magazines, newspapers, etc.), and social media platforms.

NOTE: Operation Lifesaver Inc. is an American nonprofit public awareness program dedicated to ending collisions, fatalities and injuries at highway rail grade crossings and on railroad property nationwide. OLI's headquarters is at 425 Third St, SW, Suite 915 Washington, DC 20024; phone: 800-537-6224, website: <https://oli.org>.

Operation Lifesaver Canada is dedicated to preventing collisions at railway crossings and railway trespassing incidents in Canada. It is funded by the Railway Association of Canada and Transport Canada. Its headquarters is at 99 Bank St., Suite 901, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6B9; website: <https://www.operationlifesaver.ca/>.

With permission, Operation Lifesaver, Inc. and various rail transit agencies may allow other agencies to adapt their educational materials to suit local circumstances. Examples of these educational materials are included and referenced in Appendix B. As new transit safety public outreach materials are developed and approved, they are posted on the Operation Lifesaver, Inc. website under [Public Awareness Campaigns](#).

Educational materials acquisition should include research to identify which of the available materials can meet public education needs or can be modified and adapted, and/or which need to be developed. Transit

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agencies should conduct careful assessments to ensure that educational materials obtained from other sources meet their actual public education needs.

Focus group tests have confirmed that educational programs benefit tremendously from inclusion of site-specific information. For example, station names or transit system routes, vehicle photos, telephone numbers, and contact names may be included but should be checked frequently to ensure accuracy. For optimal impact, educational materials should be illustrated with site-specific pictures of equipment operating in local settings. Also, educational materials may need to address unique site-specific safety concerns, such as street running or multiple track operation. The educational materials and messages of all rail transit, freight rail and heavy rail passenger operations and interested transportation safety groups should always contain a few identical, very basic safety messages, such as “See Tracks? Think Train!®” and “Stay Off! Stay Away! Stay Safe!®”

Educational needs that cannot be met by existing materials must be addressed by developing new materials. The educational materials development process should commence with a review of the public education needs assessment, followed by a selection of the presentation methodology to meet those needs, such as hard-copy materials, classroom presentations, video, self-paced instruction and computer-based training. The process should then continue to select and organize the topics that meet the objectives of the public education needs assessment. The next step is to develop the discussion points that support the topics. Appropriate media sources will also have to be identified. This effort should include considerable coordination with state, provincial, local and national organizations to ensure that the information being developed is consistent with other public safety education efforts.

Under a cooperative agreement with the FTA, OLI distributes grant funds on a competitive basis to transit agencies for the development and execution of public safety awareness and education campaigns, during years of FTA funding. All materials developed under this grant program are licensed by OLI and available for use by other rail transit agencies, with permission, free of charge.

It is imperative that public safety outreach and education materials be kept both accurate (so that passengers, pedestrians and road users receive the most useful information possible) and up to date (so that the material is as appropriate as possible for the intended audience). Regardless of the source of the educational materials, a collection of the most current version of materials should be kept in a central “library” for quick reference by anyone in the organization. A regular review of the educational content of materials should be scheduled.

3.3 Public education events

Public education must be consistent and ongoing to be effective. The type of public outreach activity selected largely will depend on needs and is also dependent on the financial and personnel resources available. Rail transit agencies should coordinate OL activities with the appropriate OL state coordinator and may consider using or adapting a range of approaches, based on the following educational programs successfully utilized by OL:

- **Formal education classes:** This requires course materials that are presented in a classroom situation. These materials must be tailored to meet the needs of the specific audience.
- **eLearning:** There are two interactive eLearning courses available for school bus drivers and professional drivers. Both can be found at www.oli.org.
- **In-house events:** Agencies can host regular, sponsored in-house events that stress using the system safely. Information may also be disseminated on billboards or signboard displays in rail cars and on platforms, in educational videos played in stations, and/or by handing out educational materials and other promotional items (pens, bookmarks, keychains, notepads, etc.) at stations.

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- **State, provincial and local programs:** Agencies can work through the state programs that use OL-authorized volunteers from various sources (rail transit, police, education, etc.) that support one another's public education efforts, especially when mutual needs can be met by a combined effort.
- **Coalition events:** Various groups with an interest in improving overall community safety share responsibility for long-term educational outreach. In addition to sharing the resource load with one another, rail transit agencies and other OL partners also benefit from the authorized volunteer training of community leaders such as teachers, healthcare workers, law enforcement, etc. These new authorized volunteers become a permanent rail safety resource for their communities.
- **Special events:** Agencies can implement programs such as "Officer on a Train" events, where law enforcement personnel have an opportunity to ride in the cab and see problem areas from the operator's perspective. Other special events include "Santa Trains" and "Easter Trains," during which passengers may receive safety presentations and other information.
- **Celebrity spokespeople:** Agencies can solicit local celebrities to promote grade crossing safety.

It is important that rail transit agencies coordinate public education activities with other organizations that may already be planning educational activities addressing key target audiences. Through coordinated planning and pooling of limited financial and personnel resources, unnecessary duplication of effort can be avoided and a larger audience can be reached, to the benefit of both a community and a transit organization.

3.4 Public presenter preparation

Both OLI and OL Canada offer programs in which individuals can be trained on how to promote rail safety education through community presentations and outreach. Individuals who have been trained in these programs are known as Operation Lifesaver authorized volunteers (OLAVs) for OLI and rail safety ambassadors (RSAs) for OL Canada. It is recommended that rail transit agencies identify and train employees as OLAVs or RSAs and maintain an active employee base of OLAVs or RSAs to make regular safety presentations to the service area communities as part of the rail transit agency's safety plan or equivalent.

Developing a cadre of presenters and adequately preparing them to deliver the public safety outreach and education program is critical to that program's success. A source of presenters may be found within the transit agency's own employees (which should be encouraged as an essential source of presenters), from other transportation providers and public sector organizations, and from community volunteers who have an interest in public safety. At a minimum, individuals who deliver the outreach and education program need to understand the audience for whom the information is intended. Basic information should include rail safety generally and information about the local rail operation specifically in a format that is appropriate for each particular audience, in order to effectively present and to answer audience questions.

Operation Lifesaver, Inc. provides an excellent online classroom that instructs OLAVs in how to use OL materials, followed by a face-to-face training. Operation Lifesaver state coordinators provide additional support and resources for OLAVs, and OLI provides a mechanism for reporting events and presentations, as well as helping to keep track of statistics on number of presentations, types of audiences, number of people reached and special events. OLAVs have access to a variety of resources not available to the general public. The online authorized volunteer education link is <http://oli.org/training/volunteer-for-oli>.

3.5 Evaluation and follow-up

In order to evaluate and improve the impact of public safety outreach and education programs, rail transit agencies should keep a complete record of their public outreach efforts. The evaluation process should center around two procedures: establishing measures of success and using testing or observation to verify the transfer of knowledge.

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The evaluation should consider the effectiveness of both education efforts and educational materials in meeting learning objectives. Recommend regular collection and review of near misses and collisions data for ongoing assessment and data driven decision making.

All OLI public outreach activities, including OLAV and estimated audience attendance, should be reported to OLI using the OLI reporting system for consistent recordkeeping. OLI tracks all OL activities and issues reports annually to the FTA and other stakeholders.

Related APTA standards

APTA RT-OP-RP-008-04, “Rail Transit Customer Relations Programs”

APTA RT-OP-S-022-17, “Operations Personnel Requirements in New Rail Transit Projects”

Definitions

rail transit agency: An organization that operates passenger train service and its supporting activities. Also called *operating agency, operating authority, transit agency, transit authority, transit system.*

Abbreviations and acronyms

- FTA** Federal Transit Administration
- OL** Operation Lifesaver
- OLAV** Operation Lifesaver authorized volunteer
- OLI** Operation Lifesaver, Inc.
- PSA** Public service announcement
- RSA** Rail safety ambassador

Document history

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Appendix A (informative): Bibliography

1. <http://www.apta.com>. American Public Transportation Association. Provides information on public transportation issues.
2. <http://www.oli.org>. Offers information on Operation Lifesaver, its mission, state programs, structure, volunteer opportunities, partners, safety brochures, approved vendors of safety materials, etc.
3. <https://www.operationlifesaver.ca/resources/>. The Canadian OLI offers resources which are available in English and French.
4. <https://www.operationlifesaver.ca/initiatives/campaigns/today-is-better/>. Offers mental health/Today Is Better resources.
5. <http://www.fta.dot.gov>. The Federal Transit Administration provides information on current grade crossing technology demonstration projects, as well as information on a variety of grade crossing issues. This site also provides access to the FTA Safety Management Information Statistics Annual Reports, which contain information on collisions, deaths and injuries related to light and heavy rail operations.
 - <https://gradecrossingtoolkit.fra.dot.gov/>. The Grade Crossing Toolkit (GCTK) is a resource for identifying effective strategies for preventing rail grade crossing incidents on the U.S. railroad network.
 - <https://trespasstoolkit.fra.dot.gov/>. The Trespass & Suicide Prevention (TSP) Toolkit identifies effective railroad trespass prevention strategies and suicide prevention measures.
6. <http://www.fra.dot.gov>. The Federal Railroad Administration provides [information on collisions, deaths and injuries](#) related to freight rail and heavy rail passenger operations. <https://trespasstoolkit.fra.dot.gov/>
7. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov>. The Federal Highway Administration publishes the “Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.” [Part 8](#) provides guidelines and standards for signs and signal equipment used at highway rail grade crossings.
8. <https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/passenger-and-transit-rail-safety>. Developed jointly by the Federal Transit Administration and Operation Lifesaver, this passenger and transit rail safety program is available to any transit agency that signs a licensing agreement and is fully customizable to meet the agency’s needs. Materials can be obtained online or directly from Operation Lifesaver, free of charge.

Appendix B (informative): Sample safety materials





Operation Lifesaver “Stay Safe. Know the Facts” transit safety brochure



Operation Lifesaver’s [rail safety education materials](#)—available in English and Spanish—promote safe practices for transit riders and communities with operating or planned rail transit systems: light rail, streetcar service, subway and commuter rail.

Transit Safety Pledges

Make your communities safer! Take the Transit Safety Pledge today.

	<input type="checkbox"/> My safety is important to me, my family and friends. I promise to make safe choices at train stations and when riding trains.
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will always walk my bike, scooter or skateboard on station platforms.
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will let people off the train before I get on.
	<input type="checkbox"/> If I drop something on the tracks, I will always leave it and notify transit personnel.
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will share the rail safety message with my friends and family.

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The transit safety pledges give rail transit and commuter riders concise, actionable information to use when entering stations, accessing train platforms and riding trains.

After taking the transit safety pledge online, users may download a certificate reminding them of the safe choices they promised to make. Adults also have the option to instantly share the pledge link across social media or via email with family, friends and colleagues.

- [Pre-K Transit Safety Pledge](#), tailored to appeal to pre-readers
- [Kids Transit Safety Pledge](#) (pictured above)
- [Transit Safety Pledge](#), ages 13 and up

Transit safety posters in English and Spanish

These [five transit posters](#) remind transit riders to make safe choices when traveling on transit and commuter trains. The impactful posters feature close-up face images capturing transit rider attention with actionable safety advice.



Transit safety public safety announcements (PSAs)

These [video PSAs](#), available in English and Spanish, cover safety at transit stations, rail transit crossing safety, and safety around streetcars and light rail.



Kids PSAs, coloring book and activity book



OLI's "See Tracks? Think Train!" mascot, known as ST3, comes to life in a PSA and teaches a diverse group of young riders how to make safe choices on transit platforms as well as when riding trains.

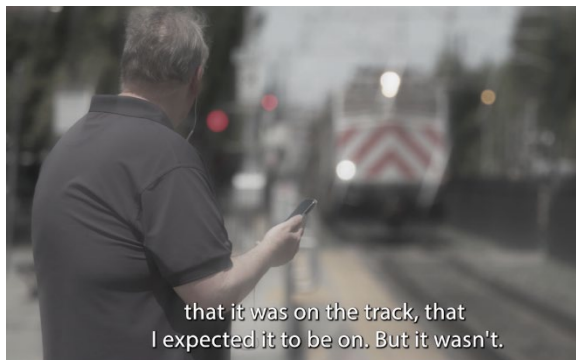
A coloring book for the youngest riders and an activity book for older kids also feature ST3, capturing kids' attention with fun images to color and engaging activities that teach important safety concepts in an entertaining way.

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Materials available:

- Kids transit safety PSA, [60 seconds](#)
- Kids transit safety PSA, [30 seconds](#)
- Spanish PSAs, [30, 60 and 75 seconds](#)
- Coloring book, [English](#)
- Coloring book, [Spanish](#)
- Activity Book, [English](#)
- Activity book, [Spanish](#)

#STOPTrackTragedies transit video



OLI's #STOPTrackTragedies campaign features personal stories of people who have been directly affected by rail crossing or trespassing incidents, including victims, friends and family members, locomotive engineers, and first responders.

In "Nick's Story," Nick Sayer explains his own near miss and educates people about why they should always stay focused at commuter rail and rail transit stations and facilities.

Materials available:

- Full video, [English](#)
- English PSA, [60 seconds](#)
- English PSA, [30 seconds](#)
- Full video, [Spanish captions](#)
- PSA, [60 seconds, Spanish captions](#)
- PSA, [30 seconds, Spanish captions](#)

Operation Lifesaver "Dedicated Left Turn" and "In-Street Running" PSAs and Supplemental Materials.

Two 30-second video PSAs, Dedicated Left Turn and In-Street Running, present realistic scenarios that underscore the importance of understanding roadway layouts, paying attention to traffic signals and always yielding to trains. These safety messages are part of OLI's ongoing efforts to reach roadway users in communities with transit systems and help prevent collisions, injuries and fatalities at railroad crossings and along railroad rights-of-way.

In [Dedicated Left Turn](#), a driver, distracted by her GPS and rushing to reach a concert, nearly turns left into the path of an oncoming train after misinterpreting a green light emphasizes the need to wait for a green arrow when turning left across train tracks -- reminding viewers to wait for the green arrow, stay alert and minimize distractions. This PSA is most relevant in the cities of Los Angeles and San Jose, CA, Seattle, WA Minneapolis, MN, New Jersey, Baltimore, MD, Phoenix, AZ and Charlotte, NC

In-Street Running highlights a common source of confusion in transit-heavy areas like Houston, TX, San Francisco, CA and New Jersey. As a driver considers turning left narrowly missing a streetcar, he is reminded that it's important to follow the signs, pavement markings and signals – and know the proper lane to turn left from. The PSA reminds viewers to understand lane designations and always yield to trains, reinforcing the message: “Don’t collide, stay on your side”

OLI has also developed a suite of supplemental materials for transit systems that share the road with drivers and have left-turn situations– available in a variety of formats and sizes, including bumper stickers, visor cards, vinyl clings, posters, billboards, etc. These are ideal for use in outreach, education and digital campaigns. You can find those materials [here](#).

