



May 8, 2017

Mr. Patrick Warren, Acting Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Acting Administrator Warren:

It is our understanding that FRA is contemplating a \$400,000 cut in FY 2017 for support of Operation Lifesaver (OLI). This represents a 40 percent reduction in support for OLI and a 15% overall reduction in its annual budget. Such a severe reduction would put the continued existence of this important safety organization in jeopardy. The OneRail Coalition urges FRA to maintain its \$1 million plus funding for OLI in support of its critical safety mission.

Ten years ago, there were nearly 3,000 vehicle-train collisions at railroad grade crossings across the United States. Today, that number has been reduced nearly a third to just over 2,000, and deaths at railroad crossings have dropped nearly 37 percent over the decade. Even with this impressive record, an uptick in crossing and trespass incidents since their historic lows in 2009 shows the continued need for Operation Lifesaver's public awareness and education efforts. It is worth noting that preliminary data for 11 months of 2016 compared to 2015 show a dangerous increase: crossing deaths are up 18 percent, and trespass deaths up 15 percent. As our Rail Safety report notes, the overwhelming majority (92%) of rail accidents today involving fatalities are the result of trespassing on rail property or highway-rail grade crossing accidents.

Operation Lifesaver, Inc., (OLI, www.oli.org), the non-profit public safety education and awareness organization, is dedicated to reducing collisions, fatalities and injuries at highway-rail crossings and trespassing on or near railroad tracks, and is a key leader in raising awareness of these two rail safety issues. Its programs are co-sponsored by a partnership of federal, state and local government agencies, highway safety organizations, America's freight and passenger railroads and rail suppliers. OLI promotes the three E's - education, enforcement and engineering - to keep people safe around the tracks and railway crossings within communities.

More than 3,000 trained OLI volunteer presenters across the U.S. work tirelessly to spread the group's standardized safety message and tips every day in cities and small towns where they live and work. These volunteers reach over 2 million people per year through in-person meetings, including free presentations customized for school groups, driver education classes, community audiences, professional truck drivers, school bus drivers, law enforcement officers, and emergency responders, as well as through social media. These efforts are supported by targeted local and national public safety campaigns, including the group's current "See Tracks? Think Train!" campaign (www.seetracksthinktrain.org).

The organization is well regarded by federal and state government entities, the news media, and other public safety organizations like AAA because of its independent, nonprofit status. Its efforts in 46 states and countless communities across the nation expand the reach of state, local and private industry safety education and enforcement efforts and amplify the messages that the public receives through news media, social media and community activities.

As background, Section 206 of the Rail Safety Improvement Act (RSIA), P.L. 110-432 (122 Stat. 4873) authorizes the FRA to make an annual grant to Operation Lifesaver to carry out rail safety public information and education programs to help prevent and reduce fatalities and injuries at highway-rail grade crossings and along railroad rights-of-way. As you are aware, the FRA funds are used to cover OLI's national staff; a reduction in these funds would likely force a reduction in staff, threatening the viability of the organization. RSIA also requires that OLI provide information to the public on how to report unsafe or malfunctioning highway-rail grade crossings (Emergency Notification Systems as required under 49 USC 20152).

Operation Lifesaver began in 1972 as a six-week public relations campaign launched by Union Pacific Railroad in the state of Idaho. That year, there were approximately 12,000 crossing collisions in the United States. Largely because of Operation Lifesaver, grade crossing-related fatalities in Idaho dropped by 43 percent. Word of this success spread to other states, which began introducing their own public education safety programs; today there are OL programs across the U.S., including in Hawaii and Alaska. Operation Lifesaver Inc., established in 1986, serves as the program's non-profit national support center, working closely with FRA on its activities and state programs.

According to FHWA, 2016 was "the fifth straight year of increased mileage on public roads throughout the nation" and the latest data from NHTSA indicates that the number of licensed drivers and registered vehicles have been steadily increasing since 2010, reaching historically high levels. The growth in overall population and traffic levels raises concern regarding exposure on highways, at highway-rail grade crossings, and along rights of way. NHTSA statistical projections indicate that traffic fatalities have increased in the last eight consecutive quarters (October 2014 - September 2016). For this and several additional reasons it is critical to support Operation Lifesaver's safety outreach programs:

- Rail's share of U.S. freight shipments is much higher today than it was 30 or 40 years ago.
- Passenger rail of all types - heavy rail, commuter rail, light rail and transit - is experiencing a period of growth in the United States.
- News media accounts and scientific studies have chronicled the increase in distractions to pedestrians and motorists alike from headphones and mobile electronic devices, making them more vulnerable around tracks and trains.

Operation Lifesaver maintains broad support from rail labor and management; its founding board members, the Association of American Railroads, the Railway Supply Institute, and Amtrak; other major organizations including the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, the Governor's Highway Safety Association, the National Safety Council, and the Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association; local and national law enforcement; and many others.

OLI's mission remains paramount: Saving lives and reducing injuries at level crossings and on and around railroad property. The OneRail Coalition urges FRA to maintain its \$1 million plus funding commitment to OLI so this valued partner in rail safety can continue building on the amazing success story of an 80% reduction in crossing collisions over the past 40 years.

Sincerely,

Anne P. Canby, Director
OneRail Coalition