

Railroads

Contact

Project Managers in the Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations –
Rail Administration Section (OFCVO)

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[Map: Project Managers' Areas](#) (bottom of page)

Purpose

Coordination of the railroad aspects of Trunk Highway projects is essential for safety, maintaining project schedule, and allocation of funding.

Threshold Criteria

- If any construction activity is expected within 50-ft of the centerline of an individual pair of railroad (RR) tracks, or
- If project limits are estimated to be within 600-ft of any RR tracks, or
- If the project has a detour that directs traffic across a RR grade crossing, or
- If the project has a 1291 Activity in PPMS:

Contact the appropriate OFCVO – Rail Administration Section project manager and request an assessment.

Also enter Activity 1291 into PPMS (if not already entered).

The project may need:

- A Railroad Agreement
- A safety evaluation
- An estimate of project RR costs

Planning Phase

If there is a RR near the project contact OFCVO – Rail Administration Section for an early estimate of project RR costs. This early coordination is important so that funding for the RR elements of the project can be identified and entered into the STIP.

Scoping / Pre-Design / Final Design Phases

If a project has RR implications (see bullet-listed thresholds above), contact OFCVO – Rail Administration Section at the start of both the pre-design and final-design phases, and if any significant changes occur. (Early identification of railroad right-of-way issues is also important).

Alternatives Evaluation Phase (Pre-Design):

Contact OFCVO – Rail Administration Section if there are any RR issues. RR impacts/costs can be a factor in the selection of the preferred alternative.

Traffic Signal adjacent to RR Signal:

If a traffic signal is within 200-ft of a signalized RR crossing, the traffic signal must be interconnected with the RR signal. If over 200-ft, but within 500-ft, a technical review should be conducted by a diagnostic team led by OFCVO – Rail Administration Section.

Access Management Projects:

If there is a RR nearby, contact OFCVO – Rail Administration Section. Projects that include Access Management may also be an opportunity to reduce RR crossings (as promulgated in State Law). Conversely, Access Management projects can have the negative effect of creating a new RR crossing (i.e., to accommodate a property-access need).

Activities on RR Property

Although construction activity on or near RR property usually requires a RR agreement, any activity on RR property requires at least a Railroad Permit (or an easement) from the affected railroad company, and the process of getting this approval can be time-consuming. (Go through OFCVO – Rail Administration Section to obtain RR permits).

If the activity is permanent, an easement is obtained by MnDOT's standard acquisition process.

Relationship to the HPDP

The scope and elements of highway projects can be affected by RR issues. Some examples are: drainage direction, pond location, footings for bridge piers, geometrics, and clearances.

Soil contamination is an issue if MnDOT acquires RR right-of-way, since RR property is often contaminated. (See HPDP: Contaminated Properties).

Roles & Responsibilities

District

The District project manager notifies the appropriate project manager in the Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations – Rail Administration Section (OFCVO) if a highway project has potential for RR impacts (i.e., if the project is near a railroad). Early coordination with OFCVO – Rail Administration Section is very important; processing RR agreements typically takes three months and complex agreements take longer.

For RR work on TH projects, the district obtains the funding, which is entered into the STIP and identified for RR costs. If a project's RR costs are over \$500,000, the RR costs can be funded using either Federal or State funds; if under \$500,000, they should be funded with State funds.

Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations – Rail Administration Section

The RR project manager (in OFCVO – Rail Administration Section) determines if there will be RR impacts, and if there are, does the following:

- Conducts a safety evaluation (a diagnostic review of any RR crossings within the vicinity of the project)
- Completes a preliminary cost estimate of project RR costs
- Negotiates and completes the RR agreement
- Continues to act as liaison between the RR company and MnDOT's project team (including the processing of RR invoices)

Railroad Company

When there is any RR impact, RR companies review and comment on MnDOT's highway and bridge plans. (This is true for bridges whether the highway is over or under the railroad).

Agencies/Organizations

Agency/Organization	Description
Federal Railroad Administration	FRA regulates railroads, administers railroad programs, and promulgates and enforces rail safety regulations.
Federal Highway Administration	FHWA administers funding for grade crossing safety programs.
Operation Lifesaver	A nationwide, non-profit public information program dedicated to reducing collisions, injuries and fatalities at highway-rail crossings and on railroads rights-of-way.
AREMA	The American Railway Engineering and Maintenance of Way Association

Permits and Approvals

Permit/Approval	Responsible Agency
Railroad Agreement	MnDOT – Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations
Railroad Permit	MnDOT – Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations
Railroad Land Acquisition	MnDOT – District Land Management

Railroad Agreements

Projects may require railroad agreements (which are negotiated and completed by OFCVO – Rail Administration Section). The following activities require a RR agreement:

- Flagging

Any activity within 50-ft of the centerline of an individual pair of RR tracks, may require a flagger. (Flaggers are always RR employees).

- Contractor's crossings (if MnDOT's contractor needs to cross RR tracks).
- Bridge construction: For a bridge over or under a RR, the RR company owning the tracks is involved in the bridge design and approval process.
- RR track relocations
- Surface Agreements: Permanent public crossing of RR tracks (RR company builds).
- RR signals, RR warning devices, and RR-signal interconnects with traffic signals. (Installation or modification).

Railroad Permits

Any activity on RR property requires a permit (or an easement) from the affected railroad company. (A permit can either be stand-alone or as part of a RR Agreement)

If any activity on RR property is needed:

- The District identifies the permit needs
- OFCVO – Rail Administration Section obtains the permit (and negotiates the permit's terms/conditions)

Request permits early, since obtaining a permit can take significant time.

Railroad Land Acquisition

See Section 5-491.125 of the Right of Way Manual at:

http://www.olmweb.dot.state.mn.us/manual/RW_MANUAL2007.pdf

Legal Basis

Minnesota Rules, [Chapter 8830](#)

Minnesota Statutes, [Chapter 219](#)

Code of Federal Regulations: Title 23, Section 646 (23 CFR 646)

Guidelines/Regulations

For projects within 600-ft of a RR crossing, federal regulations require a technical review if there is federal funding. However, it is recommended that all projects meeting the 600-ft criterion have a technical review, regardless of funding. (A diagnostic team – led by OFCVO – Rail Administration Section – conducts the technical review).

Federal

23 CFR 646

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

Has regulatory authority over RR operations, infrastructure, and inspections.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Has regulatory authority over highway – railroad at grade crossing projects and other highway – railroad crossing (grade separated) projects where federal funds are used.

MnDOT

[Minnesota Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices](#)

Has provisions addressing RR issues. (See Chapters 3, 8, and 9).

State of Minnesota

Minnesota Rules 8830

Minnesota [Statute 219.073](#)

Directs and encourages MnDOT to eliminate at-grade RR crossings when feasible.

AREMA (The American Railway Engineering and Maintenance of Way Association)

Recommends practices pertaining to the design, construction and maintenance of railway infrastructure.

Glossary

Crossing Warning System

Warning devices installed at highway-railroad grade crossings can be either passive or active systems.

Passive Warning Systems: Include advance warning signs, and any combination of crossbucks, stop, and yield signs installed at the crossing.

Active Warning Systems: Include any combination of advance warning signs in conjunction with any combination of flashing light signals (with or without gates), which are activated by a train approaching the crossing.

Flagging / Flaggers

Railroad flagging is a manual flagging operation (conducted by a designated railroad employee in radio contact with rail operations) to ensure safety between trains and MnDOT construction activities.

Railroad Agreement

Contract agreement between MnDOT and a railroad company governing actions required and payments to be made relative to a MnDOT highway project. (More)

Railroad Company

There are 26 railroad companies operating in Minnesota: Four large (Class I), five medium (Class II), and 17 smaller (Class III) companies.

Railroad Permit

A permit from a railroad company granting permission to enter railroad property. (More)

Railroad Relocation

Permanently moving the alignment of railroad tracks.

Safety Evaluation /Diagnostic Review

An on-site evaluation of the crossing geometrics, train and vehicular traffic and speed, sight distance, and other factors to determine the appropriate crossing warning system for the location. The evaluation is performed by a diagnostic team, headed by OFCVO – Rail Administration Section staff, and includes representatives from the railroad and the local road authority.

Shoo-fly

Temporary rail line by-pass to facilitate railway or roadway construction.