



CITY OF MUSCATINE
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WHO DO YOU CALL WHEN THE RAILROAD CROSSING IS BLOCKED

Information displayed at each railroad crossing on how and where to report long delays

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Blocked railroad crossings can be a nightmare for most drivers especially if the drivers are in a hurry and the blockage last for more than 10 minutes. Most cars and personal trucks have the ability to turn around and seek another “open” crossing but larger semi-trucks, like those hauling grain, are not able to turn around and must wait, rather impatiently, for the train to clear the crossing.

Complaints concerning blocked crossings in Muscatine have been centered along the Grandview Avenue corridor and extending south past Dick Drake Way. Blocked crossings, however, is not a problem limited to Muscatine ... it is a problem across the United States.

Canadian Pacific Rail Road (CPRR) has installed information signs at each crossing that provides the crossing location number and the telephone number to call (1-800-716-9312) to report extended blockages.

This is the number that individuals should call first to file a complaint of a blocked crossing.

“You will need to know the crossing number, the engine number if you can see it, and the length of time the crossing has been blocked when you call the 800 number,” Kevin Jenison, Communications Manager for the City of Muscatine, said.

All information goes directly to the CPRR safety office who is able to communicate directly with the train crew to determine why the train is stopped, how long it has been stopped, and inquire if assistance is needed.

Individuals can also call the Muscatine Police Department (MPD) to report a blocked crossing with the MPD relaying that information to CPRR through the 800 number.

“We have developed a good working relationship with CPRR and they work hard at resolving these issues,” Jenison said.

Iowa Code prohibits the blocking of a crossing for more than 10 minutes with four exceptions: (1) when necessary to comply with signals affecting the safety of the movement of the train; (2) when necessary to avoid striking an object or person on the track; (3) when the train is disabled; and, (4) when necessary to comply with governmental safety regulations including, but not limited to, speed ordinances and speed regulations. These four exceptions cover most of the extended crossing blockages.

Railroads are moving to longer trains in order to reduce costs and that is one of the reasons for the increase in the number and duration of blocked crossings. Sometimes trains have to sit due to safety protocols while at other times a part of the train will block a crossing due to switching operations.

Enforcement options are limited, however. Iowa Code does allow a local jurisdiction to issue a citation to the train, however, that power has been limited or removed by many courts in the last several years. These courts cite the fact that the Interstate Commerce Commission Termination Act of 1995 gave the federal government exclusive jurisdiction over the speed and movement of trains. The Act abolished the Interstate Commerce Commission and replaced it with the Surface Transportation Board (STB) within the Department of Transportation.

The Act effectively makes Iowa Code unenforceable as well as a municipality’s ability to cite a train for blocking a crossing.



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Neither the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) nor the STB have written any code or rules restricting the duration or timing of trains blocking a crossing.

“While there are limited options to reduce the timing of these blockages, we have found that keeping the lines of communication open and working with CPRR has been the best solution,” Jenison said.

The Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) echoed that sentiment noting that by reaching out to the railroads directly with specific complaints can help mitigate a particular issue.

Public inquires can be directed to Canadian Pacific Rail Road’s Community Connect service at 1-800-766-7912 or emailing CPRR at community_connect@cpr.ca. This information, along with answers to some common questions about rail operations is also available through the CPRR website at www.cpr.ca.

Additional resources can be found at the Federal Railroad Administration (<https://railroads.dot.gov/>) or the Surface Transportation Board (<https://www.stb.gov/stb/index.html>).