

OREGON AT-GRADE RAIL CROSSINGS



Photo credit: Greg Westergaard/ODOT

Rail lines support the efficient transport of people and goods over long and short distances. Tracks go through city centers, urban, suburban and rural areas. Periodic crossings allow for other modes to move from one side of a track to another, facilitating a fluent, multimodal system. For that system to be effective the needs of each mode must be balanced and consideration must be given to safety, system efficiency, connectivity, and mobility, among other important goals. At-grade rail crossings represent a multimodal issue requiring such balance and consideration. This document summarizes authorities, rules, regulations, and approaches for public at-grade rail crossings in Oregon.

Oregon State Rail Crossing Issues and Policies

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) is the regulatory agency responsible for public rail crossings in Oregon and must follow state statutes, rules and policies addressing safety, freight mobility, and local transportation system connectivity.

When there is formal interest to add a new crossing, or to modify or close an existing one, a review process is initiated. Applications are submitted to ODOT Rail & Public Transit Division, who will then work with applicants and affected railroads and road authorities.

Safety is the driving factor in assessing applications. Local movement needs also play a key role in decision making, such as when crossings provide important routes for local pedestrian, bicycle or vehicle circulation. As required by statute¹, ODOT must also examine opportunities to eliminate at-grade crossings, focusing on crossings that are redundant or have the greatest potential for conflicts between trains and other modes.² Consideration of project costs, available resources, expected benefits and local conditions may result in alternate approaches to closure. ODOT also considers environmental and community impacts and resources.³ See Table 1 for a full list of considerations.

Additional parameters set in administrative rule and statute also guide decisions:

- ◆ ORS 824.018 - Grade Crossing Protection Account
- ◆ ORS 824.204 - Construction of New Grade Crossing
- ◆ ORS 824.206 - Alteration or Closure of Existing Grade Crossing
- ◆ ORS 824.210 - Construction of New Separated Crossing
- ◆ OAR 741-200-0050 - Engineered Plans and Vehicle Traffic Signal Plan
- ◆ OAR 741-120-0020 - Grade crossing construction and maintenance

¹ ORS 824.202 requires ODOT to eliminate at-grade crossings wherever possible.

² The Oregon State Rail Plan provides guidance concerning crossing closure prioritization.

³ The Oregon State Rail Plan instructs ODOT to consider environmental and community impacts in the decision-making process concerning rail transportation and at-grade crossing facilities or proposals.

Quick Facts

- ◆ Oregon has 1,876 public at-grade crossings and approximately 2,000 private at-grade crossings (ODOT regulates public at-grade crossings, plus the signage required for private crossings)
- ◆ Regulated crossings in Oregon encompass 30 railroads and over 200 rail authorities
- ◆ Crossing Orders are laws that not only specify what is to be constructed at a crossing, but they may also close crossings, suspend operations of railroads or road authorities, levy fines, authorize investigations, and authorize changes to Oregon Administrative Rules



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Recommendations for Rail Crossing Applicants

When there is interest in adding a new at-grade crossing, or modifying or eliminating an existing one, you should follow this process:

- ◆ **Identify the need:** A road authority (i.e. city, county, or ODOT), railroad, or ODOT's Rail Crossing section, identifies a need, which may be through routine internal processes or through investigations requested by the public.
- ◆ **Understand the process:** Consult with ODOT's Rail Crossing Section to determine whether a rail crossing application is appropriate and to clarify roles and responsibilities of the applicant, ODOT, railroad or public road authority.
 - *Only a public road authority, railroad or ODOT may apply for a new crossing, existing crossing modification or closure.*
- ◆ **Submit an application:** Applicants may submit a draft application as early as 30% complete project plans or anytime thereafter.
 - Complete [Railroad-Highway Public Crossing Safety Application](#).
- ◆ **Participate in the decision making process:** ODOT reviews application, facilitates negotiations between the applicant, affected railroad and road authority to address right of way, crossing configuration, appropriate warning devices, and other issues during the application process (see **Figure 1**), and issues a decision.⁴

Figure 1: Crossing Order Process Summary



Rail Crossing Decision-Making Considerations

The ODOT Rail Crossing Section reviews applications for new crossings and the alteration, relocation or closure of existing crossings. **Table 1** lists the items ODOT considers during application review.

Assessment of new crossings includes identifying if a new facility can be grade-separated or not and consideration of **public safety, convenience, and general welfare**. For existing crossing alterations, relocations, and closures, ODOT also considers the **necessity** of the change (see **Table 1**).

New crossings are considered from a corridor perspective, as appropriate. When reviewing new crossing proposals, ODOT will look for opportunities to reduce safety risks within the corridor through mitigation strategies at existing crossings.

Upon application review, **if the public road authority, railroad, and ODOT all agree to proceed**, ODOT will draft a Notice of Proposed Action for review by the Crossing Section Manager and all interested parties (railroad, public road authority, and other interested parties). If the parties do not agree to move forward, but the applicant wishes to pursue the project, an administrative hearing process is available.

Additional Resources

Find more detail on rail crossing policy, planning, and implementation at the resources listed below:

- ◆ [Oregon State Rail Plan](#)
- ◆ [ODOT Rail Crossing Safety Section](#)
- ◆ [Contested Case Hearing Rules - ORS 183](#)
- ◆ [Federal Highway Administration Grade Crossing Handbook](#)

Table 1: Crossing Proposal Considerations

Public Safety		General Welfare	
Train/Vehicle exposure-speed, length, and frequency		Emergency vehicle impacts	
Train/Vehicle collision history		Land use impacts	
Potential Train/Vehicle conflicts		Economic impacts	
Physical features		No train horn	
Mix of motor vehicles		Reduced liability	
Driver behavior			
Public Convenience		Necessity*	
Traffic circulation		Safer alternate access	
Max. freight mobility		Land use	
No modal conflicts		Freight mobility	
Blockages			
Public mobility and efficiency			
Land use-Future development			
Maintenance costs			

*Necessity considerations are only applicable during review of existing crossing modification or closure proposals.

⁴ For a complete description of the application process, including application issue resolution, Proposed and finalized Orders, and administrative hearings, see [RPTD's Order Process Guide](#).