



Manar urges vigilance, safety at rural rail crossings

June 14 2018 4:59 PM

PANA – As the community of Pana today marks one year since the loss of five family members in a collision with a freight train, State Senator Andy Manar is reminding drivers and pedestrians about the dangers of rural railroad crossings.

“Today, we’ll pause to remember five respected citizens who are missed terribly by their loved ones and friends,” Manar said. “We owe it to them and their families to do everything in our power to protect people around train tracks and ensure rail crossings are unobstructed and well maintained.”

On June 14, 2017, five Pana residents were on their way home from a church event near Nokomis, when the van they were riding in was struck by a freight train near County Road 1800 East and Illinois 16 in Christian County.

All five died from the injuries they suffered. They were John “Sonny” and Mary Castle; Herb and Nell Castle; and Mary Pugsley. John and Herb Castle were brothers and well-known businessmen. Pugsley was Mary Castle’s sister-in-law.

About \$600,000 in state money has been set aside for improvements to the crossing where the crash occurred and to another crossing about a half-mile away at County Road 1825 East. Improvements include installation of automatic flashing light signals and gates, and reconstructing the approaches to the crossing.

Manar commended state transportation and commerce commission officials for quickly recognizing the need for major safety improvements at the two crossings after the fatal collision. Crash investigators have said drivers at the location may have difficulty getting a clear view of oncoming trains because of the way the crossing is built.

“Public safety projects like these should be a priority,” said Manar, a Bunker Hill Democrat and chairman of the Senate Appropriations II Committee. “It’s a small price for saving future lives.”

According to the Illinois Commerce Commission, which oversees highway-rail crossings in the state, Illinois has more than 7,600 highway-rail grade crossings and the nation’s second-largest rail system, with about 7,385 miles of track.

In 2017, there were 86 collisions at public crossings in Illinois, down from 100 in 2016. However, total fatalities resulting from those collisions increased to 26 in 2017 from 20 in 2016, [according to ICC statistics](#).

People should remember the following safety tips around railroads:

- Drivers should stop at all railroad crossings.
- Only cross tracks at designated crossings, whether you’re in an automobile or on foot, and watch for safety gates, lights, signs or other signals to indicate when to wait and when it’s safe to cross.
- Walking, playing and taking photos on railroad tracks are not only dangerous activities, they are illegal and can result in fines for misdemeanor trespassing.
- Trains move fast through rural areas and cannot stop quickly. It takes the average train more than a mile – roughly 20 football fields – to come to a stop.
- Never disobey crossing signals. Once the warning signals at a railroad crossing begin to sound, it can take as few as 20 seconds for a train to arrive.
- Should your automobile stall on railroad tracks, get out as quickly as possible, get away from the tracks and call 911 for help.

For more information about rail safety and additional statistics, visit the website of [Illinois Operation Lifesaver](#).