

Anchorage's C Street Crossing Challenges

Background

Depending upon construction activity, the Alaska Railroad's (ARRC) gravel customers may each require one to two gravel trains per day from April through October to meet contractual demands. Gravel train scheduling must consider the time required to load the trains in the Mat-Su Valley, to transport material to Anchorage, labor laws pertaining to train crew, and requirements of trains serving other freight and passenger customers. Another key factor to the timing of gravel train movements is a Municipality of Anchorage Noise Ordinance that restricts industrial noise from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Gravel companies must operate within these parameters and this means that the railroad must time its train unloading to meet ordinance requirements.

There are many moving parts, requirements and considerations for gravel movements. While

the Alaska Railroad has strived for the best schedule, it is not possible to devise a schedule that will be ideal for all concerned. Even so, the railroad has made some progress toward mitigating conflicts inherent with this and other urban crossings.

Noise & Crossing Safety

To reduce train horn noise at crossings in Anchorage urban and residential areas, ARRC pursued a Quiet Zone project in the mid-2000s. By federal law, when a train approaches an at-grade crossing (road and rail at the same level), the train **MUST** sound its horn. The only way to avoid sounding the horn is to install a mechanism that provides a safety measure equal to sounding the train's horn.

At the C Street crossing, wayside horns were installed as a train whistle reduction system. The wayside horns meet federal requirements that allow the railroad to stop blowing train horns at



A gravel train travels crosses C Street.

this crossing while maintaining safety for motorists and trains. This substantially reduced train horn noise in nearby neighborhoods. (See *separate fact sheet on the Anchorage Crossings Quiet Zone*).

To improve pedestrian safety at the C Street pedestrian pathway crossings, the Alaska Dept. of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) and ARRC installed crossing signals with gates on both pathways in 2015 – a Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funded project.



A gate has been installed at the railroad tracks crossing over a bike/pedestrian path running parallel to C-Street.



Advance warning signs with flashers similar to school zone signs will activate when a gravel train approaches, giving commuters an opportunity to use an alternate route.

Signage & Alternate Routes

Early Warning and Alternative Routes: In 2012, the Alaska Railroad began coordinating with the ADOT&PF to install flashing signs along major roadways to alert motorists when a gravel train is approaching the crossing. Sign activation provides motorists with enough advance notice to avoid the crossing when it is blocked by a train. Also funded with HSIP money, the project is currently in the final phases of construction. The advance warning signs have been in operation since 2016 and are used from April through October.

Grade Separation

The C Street crossing traffic conflict would be ultimately resolved by building a grade separation (road goes over the rail). Likewise, the gravel unloading process would be quicker if the trains did not need to be broken up for the crossing. When plans to expand and extend C Street began in 1999-2000, the Alaska Railroad foresaw a worsening of existing traffic conflicts, and shared these concerns with local transportation officials. The Alaska Railroad coordinated with the Federal Railroad Administration, which in turn supported a \$2 million earmark to design a grade separation. Because grade separation is a highway project, the \$2 million grant was awarded to the ADOT&PF through a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) "Section 115" appropriation. Grade separation design was not pursued as part of ADOT&PF's 2-to-4-lane C Street widening project in 2004. The current Alaska State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) and the current Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation System (AMATS) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) do not include a C Street grade separation in the near future. Citizens interested in raising the priority of a C Street grade separation should contact:



Alaska Dept. of Transportation & Public Facilities
Central Region Director • (907) 269-0770
4111 Aviation Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99519

Anchorage Metropolitan Area
Transportation System (AMATS)
AMATS Director • (907) 343-7991
4700 Elmore Road, 2nd Floor
Anchorage, AK 99507