



FDM 17-15-1 General Overview

November 15, 2023

1.1 Highway Improvement Program

The Highway Improvement Program has two components:

- State Trunk Highways (Major Projects, 3-R Projects, Bridge Replacement Projects, Corridors 2020 Backbone Projects, etc.) - When these highway projects approach, cross or parallel a railroad, they often result in railroad involvement (a railroad project.) Such railroad projects, require coordination, negotiation and agreements with the railroads, and are funded as a part of the highway improvement. Also, their implementation schedules are dependent upon the schedule of the larger highway improvement of which they are a part.
- Local Programs (Highway Projects, Local Bridge Replacements, etc.) - These projects are similarly the result of a multi-year program development process. Similar to the State Highway Improvement Programs, railroad involvement often generates a railroad project, which is funded and scheduled as a part of the highway improvement project of which it is a part.

1.1.1 Transverse Facility Crossings of Railroad Land

Sometimes a highway improvement project involves the construction or modification of a transverse facility across railroad land. Such facilities include sewer lines, water lines, culverts, or electrical or communication cable. Coordination of such activities is highly specialized. See [FDM 17-60-45](#) for more guidance on these facilities.

1.2 WisDOT Safety Program

Both the WisDOT and OCR "Railroad Safety Programs" are a portion of the overall WisDOT Highway Safety Program created by federal legislation. WisDOT receives federal aid money that requires certain amounts be spent for railroad crossing safety. Of these railroad crossing safety funds, a minimum of one half must be spent on railroad crossing warning devices with remaining portions to be spent either on warning devices, or on other safety related applications at railroad crossings, such as upgrades to high-type crossing surfaces, channelization, separation structures, roadway relocations, closures or warning devices.

The Federal-Aid Highway Act provides reimbursement for up to 100 percent of the eligible project costs for all safety work including the installation of railroad crossing warning devices, for improvement to highway-rail grade crossings, improvement of highway approaches at railroad crossings and for the elimination of at-grade crossings. However, WisDOT policy is to fund such projects at 90%, with the 10% matching funds provided by the appropriate state program funds, by the railroad, or from local sources. Federal funds cannot be used to match other federal funds. Federal-aid safety funds are not generally eligible for the creation of new crossings or for funding their warning systems.

For information on the safety programs see Chapter 5, Section 6, of the WisDOT Program Management Manual.

For information on federal-aid for crossing closures, see [FDM 17-35-1](#).

1.3 OCR Safety Program

By policy, WisDOT shares the federal safety funds available for warning devices at crossings with the OCR. The "OCR Safety Program" only includes warning devices and is a portion of the overall Highway Safety Program created by federal legislation. Wisconsin receives federal aid money that requires certain minimum amounts be spent for railroad crossing safety vs overall highway safety. Of these railroad crossing safety funds, one half must be spent specifically on railroad crossing warning devices. The other half may be spent on warning devices or on other safety related applications at railroad crossings, such as crossing surfaces, channelization, separation structures, etc.

1.4 STH Surface Repair

The repair of all crossing surfaces on the state trunk highways is eligible for 85% state cost participation, up to the limit of program dollars available annually. The program is intended to repair isolated STH crossings, not those that are within the limits of larger improvement projects. Crossings on connecting highways and local roads are not eligible for funding within this program; the railroads have responsibility for these crossings. See s.

86.13(5) stats and [FDM 17-30-15](#) for additional detail.

The railroads are basically responsible for the maintenance and repair of all railroad crossing surfaces. As such, they have annual programs of work to address crossing surface needs, often in conjunction with track or other work on their system.

The Legislature created the STH Surface Repair Program as an incentive to attract railroad effort to the STH system in order to achieve smoother, higher quality riding surfaces on these higher function, higher speed STH routes.

1.5 Signal Maintenance

Railroads are responsible for the perpetual maintenance and operation of all active warning devices at crossings. Wisconsin has a program to assist the railroads with their costs of signal maintenance. The WisDOT biennial budget includes an annual appropriation for signal maintenance that provides reimbursement to railroads for up to 50% of their costs of maintaining signals in the state. The distribution is based on the total number of “signal units” at each crossing maintained by each railroad. In recent years however, the appropriated amounts have covered less than 50% of the costs. When the state appropriation does not provide enough funds to reimburse the railroads for 50 percent of their signal maintenance expense, the amount due to each railroad is prorated. The OCR administers this program.

WisDOT staff should see the Railroads & Harbors Section’s Railroad Coordination Handbook for more detailed information.

1.6 Standalone Curb Ramp Program

The Standalone Curb Ramp Improvement Program is a subprogram focused on addressing priority standalone curb ramp locations on the State Trunk Highway Network (STN) including connecting highways. 23 CFR 646.214(b)(2), which pertains to addressing railroad warning device deficiencies, does not apply to Standalone Curb Ramp Program projects. If improvements to adjacent railroad warning devices are deemed necessary, coordinate with the region railroad coordinator for consideration in WisDOT’s Rail safety program or region highway improvement programs. See PMM Sections 04-05-10 and 04-07-01 for additional information.