

Conor McCormack

From: Robert Garland [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 27, 2024 5:34 PM
To: Conor McCormack
Cc: Brian Cutler; William Reposo; Charles Hunter
Subject: RE: PW Rice Road Milbury

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Conor,

Please accept this response on behalf of Providence & Worcester Railroad Company (“PW”) in vehement opposition to the expansion of use as proposed by Whitney Street Home Builders, of the Rice Road crossing in Milbury, MA.

Initially, it is important to understand that PW is a federally regulated common carrier railroad, governed by the Department of Transportation. As a common carrier, PW is required to carry rail traffic and commodities of any and every nature when asked to do so. PW has no control over the volume of traffic, or the commodities that it carries. This same rules applies to all federally regulated common carrier railroads. As such, currently PW crosses the relevant crossing at least twice a day, at the speed of 25 MPH or under to perform and comply with that regulation. Further, it is also not uncommon that PW is required to carry commodities such as ethanol over its railway and across the relevant crossing.

Given this obligation and the inherent dangers associated with train operations, the Federal Railroad Administration along with the railroad industry work towards the elimination of all unnecessary railroad crossings. This is simply put to protect the community and PW employees and to avoid crossing accidents – vehicles and pedestrians do not win in a situation when a train is involved. It is also important to understand that the decisions and costs associated with changing, upgrading, protecting (i.e. signal systems, etc) railroad crossings are not at the railroad level, but are typically those of local, state, and federal governments. These decisions lie with the municipalities, and costs are borne by taxpayers.

Understanding these concepts – it is clear why railroads are against any new crossing installations, or expanding those that do not need to be expanded, and further why we fight for high standards of protection for the crossings in place. Once crossings are installed PW maintains the current devices to federal standards. Any future changes are up to the local, state, and federal government, at their expense. The term compliant (as used in the letter mailed to the board) meant that the crossing exists in its current condition and is maintained to federal regulated standards. Out of compliance (as used in the letter mailed to the board) meant, from the perspective of the PW, the crossing as it exists today would not be supportable from a safety or regulation standpoint, and significant costs would need to be incurred to rectify that (i.e. lights, gates, crossing devices, etc.).

The traffic study that you emailed does not take into consideration many aspects of the expanded crossing use. The Rail-Highway Grade Crossing Handbook (FRA website) recommends that the appropriate safety devices be determined by a diagnostic team that includes a Highway traffic engineer with experience with railway crossings at grade, railroad representation, and any necessary governing bodies. The outcome is the decision of local governments or other stakeholders that see fit to upgrade the crossing, understanding that they will be responsible for all expenses related to upgrading the existing crossing and ongoing maintenance costs, etc..

According to the traffic study it appears that the current movement over the crossing at Rice Rd. is approximately 48 vehicles during peak hours (Figure 2.). With the proposed installation this volume is going to increase to 83 movements over the crossing during peak hours (Figure 4). Future no build conditions movement over the crossings will be at 48 movements over the crossing (Figure 5). With future build conditions movements over the crossing will be at 131 movements during peak hours. **With the construction build the exposure to a train versus car collision is nearly doubled in the immediate future and nearly tripled by year 2027.** The current crossing cannot safely stand as it is and support this drastic increase.

Again, the traffic study does not address the railroad crossing at Rice Rd at all. Does the methodology for determining the increase in traffic account for ancillary services – UPS, AMAZON, UBER, Door Dash, etc and other delivery services that are common today? Does it address the potential traffic mix that will be moving over the crossing – more school buses, UPS, Amazon delivery trucks etc? These are huge concerns that the community should appreciate.

Risk is going to increase for this highway crossing at grade. Out of interest for employees and the general public It is the stance of PW that the crossing not be expanded, and if it is that a robust and advanced crossing system inclusive of lights and gates be installed at the expense of the Town or developer to protect the community and PW employees.

Another alternative to consider is closing the Rice Road crossing as sufficient safe access lies from Ric Road to the west. If necessary, we could allow first responders access via a lock and key.

Thank you.

Robert Garland

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