

# Blocked rail crossings rile Munster officials

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MUNSTER | The Munster Town Council wants answers from Canadian National Railway regarding a nearly 11-hour blockage Friday of a rail crossing on White Oak Avenue near 45th Street.

A CSX freight train blocked the CN-owned tracks from about 2 p.m. to midnight.

Mechanical failure of a train engine is to blame.

But town officials said it's troubling that the engine crew apparently left the train dead on the tracks when its shift was up. A relief crew was brought in later, but the train didn't move until after midnight.

"We've got a lot of angry neighbors. That train was extraordinarily long," Town Manager Tom DeGuilio said at Monday's Town Council meeting.

DeGuilio estimated the train's length at more than 9,000 feet.

DeGuilio said railroad crossing blockages — and very long trains — are becoming more frequent in town.

He sent a letter to CN on Friday asking whether CN or CSX should be held responsible for the blockage of the crossing. He asked CN for a discussion regarding the installation of adequate warning devices at the White Oak and 45th Street crossings to warn motorists and emergency personnel when the crossing is occupied.

DeGuilio said sensors have been installed at Griffith's seven-track crossing to enable monitoring of train traffic via the Internet. However, when the town inquired about the sensors it was told their signals were not compatible with the sensor system, DeGuilio said.

"We want this resolved," he wrote in his letter to CN. "The town is willing to consider some financial assistance with this project. Our desire is to link the track sensors to remote signs to advise motorists and emergency dispatch of blockages."

He emphasized concerns that "cutting off" the community for lengthy periods of time could influence the town's ability to respond to an emergency. Town officials also are taking issue with the condition of the Calumet Avenue crossings and are seeking immediate repairs.

DeGuilio's letter reminded CN of Munster's support for CN's purchase of the Elgin Joliet & Eastern Railroad.

A more immediate reminder of town officials' displeasure with the extended blockage will come in the form of a fine: CN received a \$250 ticket for Friday's incident.

Council President John Reed, R-1st, also instructed Police Chief Steve Scheckel to now ticket CN, CSX and other violators under a state statute that allows for a \$500 fine.