

Delays at train crossings irk Plainfield officials

By Alicia Fabbre, Special to the Tribune

6:05 p.m. CDT, May 16, 2014

Plainfield village officials are turning to their congressman for help in dealing with backups at railroad crossings.

Village trustees and community officials Friday met with U.S. Rep. Randy Hultgren to discuss concerns about traffic along the Canadian National Railway and its impact on the 16 railroad crossings in the village.

"This is an issue that is very dramatic for us," Plainfield Trustee Jim Racich said.

Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202 Associate Superintendent Lane Abrell noted that in this school year there have been three instances where a school bus has been stuck at a railroad crossing for 45 minutes because of a train.

"Certainly we understand that trains will run through town," he said.

But when the trains cause extended delays, Abrell said, that causes a concern about safety of the students and the loss of classroom time for the students waiting on the bus.

According to a monthly report filed by Canadian National, the railway reported some 1,957 delays at railroad crossings of 10 minutes or more during the month of March. Of those, 40 delays lasting less than 30 minutes were in Plainfield. The railroad also reported 19 delays lasting between 30 and 59 minutes in Plainfield and another 12 delays lasting an hour or more at Plainfield crossings.

In most instances, the trains stopped after a safety device along the railroad detected a mechanical problem with the train.

In one case, according to the report, a train stopped at 5:19 p.m. and blocked four crossings near the downtown for about an hour as crews worked to repair a piston in the train's engine.

In another instance on March 25, a train stopped at 2:30 p.m. and blocked four crossings near downtown Plainfield for about an hour as crews worked on

mechanical problems. The same train blocked three other crossings for another 10 to 20 minutes as it started back up.

"When a train comes in and is parked that long it's crippling," Trustee Margie Bonuchi said during the meeting.

A spokesman for Canadian National noted that trains are directed to stop as soon as possible if a safety alert goes off. Plainfield is one of the towns where safety devices are located.

"In each and everyone of those cases we work as quickly as possible to get the trains back on the move and clear the crossings," spokesman Patrick Waldron said.

Racich also pointed to a recent event where a CN freight train was left parked unattended on a sidetrack for several hours near the downtown area. The train, however, did not block any railroad crossings, and the train's crew followed proper procedure before leaving it parked on the tracks to await a new crew, Waldron said.

Hultgren said he plans to contact CN officials to discuss concerns about train traffic in Plainfield. He anticipates meeting or discussing the issue again with Plainfield officials within a month.

Village officials noted an overpass for train traffic would be ideal, but acknowledged the price tag of such a project makes it an unlikely solution.