



Memorandum

To: Alderpersons, Mayor, and Administrator

From: Robert Hutter, Interim City Engineer

Date: August 31, 2022

Re: Communication Regarding Closing 55th Street Railroad Crossing

City engineering staff have been discussing the W. Beloit Road and S. 55th St. at-grade railroad crossings with Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and the WisDOT Bureau of Transit, Local Roads, Railroads and Harbors (WisDOT). Due to the aging railroad signal equipment on W. Beloit Road, UPRR must replace and upgrade the signal equipment to meet current safety standards. The new equipment will not work with the multiple closely spaced crossings, therefore we have two options:

1. Install new signal equipment at S. 55th Street to provide separation from W. Beloit Road signal equipment
2. Close S. 55th Street railroad crossing

WisDOT and UPRR agree the Beloit Road signals and gates must be upgraded with our project according to federal code. This project is funded 80% by the federal government and 20% by the city, however anything over the federal cap is 100% city responsibility.

As part of the W. Beloit Road construction project, the city has already entered into a State Municipal Agreement (SMA) with WisDOT. The estimated design and construction of the roadway and railroad crossing on W. Beloit Road is currently \$12.5 million. Federal funding is capped at \$7.8 million. The city's portion of the roadway project is approximately \$4.4 million which includes replacing the sewer and water from Lincoln to 60th Street.

Replacing the 55th St equipment is estimated to cost an additional \$600,000 vs. removing the 55th crossing which is estimated to cost an additional \$170,000. Most likely, the city could reduce the additional local share to \$0, due to railroad and WisDOT incentives associated with removing the crossing at S 55th Street. Below is a breakdown of these additional costs:

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| • Railroad signals (lights/gates) | \$300,000 |
| • S 55 th St roadway & sidewalk | \$150,000 |
| • Design amendment* | \$140,000 |
| • Real estate acquisition** | \$ 10,000 |

WisDOT recommended closing the crossing at 55th Street for safety, cost, and time. S. 57th Street is approximately 650 feet away and Electric Avenue is approximately 850 feet away.

Advantages to closing S. 55th Street Railroad Crossing:

- Reduced design and coordination time (better likelihood of keeping construction on schedule in 2023)
- Improved safety by eliminating a conflict point



- UPRR would pay for the removal items within 4-feet of tracks
- UPRR typically provides a monetary incentive payment to close crossings. Usually a 5-figure sum that would be negotiated with the city.
- WisDOT provides up to a \$30,000 match for closing a crossing that can be used to construct other safety improvements.
- City would extend curb and gutter along both sides of Mobile Street across S. 55th Street and all sidewalk, pavement, curb ramps and signal equipment would be removed between the two Mobile Streets.

The engineering department recognizes that this may be a hardship for some residents in the short term. However, since the cost and delays of keeping this crossing open are so high, and other crossings are so close, we recommend sending letters to the neighborhood and holding a neighborhood meeting to discuss these options with residents. After the meeting, our recommendation would be to close the crossing.

Improving the overall safety to the public and the railroad; constructing one, safe, well maintained, public crossing and eliminating an unsafe crossing is reasonable.

The S. 55th Street railroad crossing only handles 300 or so vehicles a day. We are one accident away from either permanently closing this crossing or installing expensive safety facilities to keep the no whistle zone.