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Provided by The Georgia Railroad Association

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GRA proposes field trials on crossing closures.

GRA President Doug Cochran yesterday proposed to an oversight committee of the Transportation Board that proposed standards for closing unsafe grade crossings be tested at actual problem crossings. Although the committee took no formal action on the request, DOT officials expressed support for the idea and said it could be carried out during the rule-making process. The standards in the "Georgia Department of Transportation's Guide for Evaluating Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety" are not part of the proposed regulations and could be changed by DOT at any time.

GRA's proposal came as the Oversight Committee heard a staff report on the development of rules and regulations to implement HB 1382, the 2002 bill relating to maintenance and closure of grade crossings. Regulations for the maintenance provisions of the Act do not have to go through the formal rule-making process. Railroads and local government representatives have been working with DOT for over a year on both the maintenance and closure provisions of the new law. Field trials were very helpful in the development of the maintenance rules, and GRA believes they would also be helpful in the development of closure rules.

The Oversight Committee voted to recommend to the full Transportation Board that the maintenance provisions become effective in August, and that formal rule-making proceedings commence on the closure provisions. The Transportation Board is expected to approve that recommendation today. The formal rule-making process on the closure provisions provides ample time for public input and appeals. DOT staff members told GRA that field tests of the closure standards could be carried out on some of Georgia's worst crossings during this period to see if any would qualify for closure.

GRA is concerned that the most recent amendments to the closure standards in the DOT guide, proposed by the Georgia Municipal Association, could make it very difficult or even impossible to close unsafe crossings in the state. Field trials at some of the state's worst crossings should indicate whether the standards are workable.

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