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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, November 6, 2015 7:21 AM
To: FHWA-ALLDA [REDACTED]
Cc: FHWA-#ALLDFS [REDACTED]
Subject: INFORMATION AND ACTION: Traffic Signal Preemption and Highway-Rail Grade Crossings
Importance: High

To: Division Administrators

Please share this information with your State and local transportation agencies, requesting that they ensure that the train-activated preemption always receives the highest priority at any traffic control signal adjacent to a grade crossing where a second type of preemption is also provided.

ISSUE:

Earlier this year, a commuter train heading north out of New York City struck a vehicle that was stopped on the tracks of a highway-rail grade crossing at Valhalla, N.Y. Multiple fatalities and injuries resulted when the energized third rail penetrated the lead car of the train as a result of the crash. The train was in “push” mode, meaning that the locomotive was at the rear of the train and the first car of the train was a passenger car.

BACKGROUND:

The NTSB conducted a thorough investigation of the crash and determined that the traffic control signal adjacent to the grade crossing had two forms of preemption: one to clear the tracks when an approaching train is detected and another to keep the signalized intersection clear if a queue leaving the intersection in the direction of the grade crossing is detected. The crash investigation revealed that if the preemption to keep the signalized intersection clear is active, then the preemption to clear the tracks is not implemented because it is not given top priority.

Paragraph 9 in Section 8C.09 of the 2009 MUTCD states, “**If preemption is provided, the normal sequence of traffic control signal indications shall be preempted upon the approach of trains to avoid entrapment of highway vehicles on the highway-rail grade crossing.**”

The last sentence of Paragraph 10 in Section 8C.09 states, “**When multiple or successive preemptions occur, train activation shall receive first priority.**”

CONCLUSION:

In the interest of highway and rail safety, it would be beneficial to determine if any other grade crossings in the U.S. have a similar issue and, if they do, to take corrective action.

Please direct any inquiries on this matter to [REDACTED] Team Leader for Traffic Control Devices.