

How to Drive Near Trains

Approximate facilitation time: 50 minutes

Materials

- *How to Drive Safely Near Trains* Video
- Test Your Train Safety Savvy Worksheets - enough copies for all students (& Master for your reference)
- Rail Safety Scenarios Handouts - enough copies for all students (& Master for your reference)
- (Optional) Know Your Sign Worksheets - enough copies for all students

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of the lesson, the learner/student will be able to:

- Identify the names and meanings of signs and signals around railroad tracks:
- Explain how to safely drive across train tracks
- Describe why not to walk near or on railroad tracks
- Explain how to safely drive around light rail

FLOW

Introduction

Begin with a large group conversation that invites the class to talk about their personal experience with trains and railroad crossings:

- *Are there any train tracks you cross regularly? Where? Picture this in your mind's eye: What do you notice? What signage is present? What is different about crossing a railroad track from crossing another street at an automotive intersection? What is similar?*
- Compare approaching a railroad crossing to driving on a side road, and coming to an intersection with a main road. There may be signage, but regardless, the vehicles on the main road have the right of way, and may be traveling at high speeds. Approach with caution. Look both ways. If extra signals are provided (lights, bells, gates) respect them. Just like running a red light can lead to a collision with another car, "running" a crossing gate can lead to a collision with a train.
- *Does anyone in the class know (of) anyone who has been injured by a train or at a railroad crossing?*

Student Worksheet: *Test Your Train Safety Savvy*

Pass out the student worksheet Test Your Train Safety Savvy, and share the following instructions with students: *Please take a few minutes to answer the questions on this worksheet to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer to a question, make your best guess or skip it. Afterwards, we will watch a video about driving safely around trains and tracks.*

Give students a few minutes to complete this work quietly, then introduce the video: *Just like you, one of the characters in the video we're about to watch is a new driver preparing for her driver's test. As you watch, keep in mind the questions you just answered. You can use the video to check your earlier work and make updates as necessary.*

Watch Video

How to Drive Near Trains [10:53]

“Stand-Out” Reflections: Ask class what information in the video really stood out for them.

Quiet Individual Work: Have students spend a few minutes updating their answers on student worksheet [Test Your Train Safety Savvy](#):

Take a few minutes to look back over your answers to the questions on the worksheet, and make any updates or corrections. As you do so, please circle anything you found surprising or that you are still unsure of the answer to.

Review correct answers: Using the [Test Your Train Safety Savvy Master](#), review the answers to the worksheet questions. You may choose to do this by reading the answers aloud to the class while students check their work, or by asking students to volunteer the answers.

Reflective Group Discussion:

- Ask students what information they were surprised by. What questions did they initially answer incorrectly? What pieces of information feel the most important to them?

Scenarios

The [Rail Safety Scenarios Master](#) handout contains nine different scenarios with accompanying questions and answers. Refer to this document for this section of the lesson. **Begin with the first scenario, *Approaching the Tracks*, and select others based on issues relevant to your community.**

You may choose to facilitate this activity entirely as a class discussion or by having students read and discuss the scenarios in pairs/small groups, and finishing with a brief whole-class sharing of what was discussed in these smaller groups:

Option 1: Read aloud...For each of the scenarios you have selected, read the scenario aloud, and engage students in discussions to identify the correct answers to the questions that follow. (Answers and related safety information for you to share with students are included in the [Rail Safety Scenarios Master](#) handout.)

Option 2: Pass out scenario handouts...Pass out the [Rail Safety Scenarios](#) handout for pair or small group discussion use. Direct students to the scenarios you wish for them to pay attention to. You may choose to assign students to attend to all scenarios, or ask different students to focus on different scenarios. Following the individual/small group work, bring students back together to briefly share their ideas with the whole class.

DriveSafe Messages

Share the following with students: *Think for a moment about what you’ve learned today. Imagine that you are going to create your own short vlog to share just one or two key messages with other teens that will help them drive safely near trains. Turn over your worksheets. On the back, write down your ideas for this.*

Optional: If time allows, after students have had a few minutes to write down their ideas, have them turn to one another and share these ideas in pairs.

OPTIONAL ENDINGS

If you have time, you may choose to reinforce sign identification or safe driving near light rail.

Sign Review (optional)

Have students complete the worksheet: [Know Your Sign](#), in which they will match common railroad crossing safety signs and warning devices to their names and meanings.

Light Rail (optional)

If you have time, you may choose to end your presentation with a final review of how to drive safely across a light rail track:

Who remembers the rules for safely turning left across a light rail track?

Answer: Obey all traffic lights. Only turn left across a light rail track on a green light or arrow. Before making the turn, be sure to look along the track for an oncoming train approaching from behind you. Never make a left turn at an intersection marked with a No Left Turn sign.

Test Your Train Safety Savvy - ANSWER KEY

1. At which of the following signs should you Yield?

- a) Crossbuck
- b) Crossbuck w/Yield
- c) Crossbuck w/Stop

Answer: a + b. All Crossbuck signs tell you to Yield to an oncoming train. A Crossbuck with Stop tells you to come to a complete stop

2. Fill in the Blank. Trains are large, heavy and can't stop quickly. An average freight train traveling at 55mph can take _____ to come to a full stop.

Answer: A mile or more

3. A motorist is _____ times more likely to die in a crash involving a train than another automobile.

Answer: 40

4. If the pavement approaching a RR crossing isn't marked with a stop line, what is the minimum distance before the track at which should you come to a complete stop?

Answer: 15 ft

5. True or False: About half of all vehicle/train collisions occur at crossings with flashing lights, bells and/or gates.

Answer: True. Amazingly, crossings with flashing lights, bells and/or gates that alert drivers to an oncoming train are the sites of about half of vehicle/train collisions. Why do you think this might be the case? (trying to beat a train, driving around a lowered gate, driving under a closing/raising gate, distracted: crashing through the gate).

6. A car stops for a passing train, and quickly pulls forward to cross the track once the train has passed—only to be struck by a different train coming from the other direction. How did this happen?

Answer: This crossing has multiple tracks. The driver may not have realized this, and assumed that once the (first) train had gone past it would be safe to cross. Or, the driver may have realized that there were multiple tracks, but didn't wait long enough for the passing train to leave the crossing and provide a clear line of sight down the tracks—the departing train may have hidden the approaching train from view. You must always wait until you have a clear, long line of sight down the tracks in both directions. Once you do, look and listen for another train before driving over the crossing.

7. True or False: You should never shift gears while driving over a railroad crossing.

Answer: True. Shifting gears can lead to stalling. Shift to a low gear *before* you begin to drive over the crossing.

8. When should you call the number on this sign?



Answer: To report a vehicle stalled on the tracks or an obstruction on the tracks, if there has been a collision, if you suspect a gate or flashing red lights/bells are malfunctioning, or any emergency at the crossing or on the railroad tracks.

9. On the above sign, what does "Crossing 846 597 H" mean?

Answer: This is the crossing identification number. When you call a dispatcher using the sign's 1-800 number, the crossing identification number is used to tell the dispatcher which crossing you are calling about.

10. What are two reasons you should never walk on railroad tracks?

Answer: It is illegal (trespassing) and highly dangerous.

Test Your Train Safety Savvy

NAME:

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Rail Safety Scenarios - MASTER

Approaching the Tracks



You see this sign (a crossbuck) marking a railroad crossing that does not have flashing red lights, bells or gates to alert you to an approaching train. What do you do if?

- As you approach, no train is visible in either direction, but you hear a train horn...
Answer: Stop & Wait for the train to pass. Once the train has gone by, Look and Listen for another Train. If there is no sign of an oncoming train, Drive across the tracks.
- As you approach, you can see a train in the distance...
Answer: Stop & Wait for the train to pass. Once the train has gone by, Look and Listen for another Train. If there is no sign of an oncoming train, Drive across the tracks.
- As you approach, no train is visible, and no train horn can be heard...
Answer: Slow down as you approach the track. Look in both directions and Listen for a train. If there is no sign of an oncoming train, Drive across the tracks.

The Long Wait

You come to a crossing. The gates are down, red lights are flashing and bells are ringing. You come to a stop at the stop line 15 feet before the track, and wait. And wait. And wait. You've listened to three whole songs. No train has passed. You look in both directions along the tracks, and don't see any sign of an oncoming train. You turn your radio off and listen, but don't hear a train horn or any other sounds to indicate an approaching train. You:

- A) Continue to wait. Some train crossing warning systems can be activated for a long time before a train arrives at the crossing.
- B) Suspect that the gate, lights and bells may be malfunctioning, and—after looking and listening again to make sure you don't see or hear any indication of a train coming—drive around the gates and through the crossing.
- C) Suspect that the gate, lights and bells may be malfunctioning, and call the number on the Emergency Notification System sign to speak with a dispatcher.

Answer: A or C. It is NEVER ok to drive around lowered gates! Doing so is illegal and could result in a devastating collision. Railroad crossing warning systems can be active for a long time before a train arrives at the crossing. If you think gates, lights or bells might be malfunctioning, you can call the Emergency Notification System number, but NEVER drive around the gates.

When is it ok to start across the tracks?

You're on your way to a school football game. There's a railroad crossing you must drive over close to school. A long line of slow-moving cars is backed-up from the parking lot all the way to the crossing. The car in front of you drives across the tracks. Where does that car need to be before you can safely begin to drive through the crossing yourself?

- a) The car is on the tracks
- b) The car has just cleared the tracks
- c) The rear bumper of that car is 15 feet beyond the tracks
- d) The car leaves enough room for your car to be 15 feet beyond the tracks

Answer: D. You should only begin crossing once you are sure you will have enough space for your entire vehicle to pass 15 feet or more beyond the far track. Any closer, and you might find yourself stuck in traffic in a dangerous location.

Rear-End Risk

You are approaching a RR crossing that you drive through daily. You know it's marked by a crossbuck with yield sign. The visibility along the tracks in both directions is very good. As you approach the crossing, you cannot see or hear a train coming. Yet, the vehicle in front of you comes to a complete stop 15' before the tracks. You quickly brake to avoid rear-ending this vehicle. (It's a good thing you were driving at the speed limit and were traveling at a safe following distance!) Why did the vehicle in front of you come to a stop?

Answer: Certain types of vehicles are required to always come to a stop at railroad crossings. Though this varies by state, these vehicles commonly include school buses, other buses, vehicles carrying hazardous material or passengers for hire.

Stalled on the Tracks

Three friends are driving in a manual shift car. As they cross the tracks, the driver shifts gears and the car stalls. They hear the sound of a train horn in the distance, approaching from their right. They get out of the car immediately. Each friend runs away from the car stalled on the tracks in a different direction. Which friend has chosen the safest path and why?

- a) is running away from the train and tracks at a 45° angle
- b) is running away from the car, perpendicular to the tracks.
- c) is running toward the oncoming train but away from the tracks at a 45° angle

Answer: C. This friend is getting out of the pathway of debris that could go flying if the train collides with the car by running toward the train but away from the tracks at a 45 degree angle.

If there were no signs of an approaching train when the car stalled, should they:

- a) Try to restart the car so they can drive off the tracks?
- b) Put the car in neutral and try to push it off the tracks?
- c) Get out of the car and away from the tracks immediately and call the 1-800 number on the Emergency Notification System (ENS) sign to report the car on the tracks.

Answer: The correct answer is C. Why? Not being able to see or hear any signs of an oncoming train doesn't mean you have enough time to restart the car and drive away. In fact, by the time you can see or hear a train, you may not have enough time to get out of the car and a safe distance away from the tracks before the train strikes the stalled car and you. Any time spent inside a car stalled on train tracks is a risk. The safe choice is to exit the car immediately, and call the 1-800 number on the blue Emergency Notification System sign to report the car stalled on the tracks. This will allow the engineer of any approaching trains to be notified so they can attempt to stop before they reach the crossing where the car is stalled. Immediately report the incident using the numbers on the Emergency Notification System (ENS) sign.

OK to Cross?

You're on your way to an evening sporting event at school. All the parking lots are already full. You find a spot along the road within a short walking distance, but once you've parked, you have to walk across train tracks to get back to school. As you near the tracks you don't see any signage of any kind, and there aren't any No Trespassing signs posted. Is it okay to cross here?

Answer: No. Even if you don't see a No Trespassing sign, walking over, on or along train tracks is trespassing. It is illegal and dangerous. The ONLY place it is safe and legal to cross tracks on foot is at a designated sidewalk crossing, pedestrian tunnel or pedestrian bridge.

Red Light Green Light

You are driving in an area where light rail is present. In fact, you are driving parallel to a light rail track. It is to your left. You are in the left lane, and want to make a left turn. You pull up to an intersection and come to a stop at a red light. The traffic to your right begins to move and you almost start driving along with them, but realize your light is still red. Why would this be?

Answer: If you are in a left turn lane with a dedicated signal, that light will let you know when it is safe to cross the track and when it isn't. If the traffic to your right has a green light, but you still have a red, a train could be approaching the intersection—it's safe for traffic to drive forward, but not safe to turn across the tracks.

Can I Drive In This Lane?

In some places, particularly where there are streetcars or trolleys offering public transport, it can be okay to drive in lanes with tracks **as long as you follow all posted signs and signals**. In which of the following settings would it be safe and legal to drive in lanes with tracks? Why? If you were driving here, what would you need to keep in mind to stay safe?

- (a) A roadway with a lane marked with "light rail only" signs
- (b) A roadway that has pavement stencils in one of the lanes showing a transit vehicle
- (c) A roadway with trolley/streetcar tracks with no pavement markings or signs

Answer: Only C. Remember to look carefully for any signs to indicate whether you may drive in the lane with the streetcar.

Streetcar Slow-Down

You are driving in an area where streetcars are common. You turn onto a road with streetcar tracks embedded in it, and see a sign clearly indicating that you are allowed to share a lane with streetcars. A few blocks later, you find yourself behind a streetcar. You slow down, and stop every time the streetcar stops to let passengers on and off. You are making very slow progress and beginning to feel annoyed. Can you drive around the streetcar?

Answer: If there is another lane of traffic traveling in your direction, you may switch lanes and pass the streetcar ONLY IF the streetcar isn't stopped and there are no posted signs that indicate this is illegal. If the lane you are in is the only one traveling in that that direction, or posted signage indicates that passing a streetcar is prohibited, you...shall...not...pass.

Rail Safety Scenarios

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