

HB 671 -- RAILROAD CROSSINGS

SPONSOR: Harbison

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Transportation by a vote of 10 to 4, with 1 member voting present. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Legislative by a vote of 7 to 2 with 1 voting present.

This bill requires that drivers stop at a railroad grade crossing when an electric or mechanical device or a human flagman warns of the approach of any on-track equipment or the approach of the on-track equipment is plainly visible.

This bill is similar to HB 2636 (2024).

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that this is for the safety of the people as well as the workers. It would require a person to stop at train tracks if a person saw equipment on the tracks the same as if there was a train car. Some railroad operators have quit working after accidents where someone ignored a stop or yield sign and was hit on the track. This would remove liability from the engineers and operators in situations where a protected crossing is violated and a collision happens with on-track equipment.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Harbison and Cory Henry, Teamsters.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that this will make the public less safe. There are different requirements for locomotives versus other on-track equipment. Locomotives require louder horns, brighter lights, and are able to more consistently trigger flashing lights and drop the bars at railroad crossings. Locomotives are also much heavier and larger than on-track equipment. Companies will have reduced liability and there isn't a problem right now of train engineers facing prosecution for railroad accidents. It is important to keep the responsibility on the operators of on-track equipment to yield to motorists.

Testifying in person against the bill were Mark Parrish and Stephanie Black.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say this is part of the Model Traffic Ordinance, and it will be up to local municipalities whether to adopt the new provision. Horn volume requirements for locomotives versus on-track equipment are different in part due to the long stopping distances for locomotives and 52% of railroad accidents happen at crossings with lights and gates. Distracted driving is a major contributor to collisions.

Testifying in person on the bill were Arnie Dienoff; Missouri Railroad Association; and Jeff Davis, BNSF Railway and MO Railroad Association.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.