

Resolution to contest the WisDOT's proposed modifications, including closure, of the existing public railroad crossings at Liberty Street/St. Cloud Street and Avon Street/Hagar Street.

## RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, on February 6, 2025, the Department of Transportation of the State of Wisconsin (WisDOT) filed a petition with the Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Railroads (OCR) to alter two public at-grade railroad crossings: one at the intersection of Liberty and St. Cloud Streets (Liberty/St. Cloud), and one at the intersection of Avon and Hagar Streets (Avon/Hagar);

WHEREAS, the WisDOT petition requests closure of the Liberty/St. Cloud railroad crossing, which will eliminate roadway through-access at this intersection;

WHEREAS, the petition requests extension of the medians surrounding the Avon/Hagar railroad crossing intersection, as well as installation of a four-way stop;

WHEREAS, historic platting of the City's streets is based on a grid of north-south and east-west streets for necessary access to neighborhoods, homes, businesses, and the safe distribution of multiple motor vehicle and pedestrian routes of travel;

WHEREAS, historic closures of platted at-grade railroad crossings have reduced the average density of available at-grade public railroad crossings to one every two miles, substantially hindering public access for the community;

WHEREAS, the proposed location for closure and alteration is located in an area considered to be environmentally burdened and socially vulnerable, and would further contribute to this area's disenfranchisement;

WHEREAS, the current number of at-grade crossings meets neither federal recommendations for closures (reference Highway-Rail Crossing Handbook 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) nor accessibility minimums, and closure of the Liberty/St. Cloud crossing would further distance the City from such standards;

WHEREAS, the City of La Crosse Comprehensive Plan, adopted via Ordinance 5264 (Item #23-0977), recommends in Action 6-3 that the City work with WisDOT and local railroad operators to maintain the viability of existing rail corridors while protecting connectivity for existing neighborhoods;

WHEREAS, the closure of the public at-grade railroad crossing would result in traffic redistribution and therefore increase the average daily traffic at the other available crossing, resulting in an increase in points of conflict at other neighborhood intersections and a permanent increase in the density of vehicle traffic at the remaining at-grade crossing;

WHEREAS, the current configuration allows for alternative access crossing, and a reduction in the number of at-grade railroad crossings would result in only one crossing being available to the public, leaving the entire neighborhood without any available crossing when maintenance or construction is done on the streets adjacent to the crossings;

WHEREAS, the City of La Crosse has an interest in maintaining public access to emergency services, and the lack of an available crossing or a reduction in the number of currently available crossings in this neighborhood would affect response times and efficiency of such services;

WHEREAS, the City of La Crosse Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, adopted via Resolution (Item #24-0957), prioritizes the development of the Avon Street Greenway, and the closure of the Liberty-St. Cloud intersection would be detrimental to its development;

WHEREAS, the City of La Crosse Safe Routes to School Plan, adopted via Resolution (Item #21-1276), establishes Avon Street as one of the few north-south connections for walking and bicycling to school for students living south of the railroad tracks;

WHEREAS, the City of La Crosse HWY 53 Corridor Study, adopted via Resolution (Item #18-0498), highlights Avon Street as a key connection for crossing the railroad tracks for people bicycling north-south, and expresses the need for improved safe and convenient north-south and east-west crossings and access;

WHEREAS, the City of La Crosse 2015 Transportation Vision, adopted via Resolution (Item # 15-0386), outlines the need for street network restoration, specifically referencing the goal to reconnect the City's street network at rail ways;

WHEREAS, the reduction in number of public at-grade railroad crossings would negatively impact access to neighborhood schools, parks, places of employment, local businesses, and more;

WHEREAS, Soo Line Railroad petitioned the OCR in 2015 to add an additional track at the same two at-grade railroad crossings, Liberty/St. Cloud and Avon/Hagar, but did not request closure of either at-grade crossing. The written decision acknowledges that these crossings provide the only north-south access for this part of the City. Further, the OCR's decision included no recommendation for closure and ordered both at-grade crossings to remain open to and be maintained for motor vehicle traffic and ADA compliant pedestrian use. The OCR specified that the Railroad could only close one crossing at a time when performing work, indicating the importance of keeping both crossings open;

WHEREAS, the request for closure is not reasonable and is detrimental to public safety and convenience.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Common Council of the City of La Crosse that it hereby opposes the closure of the public railroad crossing at Liberty Street and St. Cloud Street.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED for all the reasons identified above that the Common Council recommends the public railroad crossing at Liberty Street and St. Cloud Street remain open to motor vehicles and pedestrian access via sidewalks.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that while the Common Council recognizes that the WisDOT petition does not currently request closure of public railroad crossing at Avon Street and Hagar Street, the Common Council opposes the closure of that crossing nonetheless.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that City of La Crosse staff are to assess whether the proposed modifications to the public railroad crossing at Avon Street and Hagar Street promote public safety and convenience and identify alternatives to the OCR if necessary.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that City of La Crosse staff are hereby authorized and directed to take all necessary steps to effectuate this resolution, including participating in any and all applicable OCR proceedings.

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