

RUSTY LUCAS
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SANDUSKY, OHIO 44871-0422

October 25, 2011

Norfolk Southern
3 Commercial Place
Norfolk, VA 23510
ATTN: Rail Crossing Department

Dear Norfolk Southern:

I had a really hard time tracking down your address! I tried your web site, the yellow pages, my local post office. . . I couldn't find your company's address anywhere! I almost gave up writing to you, until I finally found it. Yahoo!

I have a concern about a railroad crossing in my city at Campbell Street. You are probably already familiar with that rail/street intersection, but if not, it is not much different from your ordinary, run of the mill railroad crossing. The dual railroad tracks are a little bit elevated, running east to west with Campbell Street running north and south. The crossing has both flashing lights and crossing gates that drop down blocking access to the street while a train goes by.

I had a situation arise yesterday night at that crossing that concerns me. After giving it some thought, I thought I should write to you about it and my idea for a keen solution. My wife and I were heading home for a quick dinner before I had to go off to a committee meeting. We were stopped at the above crossing while a very slow moving westbound Triple Crown train lumbered by. This is not a rare occurrence in our town, but we decided to wait it out rather than turn around and go to another street which travels under the tracks. (Do you call the section of a street going under the train tracks an "underpass" or a "subway"? My wife and I have a bet riding on your answer). About ten minutes later when the gates rose, there were about a dozen cars in total who all decided to wait for the tracks to clear. My wife was in the 5th car and I was in the 6th car. A number of other cars decided to turn around and go the other way while the train was still there, otherwise it might have been two or three dozen cars waiting.

About four of the 12+ cars went through the crossing when the signal lights began blinking and then the gates lowered down again. We heard the horn blasts and don't you know that an eastbound train came by from the opposite way! I didn't think this was fair that only four cars got to go through and the rest of us had to wait again. I didn't want to be late for my meeting nor did I want to get indigestion by eating my dinner too fast. I felt like I was getting railroaded by the railroad's railroad crossing treatment.

I think that there should be traffic rules in place for this kind of situation. When a traffic cop directs traffic at an accident scene or at a busy intersection during a power outage, he doesn't make crossing traffic wait for a really long time, then let just a few cars come through, then make the same people wait a long time again. When utility or road construction workers have one direction of vehicle travel blocked, they allow alternating traffic to pass in roughly equal segments so that everyone has the same opportunity to go and face the same wait times. Why shouldn't the railroads be the same way?

Before I get to my suggestion, keep in mind that I am only talking about railroad crossings *inside city limits* and am less concerned about country roads which usually have much lighter vehicle traffic. I know you cannot afford to staff a live track traffic serviceman at every crossing in every city especially since the scenario my wife and I experienced is not all that common to begin with. But maybe you could equip all of your trains with GPS beacons so that westbound train X could see that eastbound train Y has had traffic blocked at Street Z - 3 miles ahead - for close to ten minutes. Since both X and Y are already traveling at reduced speeds inside Q city limits, it shouldn't be that difficult for train X to slow down to a stop prior to reaching the trigger to lower the Z Street gates and let through the poor people who have been waiting.

It is such a tease to sit and wait for a passing train for so long only to see the gate raise and lower just long enough for a few cars to get through. I would never think of doing this myself, but last night there was one car coming from the opposite way that decided to drive through the gate gap rather than wait for the second approaching train. An unwise decision on his part, no question, but I have to believe it was fueled by the same frustration I was feeling myself.

If you added street sensors at these crossings, your approaching trains could be aware of just how far back the vehicle traffic is backed up. Similar technology already exists in conjunction with traffic light control devices. A few tweaks and you would be good to go. I envision this technologically enhanced and advanced system to be known as the Train Tracking Train-Track traffic tracker system.

I believe implementing this change would increase your company's good will with the general public and would increase the safety at thousands and thousands of railroad crossings across the country. If you would like to discuss my idea further, you can reach me at the above address. I check my mail at least twice a week, so if you wrote back to me tomorrow, there is a excellent chance I would read your letter during the first week of November and have answers to any of your questions back to you before election day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rusty Lucas". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rusty Lucas

p.s. Do you have any Norfolk Southern baseball/engineer caps? If so, could you please send me one? I would like one to wear during the summer time next year. Please send me a free Norfolk Southern cap if you have any unused/extra ones of last year's model laying around because I would not care if I had the 2010 design in 2011 or 2012. I wouldn't wear a 2010 cap in 2013 because that would be too embarrassing, but it would still be good for the next 15 months.