

RAILWAY FATALITIES IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

SUMMARY

The Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) received a request to investigate railroad deaths in Santa Barbara County (County). During a four-year period from 2015 through 2018, 20 railroad-related fatal accidents occurred along the 109-mile County railroad corridor. Ninety-five percent of the fatalities were the result of pedestrian trespassing on the right-of-way owned by Union Pacific Railroad (UPR) and used by both UPR and Amtrak. The Jury identified high rates of “suicide by train” and deaths of transient/homeless persons as significant trends. The Jury found that a vast majority of fatalities occurred in two relatively small stretches of track: from Ortega Hill in Summerland to Milpas Street in the City of Santa Barbara and from Patterson Avenue to Glen Annie Road in Goleta. The Jury focused efforts on these high fatality zones and developed six recommendations that could enhance railroad safety in the County.

BACKGROUND

During the four-year period from 2015 through 2018, 20 railroad-related fatalities occurred along the 109-mile County railroad corridor (Figure 1). UPR owns all the track in the County, including the right-of-way which averages 100 feet in width for the majority of the corridor. Amtrak leases the UPR track for use in operating its passenger trains, which pass through the County rail corridor 12 times a day, six in each direction. UPR runs an average of two freight trains through the corridor each day.

UPR classifies any incident or accident that occurs on its tracks, or within its right-of-way, as a trespasser incident or trespasser accident. UPR uses this terminology to emphasize that anyone injured on its property was there without permission. When a pedestrian or vehicle is in a



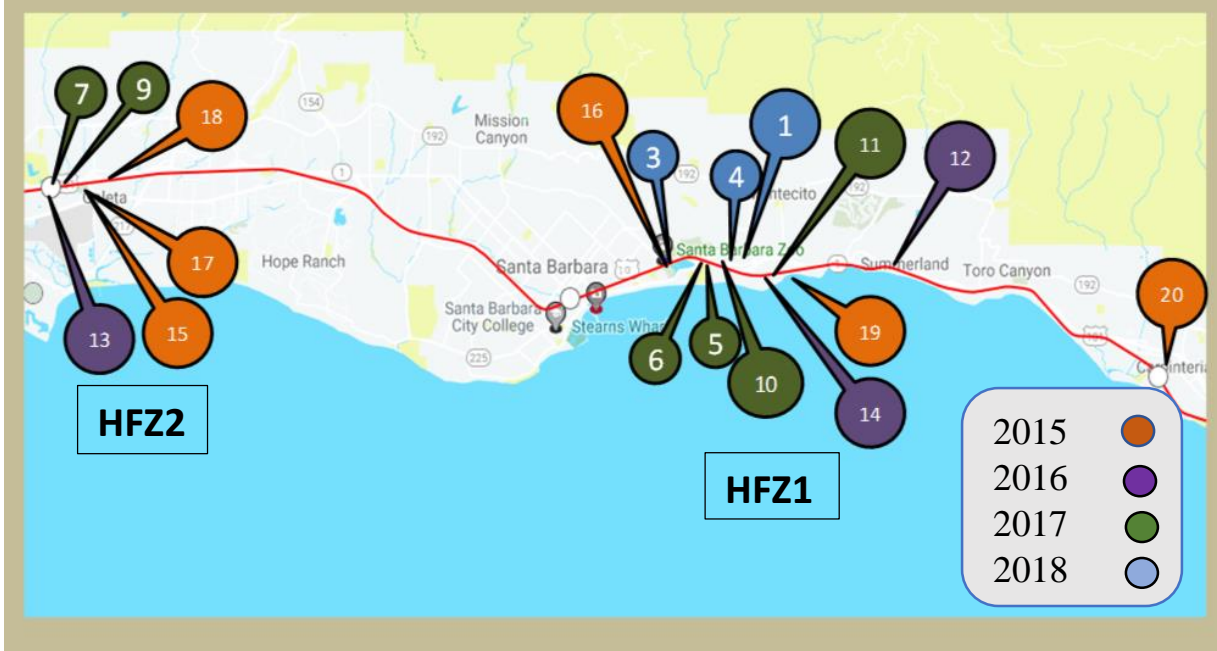
Source: Sheriff/Coroner Data

Figure 1

designated crossing, it is not considered trespassing. Of the 20 deaths recorded in the County, 19 were pedestrians and one was vehicle related. By the UPR classification, all the pedestrian fatalities were trespasser incidents.

Review of the data by the Jury revealed that the vast majority of fatalities occurred within two relatively short High Fatality Zones (HFZ), between Ortega Hill and Milpas Street (HFZ1) and between Patterson Avenue and Glen Annie Road (HFZ2) (Figure 2). Of the 19 pedestrian trespasser fatalities during this four-year period, 11 were in HFZ1 and six in HFZ2. Thus, 85 percent of fatalities occurred in approximately 12 percent (13 miles) of the 109-mile County railroad corridor.

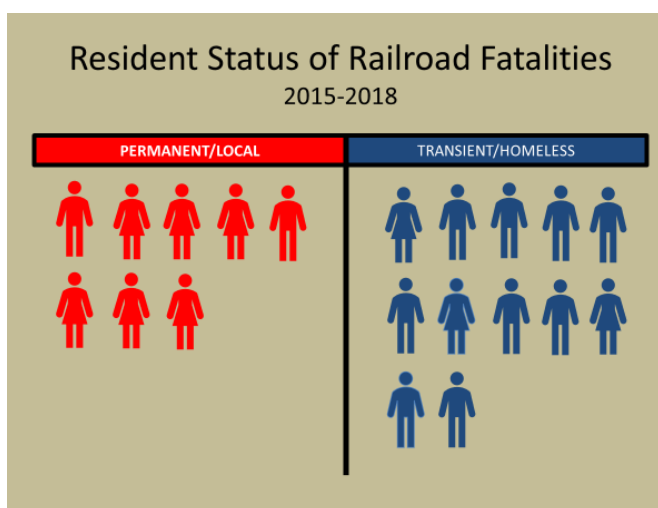
Santa Barbara County – South Coast Rail Deaths 2015-2018



Source: Sheriff/Coroner Data

Figure 2

Most of the pedestrian trespasser fatalities have been classified as transient/homeless by the Sheriff/Coroner (Coroner) (Figure 3 and Exhibit A). The Jury found significant numbers of transient/homeless encampments in HFZ1 and HFZ2, as pictured below. These zones include stretches where right-of-way fencing has deteriorated or is nonexistent. Additionally, these portions of the corridor have extensive areas where scrub brush and trees have been allowed to grow in the right-of-way, providing natural shelter for transient/homeless encampments. Areas where brush has been cleared and trees properly managed have very few encampments.



Source: Sheriff/Coroner Data

Figure 3



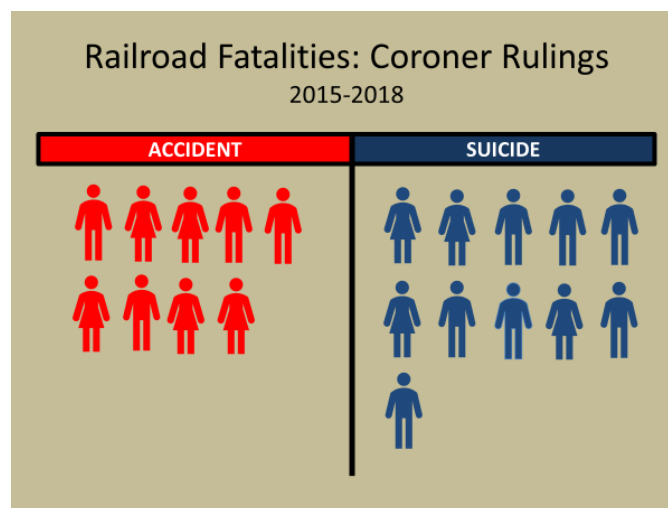
Source Carpinteria-Summerland Fire District



Source: Santa Barbara County Fire Department

UPR employs approximately 100 security personnel for the entire Western United States, which covers a total of 23,000 miles of track. In Santa Barbara County, local law enforcement agencies enforce trespassing and illegal camping ordinances in city, county, and state-owned land but do not pursue enforcement into the privately owned UPR right-of-way. In other locations, UPR has negotiated Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with local law enforcement agencies to provide security along its right-of-way. In these cases, when pedestrian trespassing or encampments are observed, the local law enforcement agency is notified and takes the appropriate measures to remove the trespassers.

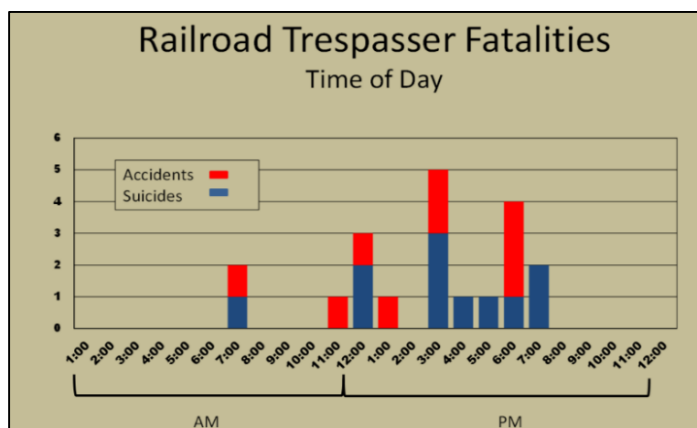
A disturbing observation is the number of incidents of “suicide by train.” The Coroner determined that 11 of the deaths in the county were suicides, of which seven were transients/homeless while four were local citizens or people with permanent addresses (Figure 4).



Source: Sheriff/Coroner Data

Figure 4

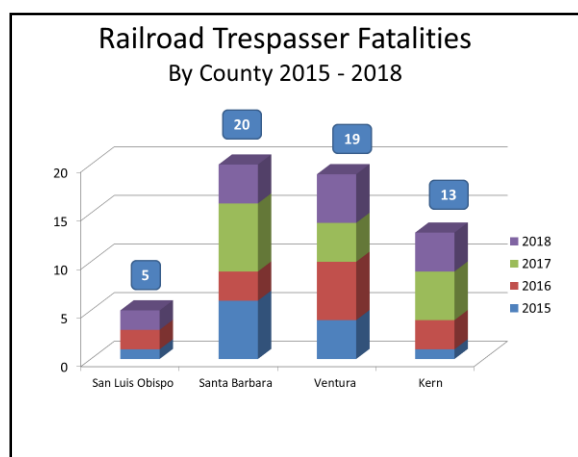
Ninety percent of the fatalities occurred between the hours of 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. None of the deaths occurred between 8 p.m. and 7 a.m. Ninety-five percent of all deaths involved the Amtrak trains.



Source: Sheriff/Coroner Data

Figure 5

A comparison of railroad deaths in the County with those in neighboring counties revealed a higher number and a much higher rate of railroad fatalities when compared to county population. Over the four-year period, the County had one railroad related death per 22,000 inhabitants, Ventura County had one per 46,000 inhabitants, San Luis Obispo County had one per 57,000 inhabitants, and Kern County had one per 69,000 inhabitants¹.



Source: California Public Utilities Commission Data

Figure 6

METHODOLOGY

The primary investigative activity undertaken by the Jury consisted of personal interviews with UPR officials and Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) officials. Also interviewed were representatives from the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor (LOSSAN) which manages the rail corridor. The Jury examined records from the Santa Barbara County Coroner, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to determine the scope and nature of the problem and to determine methods to remedy the situation. The Jury also conducted a site investigation of the rail corridor from Carpinteria to Goleta.

¹ www.worldpopulationreview.com/us-counties/ca, last visited May 23, 2019

OBSERVATIONS

When compared to the number of railroad-related deaths for neighboring counties, the 20 deaths in the County were higher in number and percentage per population than deaths in San Luis Obispo, Kern, and Ventura counties over the same time period. The Jury found that 85 percent of the deaths occurred in two relatively small sections of the County's 109-mile-long railroad corridor. The high number of pedestrian fatalities that occurred in HFZ1 and HFZ2 indicates that these two areas should receive intense scrutiny with respect to pedestrian safety. HFZ1 and HFZ2 have several factors in common including:

- areas of damaged or nonexistent fencing
- stretches of scrub brush and overgrown trees
- high numbers of homeless encampments
- located near residential neighborhoods
- adjacent to Highway 101
- infrequently patrolled by security personnel

The high number of transient/homeless encampments plays a significant role in county railroad pedestrian deaths. Twelve of the 19 victims have been designated as transient/homeless. Deteriorating fences or no fencing at all provide easy access to the HFZs, while overgrown foliage provides the partial shelter and concealment that attract homeless encampments. As UPR employs few security personnel, the homeless encampments flourish in these zones.

Railroad service providers have worked in cooperation with local city and county agencies elsewhere in California to create sealed corridors. A sealed corridor is an area designed to enhance the safety of trains, passengers, motorists, pedestrians, and neighboring land users within and along a railroad corridor. It employs appropriate safety measures to systematically reduce the opportunity for accidents at grade crossings or elsewhere within the corridor.² An example of this is the City of Glendale, California, where officials from Metrolink and city agencies combined to make safety improvements including roadway and curb widening, new automatic vehicle exit gates, new sidewalks, new pedestrian gates and traffic signal advance preemption technology. Officials from Metrolink and city agencies refer to this as positive train control.³ The combination of these measures and others, such as additional fencing, removal of excess foliage and increased security observation, can work to limit pedestrian access to railroad right-of-way and create a sealed corridor.

UPR and Amtrak, working in conjunction with local governmental agencies, could create a sealed corridor stretching from Ortega Hill to Glen Annie Road. Improvements should include the repair and replacement of fencing to eliminate access to the rights-of-way, clearing of overgrown foliage

² www.DOT.CA.gov/hg/ctc/2006 Southern California Regional Rail Authority Board of Directors Report, "Metrolinks Sealed Corridor Project 2006," last visited May 9, 2019

³ www.cvweekly.com *Crescenta Valley Weekly*, "Rail 'Sealed Corridor Inaugurated,'" November 22, 2012, page 1, last visited May 12, 2019

to eliminate shelter areas, and working with local law enforcement to provide security and eliminate pedestrian trespassing.

Another component adding strength to the proposed sealed corridor would be to increase the security presence within the right-of-way area. In parts of Ventura County, the Sheriff's Department and UPR have adopted an MOU to provide security within the privately owned UPR right-of-way, and to investigate reports of pedestrian trespassing. If MOUs can be created with the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department and the Santa Barbara Police Department, security will be vastly improved within the proposed sealed corridor.

The introduction of video cameras within the HFZs can also act to seal the corridors. An eight-car passenger train traveling at 80 miles per hour needs about a mile to stop.⁴ If video surveillance cameras were installed on poles every mile within the HFZs, the increased observation of the zones could alert UPR staff to the existence of pedestrian trespassers and homeless encampments within the right-of-way. Since 90 percent of the fatalities have occurred between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m., the cameras would need to be monitored only during this period.

The sealed corridor concept could reduce the "suicide by train" incidents. All of the 11 pedestrian suicides occurred in the HFZ1 and HFZ2 areas. Easy access to the right-of-way, the predictability of train arrivals, the overgrown foliage, and the secluded nature of the zones within populated neighborhoods make them likely places for suicide. While the Jury realizes that it would be impossible to prevent determined individuals from ending their lives, creating sealed corridors can reduce the likelihood of suicide by train.

CONCLUSIONS

The 20 railroad-related deaths that occurred in the 109-mile County railroad corridor during the 2015 through 2018 period are significant and are concentrated within two small areas of track, HFZ1 and HFZ2. A reduction in pedestrian trespassing deaths, including suicides and transient/homeless deaths, can best be secured by restricting access to and providing additional security in the HFZs. Other jurisdictions in the state of California have achieved success in reducing the number of railroad fatalities by constructing a sealed corridor. A sealed corridor could be constructed from Ortega Hill to Glen Annie Road, essentially spanning the cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta. For maximum effectiveness, the proposed Santa Barbara-Goleta corridor would require a program to:

- mend existing fences and erect new ones
- remove overgrown foliage in the right-of-way area
- improve security patrols by negotiating MOUs with local law enforcement
- increase surveillance by installing video cameras to monitor pedestrian trespassing and transient/homeless encampments.
- A collaboration between all stakeholders, including scheduling regular meetings, will improve railroad safety measures in the County.

⁴ www.OLI.org Minnesota Operation Lifesaver, Inc., last visited May 23, 2019

Exhibit A

Santa Barbara County Railroad Fatalities							
Years 2015 through 2018							
Year	Victim	Age	City	Location	Ruling ¹	Home ² Time	
1	2018	Female	33	Montecito.	Southbound Olive Mill Exit	A	T 7:10 AM
2	2018	Male	59	Guadalupe	Pacheco and 12th Streets	A	T 3:03 PM
3	2018	Female	77	Santa Barbara	Milpas/Calle Puerto Vallarta	S	T 7:00 PM
4	2018	Male	50	Montecito.	Spring Road	A	T 6:00 PM
5	2017	Male	44	Santa Barbara	W. Montecito ST	S	T 5:22 PM
6	2017	Male	18	Montecito	1700 Fernald PT	A	L 1:30 PM
7	2017	Male	52	Goleta	San Pedro Creek	A	T 12:06 AM
8	2017	Female	74	Goleta	W. Main ST	A	L 3:00 PM
9	2017	Female	65	Goleta	15 S La Patera Ln.	S	L 12:05 AM
10	2017	Female	62	Montecito.	Butterfly Lane	S	T 3:00 PM
11	2017	Male	46	Montecito.	Miramar Ave	S	T 7:00 PM
12	2016	Male	60	Summerland	Wallace Ave	S	T 4:30 PM
13	2016	Female	19	Goleta	Glen Annie	S	L 3:00 PM
14	2016	Male	61	Montecito.	Butterfly Lane	S	L 3:05 PM
15	2015	Female	49	Goleta	La Patera	A	T 11:30 AM
16	2015	Male	60	Santa Barbara	300 S Milpas	S	T 12:44 AM
17	2015	Female	21	Guadalupe	Magnolia Ave	A	L 6:11 PM
18	2015	Male	59	Goleta	500 Ninos Drive	S	T 6:00 PM
19	2015	Female	60	Guadalupe	Eucalytos	S	L 7:08 AM
20	2015	Female	54	Carpinteria	RR Tracks	A	L 6:56 PM

¹ S = Suicide, A = Accident

² T = Transient, L = Local Resident

Source: Sheriff/Coroner Data

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1

Eighty-five percent of railroad-related deaths occurring in Santa Barbara County were pedestrian trespasser incidents that occurred in the High Fatality Zone One from Ortega Hill in Summerland to Milpas Street in Santa Barbara and High Fatality Zone Two from Patterson Avenue to Glen Annie Road in Goleta.

Recommendation 1

That the Cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta, the County of Santa Barbara and Santa Barbara County Association of Governments meet regularly with Union Pacific Railroad to create a safety plan to reduce trespasser deaths in High Fatality Zones.

Finding 2

A sealed corridor has been used effectively to enhance railroad safety.

Recommendation 2

That the Cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta, the County of Santa Barbara, and Santa Barbara County Association of Governments collaborate with Union Pacific Railroad to develop a sealed corridor from Ortega Hill in Summerland to Glen Annie Road in Goleta.

Finding 3

There is a need for increased security presence to reduce trespassing within the High Fatality Zones, and in other communities this has been achieved through Memoranda of Understanding between Union Pacific Railroad and local law enforcement.

Recommendation 3

That the Santa Barbara County Sheriff and City of Santa Barbara Police Department negotiate Memoranda of Understanding with Union Pacific Railroad to provide enhanced security within their respective High Fatality Zones.

Finding 4

Fencing along the railroad right-of-way in the High Fatality Zones is inadequate or nonexistent.

Recommendation 4

That the Cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta, the County of Santa Barbara, and Santa Barbara County Association of Governments collaborate with Union Pacific Railroad to repair and install fencing, to prevent easy access to the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way in the High Fatality Zones.

Finding 5

Overgrown foliage and trees provide a natural shelter for homeless encampments.

Recommendation 5

That the County of Santa Barbara and the Cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta encourage Union Pacific Railroad to cut back or remove overgrown trees and foliage within the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way in the High Fatality Zones.

Finding 6

Video surveillance cameras provide increased observation of activity by pedestrian trespassers and homeless encampments within the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way.

Recommendation 6a

That the Cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta, the County of Santa Barbara, and Santa Barbara County Association of Governments encourage Union Pacific Railroad to install and monitor video surveillance cameras on poles every mile within the High Fatality Zone.

Recommendation 6b

That County of Santa Barbara and the Cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta, together with Union Pacific Railroad, establish a schedule to monitor the video surveillance cameras between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

Pursuant to *California Penal Code* §933 and 935.59.05, the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury requests each entity or individual named below to respond to the enumerated finds and recommendations within the specified statutory time limit. Responses to Findings shall be either:

- Agree
- Disagree wholly
- Disagree partially with an explanation

Responses to recommendations shall be one of the following:

- Has been implemented, with a brief, summary of the implementation actions taken
- Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule
- Requires Further Analysis, with an analysis completion date of less than six months after the issuance of the report
- Will not be implemented with an explanation of why

City of Goleta - 90 Days

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6a, 6b

City of Santa Barbara - 90 Days

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6a, 6b

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors - 90 Days

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6a, 6b

Santa Barbara County Sheriff - 60 Days

Finding 3

Recommendation 3

Santa Barbara County Association of Governments - 90 Days

Findings 1, 2, 4, 6

Recommendations 1, 2, 4, 6a