

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

EDITORIALS

Fort Worth rail bottleneck endangers young lives

Posted Monday, Mar. 08, 2010

[Gridlock at Tower 55 rail interchange hems in Fort Worth neighborhood](#) 

Have more to add? News tip? [Tell us](#)

Fort Worth missed out on a \$60.9 million federal economic stimulus grant that was supposed to be combined with money from the BNSF and Union Pacific railroads to help clear a crippling rail bottleneck southeast of downtown.

Local transportation experts and railroad executives are trying to figure out what to do next.

Meanwhile, a couple of miles to the north, children walking to and from Nash Elementary School sometimes crawl under rail cars or climb between them because the path to classes frequently is blocked by stalled trains.

Seriously, now. Can there really be a question about what to do? Fix this problem!

No one can blame the local folks or the railroads for wanting the federal help. Congestion at the Tower 55 rail crossing has been a headache for years. The plan to spend \$93.7 million to add tracks that would help clear the mess, along with underpasses and overpasses to relieve vehicle and pedestrian traffic, would help a lot.

But the federal money isn't coming, and those kids are still in great danger. Their entire Rock Island/Samuels Avenue neighborhood is sometimes isolated, blocked from entry by even emergency vehicles, because of trains that block roads for hours. *Star-Telegram* reporter Gordon Dickson [detailed the problems in a Sunday news report](#).

These are tough economic times, but that will be an empty excuse if even one child is seriously injured or worse. Further foot-dragging simply won't do.

The first responsibility belongs to the railroads. Fort Worth-based BNSF, despite hard times, had net income of \$2 billion on revenue of \$13.8 billion last year. Union Pacific's numbers were about the same: \$1.9 billion net income on \$14.1 billion in operating revenue.

These are two of the largest railroads in North America, each with about 32,000 miles of track. Union Pacific spokesman Clint Schelbitzki told Dickson that problems elsewhere in that system also must be considered when it comes to allocating limited funds.

He said the company must "assess the return on investment" and "determine if it's a viable project."

Surely the safety of children and their parents in the Rock Island/Samuels Avenue neighborhood weighs heavy in that evaluation.

It's not as if Dallas-Fort Worth lacks resources to help. Tom Shelton, senior planner for the North Central Texas Council of Governments, told Dickson there is "still a commitment on the region's part to do the projects."

Innovative financing may be necessary, but the council of governments is no stranger to that. The Regional Transportation Council, the body's transportation planning arm, is contributing \$322.1 million toward construction of the Southwest Parkway/Chisholm Trail tollway from downtown Fort Worth to Cleburne. Transportation council planners were instrumental in working out an extremely complex financial plan for that project.

Clearing the Tower 55 bottleneck and taking other steps to make life safer for the Rock Island/Samuels Avenue neighborhood has become a matter of priorities.

Alice Cuellar, 37, who grew up in the neighborhood and is raising her family there, told Dickson she has taught her children how to crawl under the trains. She said, "You have to learn to listen for the little squeaks that tell you the train is getting ready to move and you can't go under it."

That's not acceptable. These kids and this neighborhood should be a higher priority than that. It's time to come up with the money and do the work.