

NEWS RELEASE

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MACOG, St. Joseph County Awarded Federal Planning Grant to Study Vehicle/Rail Safety Improvements

SOUTH BEND – The U.S. Department of Transportation announced that the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG), partnering with St. Joseph County will receive \$1 million from the Railroad Crossing Elimination Program for a rail crossing study at Ash Road and other nearby grade-crossings (Apple, Beech, and Cottage Grove) along the Norfolk Southern Railway.

This planning project includes an alternatives analysis for a grade separation near Ash Road and an evaluation of safety improvements at the nearby crossings. These improvements aim to improve safety, increase reliability for emergency responders, enhance livability for residents, and facilitate the efficient movement of freight.

"The Norfolk Southern Line between Chicago and Cleveland is the busiest rail line in our region, with nearly 100 trains daily," said James Turnwald, Executive Director of MACOG. "This level of activity, combined with the nearby Robert Young Classification Yard—Norfolk Southern's second-largest—creates significant safety and mobility challenges for the surrounding community, making this plan critical to improving safety and connectivity along Ash Road and between St. Joseph and Elkhart Counties."

MACOG is partnering with St. Joseph County on this project and the County is providing the local match for the \$1 million award.

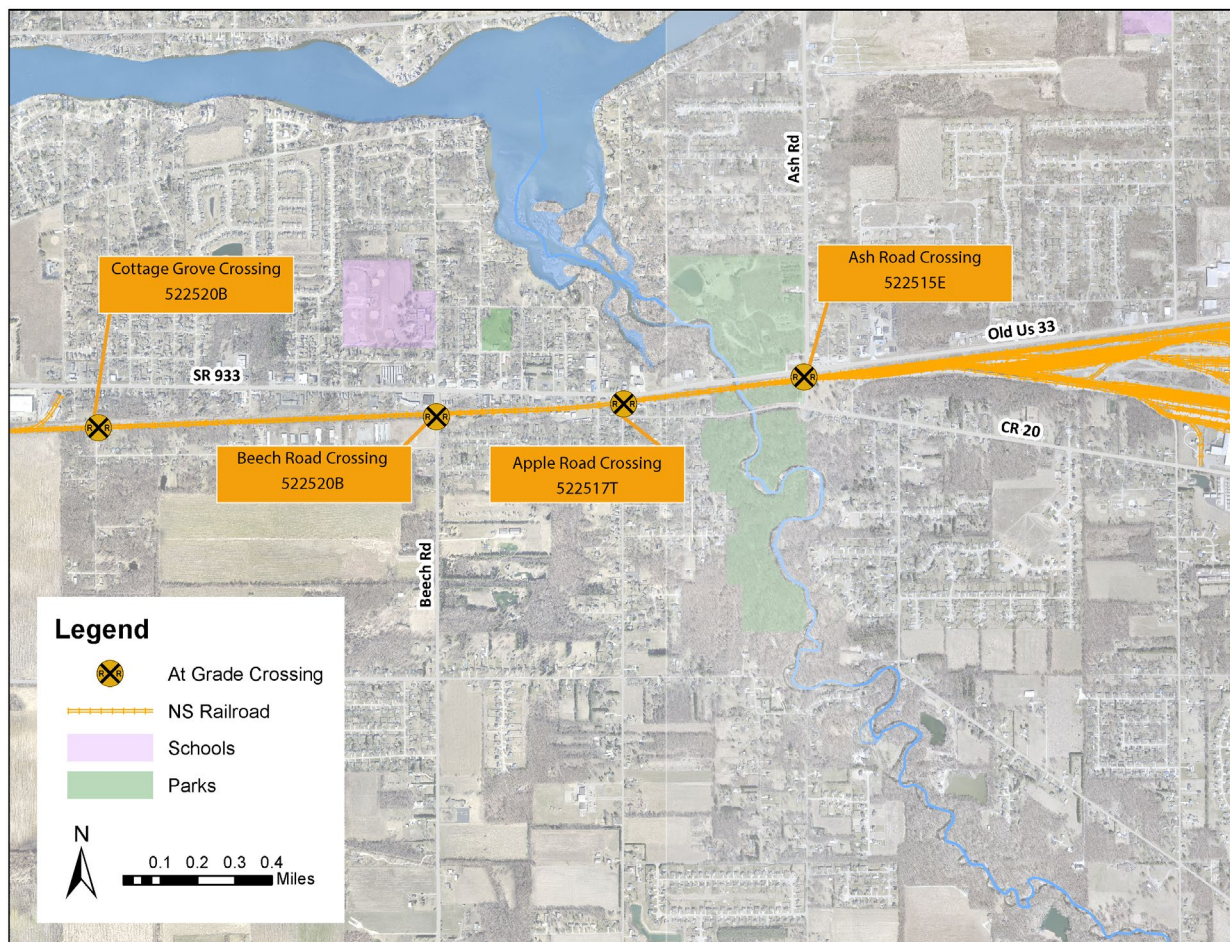
"St. Joseph County has been working to develop a plan for an overpass at Ash Road for the past few years. We are working in partnership with MACOG to study the best option," said Bill Schalliol, St. Joseph County's Executive Director of Economic Development. "This is an important step toward building an overpass at Ash Road to improve safety of our roadways and enhance the quality of life of residents in the area."

St. Joseph County Commissioner Carl Baxmeyer stated, "The Commissioners appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with MACOG on this opportunity to explore ways to make the Ash and Lincolnway railroad crossing safer for everyone."

Over 12,000 vehicles and 100 trains cross paths daily in this corridor. Improving safety at these rail crossings is important because the risk of crashes remains high. From 2014 to today, there have been 7 train-related collisions in the area, resulting in 3 fatalities and 1 injury. By addressing at-grade crossings, this project aims to prevent such tragedies and create safer travel conditions for everyone.

Stacy Reeves, was equally elated with the news of this grant award, “We are extremely pleased with the announcement of the grant for the overpass study. Our family has worked hard and appreciates all the county has done to help with putting our words into action and getting this grant. We lost our 23 year old son (Franky Reeves Jr.) 6 years ago to a horrible train accident. Every crossing in Osceola was blocked by not 1 but 2 trains on the morning of Sept. 5, 2018. Franky was on his way to work at 4:30 am when the accident occurred. If there had been an overpass there that morning my son would still be alive today. I promised my son that day that our family would fight for an overpass in Osceola until it is done or I die! No other family needs to endure the pain my family has endured the last six years.”

MACOG and St. Joseph County’s grant is part of the USDOT announcement of more than \$1.1 billion in awards from the Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program to 123 rail projects, improving or studying more than 1,000 highway-rail crossings nationwide. This includes The City of Elkhart receiving \$19.8 million for the final design and construction of the Hively Avenue Overpass. This project includes activities to close two at-grade crossings in Elkhart and replace one crossing at Hively Avenue with a grade separation over Norfolk Southern’s triple-tracked Chicago Line.



A map showing the railroad crossings included in this study

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About the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG):

The Michiana Area Council of Governments is a metropolitan planning commission serving Elkhart, Kosciusko, Marshall and St. Joseph counties in northern Indiana. The voluntary organization of local governments studies and attempts to resolve, for the benefit of each member and the region, areas of interlocal issues, which includes but is not limited to transportation, transit, economic development, environment, and other issues that impact the region. To learn more, go to www.macog.com.