



VILLAGE OF TEQUESTA

March 9, 2015

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Mr. Robert Ledoux
Senior Vice President
Florida East Coast Railway
7150 Philips Highway
Jacksonville, FL 32256

Dear Mr. Ledoux:

On Saturday morning, March 7, 2015, a Florida East Coast Railway freight train traveling southbound from Martin County was forced to stop in the Village of Tequesta for over 1 ½ hours due to yet another mechanical malfunction of the lowering/raising machinery on the Loxahatchee River bascule bridge. The stuck freight train blocked each and every one of the three grade crossings used by residents and visitors of Tequesta and contiguous areas of Jupiter, unincorporated Palm Beach County and Martin County making eastbound travel impossible. In addition, westbound traffic suffered with completely unmanageable traffic congestion and the result was the inability of vehicular traffic to effectively move in, out or through these communities.

As bad as this unnecessary inconvenience to more than 7,000 individuals who visit and live on the peninsula was, a far more severe threat to the health, safety and welfare of our entire community was demonstrated by this mishap. During the period that the three eastbound grade crossings were blocked by the train, a car crash with injuries occurred on the west side of the tracks which required fire rescue personnel to transport the accident victim to Jupiter Medical Center. The location of the crash enabled first responders to be at the scene in minutes. However, transport of the accident victim from the site of the crash to Jupiter Medical Center, which could have been accomplished within five minutes by using the Riverside Drive grade crossing, took 47 minutes.

The transport time was exacerbated by the traffic congestion created when the grade crossings were all blocked and cars were stacked bumper-to-bumper for nearly three miles as drivers attempted to enter and leave Tequesta using the one and only westbound route. Although the accident victim transported did not experience severe injuries, the outcome could have been quite different. As every medical professional will tell you, seconds count when an individual is experiencing a life-threatening emergency. It is only a matter of time before this unacceptable, and **avoidable** scenario caused by your railroad will literally costs lives.



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Over the years, concerns for public safety have increased as the Loxahatchee River bascule bridge ages and its machinery fails. After learning about the proposed All Aboard Florida project and its plans to add 32 trains a day to the FEC railroad tracks, the members of the Village Council began a rigorous campaign to bring attention to this very serious issue. The added rail traffic, and the necessary increased bridge openings and closings that come with it, will only serve to accelerate the faulty bridge mechanisms to their ultimate and complete failure. Although it is my understanding that the 90 year-old bridge and its faulty equipment will be addressed in the future by All Aboard Florida, this problem simply cannot wait to be remedied.

This past November you explained to me that when a railroad signal indicates that there is a malfunction at the bridge, Florida East Coast Railway protocol requires the train to advance as close to the bridge as possible so the engineer can make a visual inspection. This current protocol requires southbound trains to block the Riverside Drive grade crossing, which is the most southerly grade crossing providing east/west access into and out of Tequesta and neighboring communities. Although it does not address the obvious necessity to replace or completely rehabilitate the bridge and its mechanisms, you and I also discussed a possible interim solution. By amending the current Florida East Coast Railway protocol to require a southbound train to stop just north of the Riverside Drive grade crossing, a critically important route for emergency vehicles and motorists would remain open to traffic. As you know, stopping north of the grade crossing, instead of blocking it, would only increase the train engineer's walk to the bridge by a matter of feet, which, considering the benefit of leaving the grade crossing open, is a truly negligible change from the railroad's point of view.

On behalf of our entire community, I implore you to immediately address this issue, take the necessary steps to amend the existing protocol for southbound trains, and thereby mitigate what is currently the potential for lost lives.

Finally, could you please institute a policy to notify the Tequesta public safety dispatch center if any of the three grade crossings are blocked in the future? It is imperative that our first responders know at all times which exit routes are available to them. The non-emergency telephone number is **(561) 768-0500**. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Abby Brennan
Mayor

C: Michael Reininger, President, All Aboard Florida