



VILLAGE OF TEQUESTA

August 31, 2015

VILLAGE COUNCIL

ABBY BRENNAN
Mayor
abrennan@tequesta.org

VINCE ARENA
Vice-Mayor
varena@tequesta.org

STEVE OKUN
Council Member
sokun@tequesta.org

TOM PATERNO
Council Member
tpaterno@tequesta.org

FRANK D'AMBRA
Council Member
fdambra@tequesta.org

VILLAGE MANAGER

MICHAEL COUZZO
mcouzzo@tequesta.org
561.768.0465

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

Dr. Mr. Ledoux:

Saturday night, August 22, 2015, at 10:02 pm, Village of Tequesta Fire Rescue Station 85 (TFR) received a request for mutual aid from the Palm Beach County Fire Rescue Command Center. TFR assistance was needed at a serious automobile crash with trauma injuries at U.S. 1 in Jupiter. TFR was prevented from responding by a Florida East Coast Railways (FEC) freight train blocking all three grade crossings providing access to and from Tequesta, due to a mechanical malfunction of the railroad bridge. A memo from the Shift Captain on duty to TFR Chief James Weinand summarizes the events that made it impossible for first responders to answer the call for mutual aid:

Good morning Chief. We had an incident tonight, 8/22, with a train blocking all 3 intersections in Tequesta while trying to respond to a call. At 2204 tonight, R85 got toned out to respond to a mutual aid call in Jupiter in front of Harbourside (U.S.-1 & Breakwater Court). It was a very serious automobile accident with extrication and initially 2 trauma alert patients. R85 called in a train delay when they got to Tequesta Drive railroad tracks. They then tried the intersection at Riverside which was also blocked. At this time, Command is calling them on the radio asking what their ETA was. Lt. Spurgeon explained to him it was unknown at this time do to the train not moving. Then they tried County Line Road which was also blocked by the train. Lt. Spurgeon notified dispatch that they could not respond due to the stopped train so they dispatched another Rescue. We went over to dispatch to find out what was going on and she told us that F.E.C. stated that they had a mechanical problem with the bridge again and that they were working on it. The train finally started moving again at 2225 so it looks like all 3 intersections were blocked for at least 21 minutes.

As you are aware, on March 7, 2015, the very same malfunctioning railroad bridge stopped another FEC freight train so that all three grade crossings providing access to and from Tequesta were completely blocked for over 90 minutes. During the March 7, 2015 bridge malfunction, TFR first responders were forced to transport an automobile accident victim using Island Way, the only road that does not require crossing the railroad tracks. As a result of the bridge malfunction and resulting blockage of all grade crossing access points in Tequesta, a normal 5-minute trip to Jupiter Medical Center required an unacceptable 47 minutes.



Mr. Robert Ledoux
August 31, 2015
Page 2

I brought this to your attention in a letter dated March 11, 2015. You immediately acknowledged my letter and in your responding correspondence you identified the issue that prevented the Loxahatchee River rail bridge from locking into place noting that "the repair was addressed and this particular problem should not occur in the future." You also listed four action items that had been implemented to assure the health, safety and welfare of our community would never again be compromised by a stopped FEC freight train.

Nevertheless, the very same problem has occurred again; a mere six months later. Unfortunately, none of the four action items you promised were evident on August 22, 2015, and the ability for our first responders to reach and transport seriously injured accident victims was compromised to the point of impossibility. Once again, the locking mechanism on the Loxahatchee River rail bridge failed and an FEC train engineer chose to advance the train as close to the bridge as possible. Once again, a single stopped freight train blocked the only three points of egress from the Tequesta peninsula to U.S. 1 and Alt. A1A. In addition, a FEC train dispatcher failed to notify the Tequesta Police dispatch center that a train had blocked the three grade crossings. This lack of information caused a TFR rescue vehicle to literally "spin its wheels" as emergency responders desperately tried to cross the tracks and get to the accident scene.

It is clear that the dangerously decaying condition of the 90 year-old Loxahatchee River Bridge and its rapidly deteriorating operating mechanism are problems that cannot be solved with "routine maintenance." Although I acknowledge your attempt to mitigate the problem, the callous indifference of FEC operations personnel is of serious concern. Regardless of whether Village of Tequesta police and fire rescue personnel cannot exit the peninsula, or incoming mutual aid responders from other jurisdictions are unable to gain access to it, blocked grade crossings can mean the difference between life and death. A recent example is the LP gas-fueled structure fire that exceeded the resources of Tequesta police and fire rescue personnel on August 10, 2015. That incident required, in addition to TPD personnel and equipment, three additional fire rescue units from Palm Beach County and numerous Palm Beach County Sheriff's deputies who were dispatched to evacuate neighboring residents and contain the fire. Had the Riverside Drive grade crossing been blocked that night, the only other available route would have conservatively added 15 - 20 minutes to the response times of critically important backup equipment and personnel. The risk of serious injury or death to Tequesta residents and first responders would have increased exponentially for every second that went by before full containment of the fire and risk of explosion could be achieved.



Mr. Robert Ledoux
August 31, 2015
Page 3

The increasing malfunctions at the Loxahatchee Bridge and resulting blockage of ANY of the three grade crossings must stop. Although All Aboard Florida's president Mike Reininger has stated that the bridge will undergo a multimillion dollar renovation of the structure, mechanisms and signaling system, the details and timing of when that will occur is unspecified. Given the inability of FEC operations staff to honor a simple four point mitigation strategy to prevent the Riverside Drive crossing from being blocked, there is little faith that the promised renovations will occur with any sense of importance. The members of this community and the protectors of their health, safety and welfare must have reasonable access to both sides of the FEC tracks and it must be addressed immediately. We cannot wait and risk an occurrence of a truly catastrophic event that your railroad could have prevented.

Please contact me to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Abby Brennan
Mayor

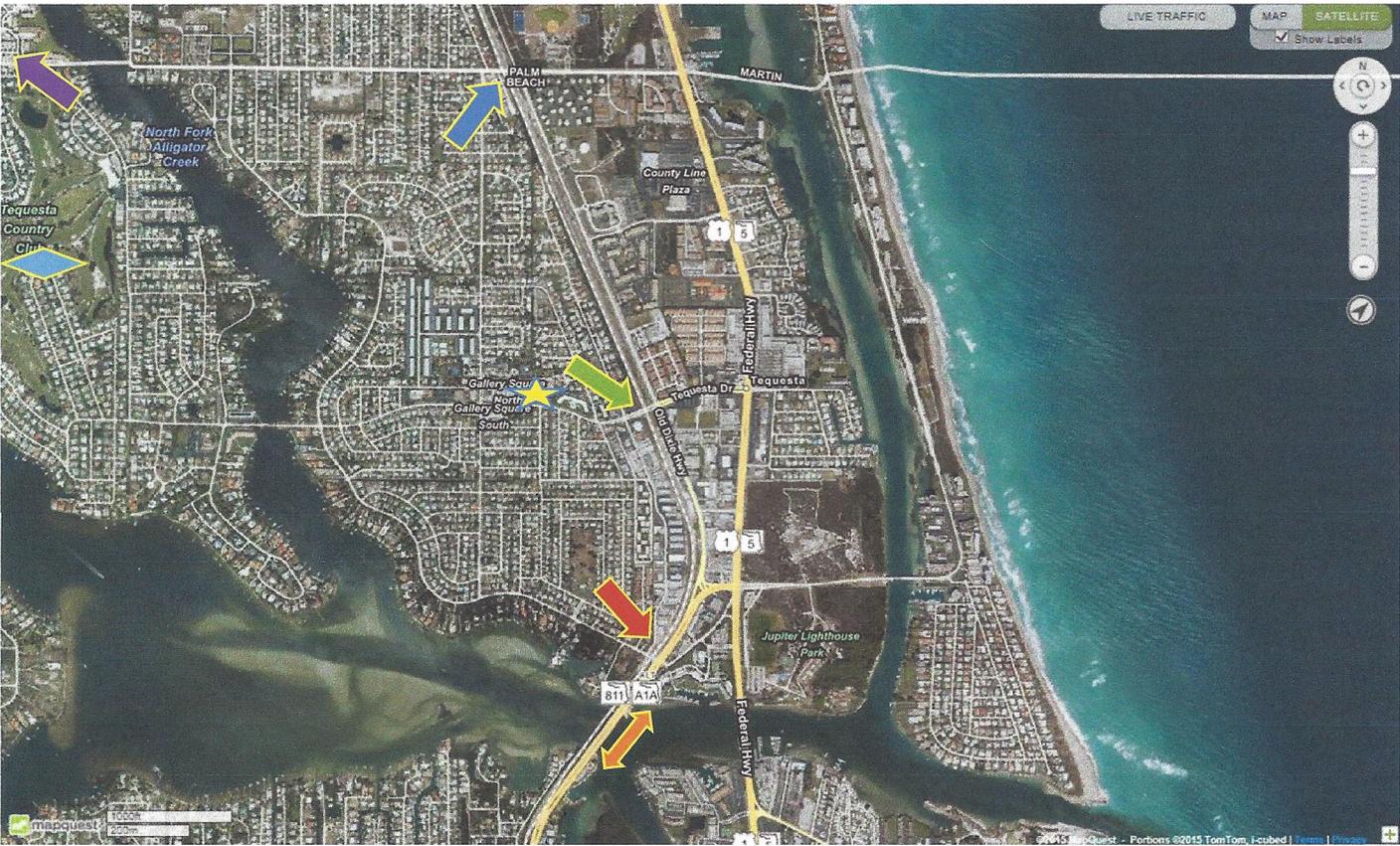
C: Village Council
Michael Reininger, President, All Aboard Florida

Attachment: Satellite Image of Tequesta

Below is a satellite image of the Tequesta area* which identifies the three FECR grade crossings being referenced in this letter. Island Way in Martin County is the only other exit available when all three crossings are blocked. Using the Tequesta Public Safety Building as the starting point, the distance and estimate time for a rescue vehicle (in normal traffic) to reach Jupiter Medical Center is shown below. On March 7th, it took first responders 47 minutes to reach JMC because of the 2-mile backup of cars forced to use Island Way.

Jupiter Medical Center is south of the Loxahatchee River Bridge.

-  **County Line Road Grade Crossing** **5.14 miles / 8 – 9 minutes**
-  **Tequesta Drive Grade Crossing** **3.06 miles / 5 – 6 minutes**
-  **Riverside Drive Grade Crossing** **3.19 miles / 6 – 7 minutes**
-  **Island Way** **10.01 miles / 18 – 24 minutes**
-  **Tequesta Public Safety Building**
-  **Loxahatchee River Train Bridge**



 This image does not capture a portion of the western section of the Tequesta Country Club residential community. The community is bordered on the west by the NW fork of the Loxahatchee River and residents can only exit using Tequesta Drive to the east or Island Way to the north.