

Appendix D

Albion Safety Concerns Report



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# **Albion Rail Corridor Safety Concerns**

# **DRAFT**

**Prepared for Michigan Department of Transportation**

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## Introduction

MDOT has proposed a train speed limit increase through Albion, MI to improve Amtrak's service between Chicago, IL and Detroit, MI. The MDOT Railroad Right of Way (ROW) traverses Albion's downtown district and neighboring Albion College. MDOT's plan would increase train speeds through Albion from 25 to 60 MPH. MDOT's goal is to reduce passenger train travel time while enhancing public safety.

In April of 2019, MDOT held a meeting with the City of Albion officials along with Albion College representatives to discuss the proposed increased train speeds through the city. Pedestrian and vehicular safety concerns were voiced from both MDOT, the City and the College. MDOT also met with Amtrak, the railroad maintenance contractor to collect information on concerns its staff sees on a regular basis. Details of the concerns expressed by the project stakeholders are summarized in this report and attached map. In general, each party believes that the improvements MDOT has made to the Michigan Line have benefited the community and the train station in Albion has the potential to promote Albion's tourism and College to its passengers.

## Existing Safety Concerns Through Albion Michigan

Throughout the railroad property the most prevalent safety issue is trespassing. Pedestrian trespassing occurs in four main locations; The Snack Shop at 201 Perry Street, the closed grade crossing (North Berrien Street), between Erie Street and Huron Street, and near the Albion College athletics complex. In addition to pedestrian trespassing there are several locations where vehicles, debris, and neighboring business encroach on the railroad ROW. Below is a description of the identified issues.

- West of Eaton Street trash and vegetation are piled up on the railroad ROW. The trash is fouling the ROW and needs to be removed. The removal of the trash preserves the integrity of the ROW and prevents more trash from being dumped on the ROW. The area covered in trash and vegetation is shown below in Picture 1 outlined in red.

*Picture 1 – Vegetation and Trash Piled up Near the Railroad ROW*



- Between Eaton Street and Clinton Street, opposite the Albion Amtrak Station, there is a concrete retainer on the ROW restricting future track realignment and construction. Although there is no immediate need for this to be removed, the retainer's presence greatly reduces the ability to maintain the track in this section because machines can't access the track from the north side. The retainer is shown below in Picture 2 outlined in red.

*Picture 2 – Concrete Retainer Near Albion Station*



- Between Clinton Street and Superior Street vehicles routinely park on the MDOT ROW. A vehicle parked close to the active track poses a risk to passing trains and maintenance crews. A vehicle parked on the ROW is shown below in Picture 3 with the estimated rail ROW limits shown in red.

*Picture 3 – Vehicle Parked on Railroad ROW*



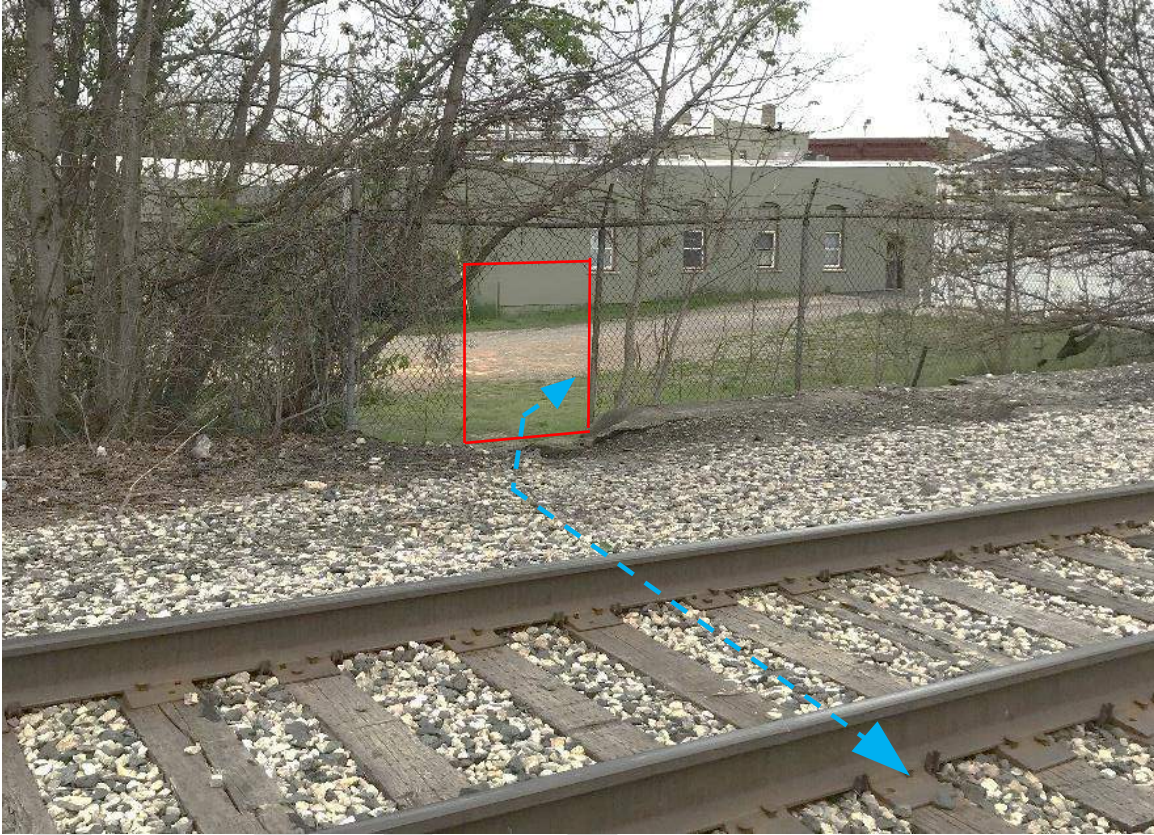
- On Superior Street in the northeast quadrant of the railroad ROW, in the City of Albion's downtown district, snow is plowed onto the railroad ROW obstructing the movement of maintenance of way workers and blocking access to the street from the railroad ROW. Picture 4 below shows the area where snow is typically piled up.

*Picture 4 – Snow Piling Area*



- Between Superior Street and Ionia Street there is routine trespassing through a man-made hole in the chain-link fence on the south side of the track. Trespassers use this route to access The Snack Shop on the north side of the track. Picture 5 shows the hole in the fence along with the route.

*Picture 5 – Hole in Fence Near Snack Shop*



- The crossing at Monroe Street and Cass Street is at a 45-degree angle to the tracks. Albion College is targeting Cass St. to be the primary pedestrian route between Albion's emerging downtown and the College. Currently the pedestrian route has no designated crossing for the south side sidewalk, and routing signs and striping need to be improved if the north side sidewalk is the intended pathway.

*Picture 6 – Crossing at Monroe St. and Cass St. South Side Facing West*



*Picture 7 – Rail Crossing at Cass St. & Monroe St. North Side Facing West*



- The grade crossing at North Berrien Street was previously closed; however, pedestrians still traverse the tracks, illegally. Although the road was removed there are no barriers impeding access. Picture 8 below shows the street meeting the Rail ROW.

*Picture 8 – Closed Crossing at Berrien St.*



- Between Erie Street and Huron Street, students and faculty often trespass across the tracks to access Albion College's facilities. College maintenance vehicles also encroach on the ROW in this location. The presence of the people and vehicles is a safety hazard. Picture 9 below shows worn paths on the ROW where vehicles and pedestrians foul the track.

*Picture 9 – Worn Paths Between Erie St. and Huron St.*



- The existing pedestrian crossing at Erie Street was recently relocated to enhance safety; however, the northside sidewalk was never removed, and now dead ends. This confused pedestrian traffic and may be contributing to trespassing. Picture 10 below shows the sidewalk configuration.

*Picture 10 – Sidewalk Crossing at Erie St.*



- Hannah Street is the busiest legal pedestrian crossing in Albion because of its direct connection between the College campus and the athletic facilities. While this crossing functions as intended in its current state, enhanced pedestrian safety features may be warranted as train speeds increase. Picture 11 below shows the existing pedestrian crossing at Hannah St.

*Picture 11 – Pedestrian Crossing at Hannah St.*



- On the east end of Albion’s campus students trespass on the ROW as they travel between the athletic complex and student housing. Picture 12 below shows the end of the fencing facing north from Albion College’s Athletic Complex.

*Picture 12 – End of Fence Near Albion Athletic Complex*



Of the issues listed above two major trespassing routes near the athletic complex and the Snack Shop were outlined as the biggest risk to public safety by college and city officials. Both locations have fences; however, pedestrians currently go around or through them. As train speeds rise, the risk to trespassers increases, warranting enhanced corridor safety.

### Next Steps

While reviewing MDOT’s railroad ROW through Albion, MI, several encroachment issues were identified and need to be examined by MDOT’s real-estate department. Additionally, the College noted that Cass St. is planned to be the main pedestrian corridor between the college and downtown. This route crosses MDOT’s railroad ROW. Understanding the city and the college’s plan for a pedestrian corridor will assist in making safety recommendations.

Meeting participants proposed a fence be installed along the railroad ROW to prevent trespassing. The City, College, and MDOT agreed that a fence is necessary; however, the city and college noted that aesthetics of the fence are important.

Increasing train speeds through the City of Albion will reduce the minimum train runtime between Chicago and Detroit and can be done while enhancing public safety for the City and Albion College. By understanding public safety concerns, these worries can be appropriately mitigated.

