

available to solve their operating problems on certain sections of line. The signal engineers might well take the initiative by co-operating with their operating officers in determining where the tight spots are and in offering suggestions as to the remedies to be applied.

OPEN FORUM

This column is published to encourage interchange of ideas on railway signaling subjects. Letters published will be signed with the author's name, unless the author objects. However, in order to encourage open discussion of controversial matters, letters may be signed with pen names at the request of the author. In such instances, the correspondent must supply the editor with his name and address as evidence of good faith. This information will not be disclosed, even on inquiry, unless the correspondent consents.

Obligation for Crossing Protection

St. Paul, Minn.

To the Editor:

I have read with interest your editorial in the December issue of *Railway Signaling*, concerning "Illumination as a Type of Crossing Protection," and am taking the liberty of commenting to some extent on your statements, as in my opinion, they bring out certain conclusions, inferentially at least, which have been permitted to stand for a long time and which are now growing to such proportions that no one may prophesy where they will eventually end.

It would seem to me that you infer and further the thought, that it is the obligation of the railroads to protect highway traffic at grade crossings, and that the responsibility for the prevention of accidents at such crossings, regardless of conditions, rests entirely with them. This is not so strange, as perhaps the majority of highway users accept this as an established fact.

The railroads may be more or less to blame for this condition, as they have, since the beginning, indicated acceptance of responsibility for crossing accidents by paying damages, not because they considered themselves liable, but because it was the most economical way out. It has, therefore, become a custom for highway users to consider they have all the rights at grade crossings, and if these rights are interfered with in any way whatever the railroads must take the consequences.

In the first instance, the railroads were called upon to protect highway traffic from their trains. Now they are called upon to protect their trains from highway traffic. The railroads were here first and the situation is not of their making, except that they developed the country to the extent that modern highways and the traffic they carry were made possible. They are the senior lines and yet, contrary to established practice, are compelled to furnish and maintain the protection.

You cite the record of crossing accidents but you should also make clear that train-automobile accidents are a very small percentage of highway accidents causing death and injury. You point out that state laws require that headlights of automobiles be directed down-

ward so that they do not blind drivers going in the opposite direction, and this limits the effective range so that freight cars are most difficult to see. Do you think this is any excuse for drivers to proceed at speeds far beyond the range of their headlights? Do you not think the logical legislative action for a state to take would be to compel automobile manufacturers to place lamps on the cars which would not be so objectionable? Can anyone truthfully consider that a driver who is traveling at a speed far beyond the range of his headlights is not driving recklessly? This undoubtedly is the cause of so many other accidents on the highways that those which occur at railway crossings are insignificant by comparison.

Why then should railroads be called upon to protect themselves against such conditions by floodlighting their trains at crossings, when corrections in headlight design and the compelling of drivers to assume some responsibility for their own safety, in accordance with the laws of self-preservation, would not only assist greatly in reducing the comparatively few accidents at railroad crossings, but would also do much in the way of reducing the far greater number of accidents on the highways in general?

You cite instances where neon gas signs make it difficult for drivers of fast moving automobiles to readily pick out flashing-light crossing indications. Can anyone justify this driver continuing blindly at high speed under such conditions? With modern reflectorized approach and railroad crossing signs plainly marking a crossing, could it be anything but reckless driving to miss these signs because of high speed or neon signs? Is there any reason why one major industry should be penalized because of the use of neon gas signs displayed by some other industry at the risk of human life? Why not prohibit the use of such signs in such places or force the use of a non-conflicting color? Are not the railroads entitled to some consideration in the regulating to make highway crossings less dangerous? They most certainly should not be required to change or add to their crossing signal systems every time a reckless driver comes down the highway or some tavern or roadhouse puts up a new neon gas sign.

In the consideration of the floodlight as a safety device, you are advocating the use of another "open circuit" piece of apparatus to be installed by signal departments which consider such devices unsuitable for use as far as train signals are concerned, and some of which oppose the use of such devices for obtaining safety at highway crossings. I need not remind you of what difficulties would be encountered in being required by state or other authorities to practically guarantee against power outages, burned out lamps, and many of the other agencies which act to cause an "open circuit" device to indicate safety when the most dangerous condition may exist.

In my opinion, the more of such devices we are required to add at grade crossings, the more dangerous these crossings become. Why not plainly show their existence, and then make every effort to obtain regulations, for others than the railroads, which will not only improve conditions at grade crossings, but at all other points on the highways.

H. E. BRASHARES,
Asst. Supt. of Signals, Great Northern.