

Here is the prepared text of comments Chief Administrative Officer Mike Leonard made to councilmembers during a meeting regarding rail crossings in Biloxi on March 21, 2017. (During the meeting, the City Council, by a 4-1 vote, opted to nominate six crossings for consolidation, removing Keller Avenue from the list.)

The City of Biloxi conducted a study to identify railroad crossings in the city that could be consolidated to improve safety, reduce the potential for accidents and allow the city to focus on maintaining fewer but safer railroad crossings. While this effort to consolidate crossings began weeks before the recent accident, that tragic event certainly underscores the importance of actions needed to improve safe crossing of the railroad in Biloxi.

In addition to the 45,000 city residents who may regularly cross the train tracks, we have an estimated 5.7 Million visitors and tourists not familiar with our city and rail crossings that travel gulf coast streets. There have been 33 fatalities on gulf coast rail crossings since 2007 and we may soon have high speed passenger trains on those tracks.

There are currently 29 at-grade crossings in Biloxi from Point Cadet to Debuys Road. 29 crossings in 8.6 miles. 21 crossings are located in just two and a half miles from White Avenue to Oaks Street. We can clearly consolidate some crossings without significant impact on movement of traffic across the railroad in Biloxi

In selecting potential crossings for closure, our study looked at whether a crossing was a major street or neighborhood street, traffic counts and distance to an alternate crossing. That study is a matter of public record. The city council has been provided a copy and copies were provided to the media.

We are aware that before railroad crossings can be closed that we must develop or improve existing parallel service roads to allow traffic to move to alternate crossing sites. We are also aware that we must see that necessary measures are taken to improve the safety at the remaining crossing sites.

A final consideration is that, should the city wish to ask for any additional railroad crossings in the future that CSX and MDOT would not agree if the city had not already taken action to consolidate and reduce crossings

Please understand what we are now proposing to the city council. That is Just two things.

First that the city be authorized to “nominate” specific crossings to CSX and the Mississippi Department of Transportation.

Second that the city be authorized to develop a capital project and negotiate with CSX and MDOT for financial assistance to both improve parallel service roads and make necessary improvements to existing crossing sites

Any agreement with CSX and MDOT to close a Biloxi crossing site will include the condition that prior to closure the necessary parallel service roads which allow access to alternate crossing sites must be completed. And the city must seek council approval before any closure takes place.

Our list of proposed crossings to be closed was made public last Friday. That list includes Nixon Street, Holley Street, Iroquois Street, Keller Street, Dorries Street, Querens Avenue, and Delauney Street.

Additionally several others including Benachi and McDonnell were considered but not nominated at this time as the necessary alternate routes were not currently available.

In summary, let me repeat that we are not asking the council for permission to close these crossings. We are just asking authority to Nominate not close.