

# Railroad Signs and Safety

Upon approaching a railroad crossing in your car or truck, you might see any number of signs leading up to the actual crossing. Some might be black and white, some black and yellow, while others might display a message or flashing red lights. There is a considerable variety of railroad and street intersection signs, and understanding these signs is crucial for safely navigating through these exchanges. There are two types of signs, active and passive. A passive sign is a regular roadway sign on a post, while an active sign is electronic, such as flashing red lights and a crossing gate. These signs are in place to warn motorists and pedestrians about various hazards, including approaching trains and locomotives. Understanding what each of these signs indicates is crucial for safely navigating around and across railway intersections.

**Advance Warning Sign** - This sign is a yellow circle with the letters R R bisected by a large black X. It is usually the first sign seen when approaching a railroad crossing.

**Advance Warning Signs for Side Streets** - Motorists will see this sign when a railway is running parallel to a road and making a perpendicular turn will immediately put them at a rail crossing.

**Cantilever Flashing Lights** - This type of active railroad sign is used at intersections with multiple lanes of traffic. The cantilever extends over all the traffic lanes and is highly visible to all motorists.

**Crossbuck Sign** - The Crossbuck is the common X-shaped sign found at most highway-railway interchanges. It is usually a large white X with the words Railroad Crossing in black letters.

**Emergency Notification System Sign** - If your or someone else's vehicle is stuck on the railroad crossing, the emergency number to call will be on this crossing sign. If there is no number listed, dial 911. The emergency notification system sign may also have a United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) crossing number.

**Flashing Red Lights (with or without bells)** - The flashing red lights indicate that a train is approaching. Flashing red lights are sometimes attached to the crossbuck sign. There may also be a loud bell or chime sound. Do not attempt to cross the railroad when the lights are flashing, even if you can't see the train.

**Flashing Red Lights and Gates** - Many railroad crossings also employ security gates to prevent vehicles from crossing while a train is approaching. It is against the law in the United States to drive around a lowered railway gate.

**Low Ground Clearance** - The tracks crossing the road can trip up a vehicle or trailer with low clearance. Such vehicles should exercise caution when crossing the railroad tracks and ensure their vehicle or trailer has crossed completely. This sign is a graphic showing a trailer striking a rail crossing.

**Multiple Track Sign** - Some railroad crossings have more than one track crossing the roadway. This can be two, three, or more. Be especially cautious at these interchanges.

**No Train Horn Sign** - This sign indicates that a quiet zone is in effect for the designated area, which means the conductor is not supposed to use their horn. Exceptions can be made if there is a danger to people or vehicles near the tracks.

**No Trespassing** - This sign might appear outside certain railroad and railroad crossing areas. Bypassing a fence or any barrier to access a railroad or crossing is often illegal. Pay attention to any posted No Trespassing signs.

**Pavement Markings and Stop Bars** - In addition to the advanced warning *signs*, the road will have a white, painted marking indicating a railroad crossing ahead. This marking will also have two white bars indicating a safe area to stop a vehicle.

**Yield Sign** - Drivers are required to yield the right of way to the train, as the train cannot stop as easily as an automobile.

## *Additional Railroad Signs and Safety Resources*

- [\*USDOT: Railroad Safety\*](#)
- [\*Railroad Safety Signs and Signals \(PDF\)\*](#)
- [\*Railroad Crossing Signs\*](#)
- [\*Understanding Railroad Signals\*](#)
- [\*History of Railroad Signals\*](#)
- [\*NHSTA: Rain and Railroad Crossing Safety\*](#)
- [\*Drivers Never Win When Racing a Train\*](#)
- [\*A Big Rig Ain't Diddly Compared to a Train\*](#)
- [\*Truck Driver Safety Alert \(PDF\)\*](#)
- [\*A Truck Driver's Guide to Safely Navigate Rail Crossings\*](#)
- [\*Railroad Crossing Safety for Truck Drivers\*](#)
- [\*Ignoring Railroad Crossing Gates Can Be Deadly\*](#)
- [\*Is it Legal to Drive Around Lowered Railroad Crossing Arms?\*](#)
- [\*History and Review of Railway-Highway Grade Crossing Warning Systems and the Genesis of Standard Specification\*](#)
- [\*Railroad Crossing Signs \(Meanings\)\*](#)
- [\*Tips for Train Safety\*](#)
- [\*Pedestrian Rail Safety Tips\*](#)
- [\*Rail Safety Week\*](#)
- [\*History of the Railroad Crossbuck Sign\*](#)
- [\*History of Railroad Crossing Gates and Signals\*](#)