

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Fines will double for drivers who disobey crossing gates in 2017**

*Stricter penalties begin on Sunday, Jan. 1*

CHICAGO (Dec. 28, 2016) – Metra reminds drivers that starting Sunday, Jan. 1, the penalties will double for those who try to cross railroad tracks after the grade crossing systems have activated.

In July 2016, Gov. Bruce Rauner signed into law an amendment to the Illinois Vehicle Code that increases fines for drivers who disregard activated railroad gates and warning lights from \$250 to \$500 for a first offense and from \$500 to \$1,000 for a second or subsequent offense. This amendment becomes law on Jan. 1, 2017.

Illinois, which ranked second in the nation in 2015 for highway-rail fatalities, will now have some of the strictest penalties in the nation for these types of vehicular offenses. Nearly 75 to 80 percent of vehicle/train collisions occur at crossings with active warning devices, including lights, gates and bells, according to Illinois Operation Lifesaver.

“Drivers who think they can beat a train on the tracks often suffer dangerous and deadly consequences,” said bill sponsor Sen. Karen McConnaughay (R-33rd District). “I hope these increased fines will help make drivers think twice before deciding to take their chances and put their lives at risk at railroad crossings.”

“These incidents are entirely avoidable,” said bill sponsor Rep. Michael W. Tryon (R-66<sup>th</sup> District). “With the second largest rail system in the nation, we must do all we can to help discourage and prevent injuries and fatalities on railroad tracks.”

The legislation was initiated by Metra this spring as part of a larger initiative to help promote rail safety awareness and eliminate preventable injuries and deaths at highway-rail grade crossings.

“The message is simple: when the gates are activated, stay off the tracks or you will pay the price through these increased fines or worse,” said Metra’s Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. “In addition to the tragic injuries or loss of life that can result when a vehicle is struck by a train, collisions at railroad crossings can impact thousands of

Metra customers, who can be delayed for hours waiting for first responders to clear the accident scene, and delay other motorists who are forced to find alternate routes. Also, let's not forget the trauma experienced by locomotive engineers and conductors when these incidents occur and work together to prevent accidents and injuries along the railroad.”

Illinois has the second-largest rail system of any state with more than 7,300 miles of railroad track and 10,363 public highway-rail crossings. In 2015, Illinois also had the third-highest number of rail crossing collisions (140, behind Texas and California), the second-highest number of rail crossing fatalities (24, behind California) and the third-highest number of rail crossing injuries (79, behind Texas and North Carolina), according to the Federal Railroad Administration. Two hundred and forty-four people died in highway-rail crashes nationwide in 2015. A pedestrian or vehicle-train collision occurs every three hours on average nationwide.

Metra conducts Operation Lifesaver Safety Blitzes at train stations across its six-county service area throughout the year as part of ongoing efforts to raise awareness of the importance of safe behavior around its trains and tracks. In 2016, 45 safety blitzes were conducted.

Metra also promotes safety through its annual Safety Poster and Essay Contest for the region's schoolchildren and by conducting nearly 1,000 free Operation Lifesaver presentations annually to schools, community groups, school bus drivers, professional truck drivers, emergency responders and other organizations throughout the region.

Operation Lifesaver is a national organization that works to educate and promote safe behavior near the tracks by offering free rail safety education programs. The organization's work is co-sponsored by local, state and federal government agencies, highway safety organizations and America's railroads.

For more information about Metra's safety programs or to request an Operation Lifesaver presentation, please visit [metrarail.com](http://metrarail.com).

### ***About Metra***

*Metra is one of the largest and most complex commuter rail systems in North America, serving Cook, DuPage, Will, Lake, Kane and McHenry counties in northeastern Illinois. The agency provides service to and from downtown Chicago with 241 stations over 11 routes totaling nearly 500 route miles and approximately 1,200 miles of track. Metra operates more than 700 weekday trains, providing about 300,000 passenger trips each weekday.*

**Like** us on Facebook: **Metra** – **Follow** us on Twitter: **@Metra** – **Visit** us at **metrarail.com**

#####

