

Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council

www.pasadenacac.org

Summary of Thursday, December 3, 2015 Meeting

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS (Haz-Mat) TRANSPORTATION BY RAIL

Kirk Higbie, Director of Safety and Environmental for the Port Terminal Railroad Association (PTRA), talked about PTRA's services. PTRA moves rail cars from plants to the rail yard of a major railroad to be made into trains. He described safeguards in place from the time a railcar is loaded in a plant until it reaches the customer; safeguards related to safety, environment, and security; and the concern that those who gain access to a train to paint graffiti on it make community members worry that someone could gain access to do greater harm. Higbie also provided information about rail car design as a safeguard, and new regulations designed to improve railcar safety.

Higbie's slides cover PTRA history, how it differs from Class I railroads, its operating area, its employees, its infrastructure, the commodities it handled in 2014, its partners, its technology, public safety including Operation Lifesaver, railroad safety, and railroad haz-mat safety.

In response to questions, Higbie provided additional information:

- The top speed for PTRA trains is 20 mph, but they average 10 mph or less. Trains carrying crude from Canada travel higher speeds. Slow speeds decrease the chance of derailment. Nonetheless, PTRA maintains contracts with emergency response companies to be prepared.
- PTRA has its own police department and relies on its employees to be alert and report intrusions. They use some fencing to help limit the exits if someone enters their property, making it easier for police officers to catch intruders. The cameras they use for operations also help with security.
- PTRA has been making investments for several years and doubling its lines on both sides of the Houston Ship Channel in anticipation of industrial and Port of Houston expansions.
- The timetable for phasing out of certain older railcars may be found on the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) website www.fra.dot.gov. FRA is part of the US Department of Transportation (DOT).
- There are provisions in an emergency to break a train that is blocking an intersection. Police departments, for example, know how to contact the PTRA to do so. On the south side of the ship channel, PTRA travels almost exclusively through industry property. New cameras are making it easier for the engineer to know if there are a couple cars blocking a road. If you are blocked for 15-20 minutes, call 713-393-6500 to report your location and train identification, or do so at www.ptra.com.
- Higbie was not sure of PTRA's involvement in the Houston Ship Channel Security District. The Port of Houston is a member.
- PTRA plans for hurricanes and floods like industry does; they also review plans annually. Plans include provisions for moving tank cars carrying toxic inhalation hazards or chlorine out of low-lying areas.
- Trains sound horns and whistles to keep people safe by alerting them to a coming train, and they are required by law to do so. The law does allow for local governments to establish a quiet zone but the city then assumes the liability if there is an accident because someone did not realize a train was

coming. Directional whistles are being used in the Sugarland area instead of the usual horns. Applications for cities wishing to apply for a quiet zone may be found at www.fra.dot.gov.

- PTRA takes part in the Operation Lifesaver public safety program, making presentations to schools and organizations and taking part in events like the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Railroads are private property and they want children to understand the dangers of walking the tracks. Higbie said want people to know that the locomotive always wins if there is a collision.
- Additional information about trains and rail safety may be found at the Association of American Railroads (AAR) at www.aar.org. AAR is the trade association for railroads.