FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  Contact: Patrick K. Petree  Reference: TRN12597-92

OCC Task Force Will Seek Ways to Make Rail Crossings Safer

OKLAHOMA CITY -- A special task force formed by the Oklahoma Corporation Commission to seek improvements in railroad crossing safety will begin its work on Dec. 10 with a 1:30 p.m. meeting at the Department of Transportation Building (200 NE 21) in Oklahoma City.

[The meeting will be in the Planning Division Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room A-7.]

The task force was established by Oklahoma House and Senate resolutions. "Our main goal is to develop criteria for crossing consolidations -- the closing of unsafe or unneeded crossings and the upgrading of crossings that remain open," Jerry Matheson, Corporation Commission Transportation director and task force chairman, said.

The 12-member task force includes Corporation Commission and state Department of Transportation (ODOT) officials who administer federal and state rail crossing safety regulations and programs in Oklahoma. Other members represent railroads, city and county governments and highway users. "Every entity interested in rail crossing safety will have a voice, so our recommendations will be equitable to everyone," Matheson said.

The Corporation Commission regulates rail crossing safety and ODOT administers $3.2 million in federal rail safety funds that Oklahoma receives annually for crossing upgrades.

Joe Kyle, ODOT rail planning and safety manager, said the federal government has set a national goal of reducing redundant (unnecessary) crossings by 25 percent by 2000. He said "corridor projects," which consider traffic and safety factors for specified sections of railroad right-of-way rather than for individual crossings, help rail planners identify crossings for consolidation. Corridor projects in Oklahoma since 1988 have closed 52 crossings and installed 118 signal systems and 111 crossing surfaces at a cost of $19.3 million, ODOT statistics reveal.

Matheson said the task force also will consider ways to improve safety at many of Oklahoma's 4,300 rail crossings that have crossbuck warning posts but no light or sound signal systems.

Task force members are Matheson, Mike Grimes, Department of Public Safety; Joe Kyle, ODOT; John Kyle, director, Oklahoma Railroad Association; Chuck Mai, American Automobile Association; Louis Mathia, mayor, City of Miami; Robert Painter, an accident reconstructionist; Richard Shaw, president and CEO of the Farmrail System; Troy Streber, Grady County commissioner; Gary Weathers, Operation Lifesaver; Mike Weissmann, division superintendent, Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railroad; and Leonard West, councilman, City of Norman.

-OCC-