

On a recent 300km drive from Lakes Entrance to Melbourne, via some backroads, we crossed the Bairnsdale to Melbourne railway line many times.

There were a number of trains on the line and when approaching uncontrolled level crossings with no lights/boomgates it was often very difficult to know exactly which direction to look to locate any fast approaching trains. (Tracks at crossings are not always at right angles to the road).

We noted that, to improve visibility and safety, flashing beacons are always used on roadworking machinery and some Vicroads vehicles, support vehicles at all airports, and on all ambulances, police and fire vehicles. Some railway track maintenance vehicles also have flashing beacons - but, very surprisingly, they never seem to be fitted to fast moving railway locomotives.

The question is - WHY NOT INSTALL FLASHING BEACONS ON ALL COUNTRY AND OUTER URBAN RAILWAY LOCOMOTIVES TO REDUCE UNCONTROLLED LEVEL CROSSING ACCIDENTS?

The style and color of flashing beacons (and other associated front lights) could be chosen to be unique to railway locomotives. The cost would be relatively low, compared with most level crossing upgrade solutions.

CURRENT PRACTICE IS NOT HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL.

Please note that the current practice of switching on **fixed** high intensity white, but very narrow beam, railway engine headlights is not highly successful since they are only clearly visible by motorists/truck/bus drivers over a narrow range of angles, and being a fixed source of light they are unlikely to sufficiently alert a driver suffering from significant fatigue - particularly during daylight.

A flashing beacon on country and outer urban railway engines would be much more likely to grab motorists/truck/bus drivers attention early enough for them to avoid an uncontrolled level crossing accident.

I am of the view that, at relatively low cost, this initiative would have a significant impact on reducing country and outer urban level crossing accidents at uncontrolled level crossings. It would also put Victoria ahead of all other States in level crossing safety, since this simple idea does not appear to be used on railway locomotives anywhere in Australia - except on some small sugar cane trains in Queensland.

THERE ARE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN AND USA REPORTS WHICH STRONGLY SUPPORT THIS VIEW.

AUSTRALIAN REPORT - JUNE 2004, by House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services .(see <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/trains/report.htm#fullreport> Chapter 2 'Improving Train Visibility', Recommendation 1) which says, in part, "**The Committee recommends that the Australian Government takes steps through the Transport Ministers Council, to require that all locomotives ----- are fitted with rotating beacon lights**". Note that this report is currently being updated by the House of Representatives Transport Committee - submissions are due Friday 23rd January 2009. This Email will be my submission.

USA REPORT - JULY 2007, US Department of Transportation - Federal Railroad Administration. Research Results.(See Attachment) **There have been very detailed studies in the USA starting in the early 1990's resulting in Regulatory Provisions for flashing 'Crossing Lights', fixed 'Ditch Lights', and flashing (strobe) lights, on the front of American locomotives which have apparently been in place for many years. Field**

results in the early 1990's showed that even the flashing 'Crossing Lights' alone reduced level crossing accidents by 54 - 76%!!

CONCLUSION.

It would appear that the more sophisticated combination of flashing and fixed lights which are mandatory on the front of USA locomotives (detailed in the attachment) would provide the highest level of safety and should be implemented in Australia as a matter of urgency.

Clearly, these studies have concluded that flashing beacons on locomotives will reduce uncontrolled level crossing accidents - but nothing has been done in Australia to date. WHY IS IT SO ?

If you agree with this initiative, your assistance in encouraging our Minister of Transport to have this very important safety issue attended to as a matter of urgency would be very much appreciated.

Best Regards,
John McCulloch. (MIE Aust).