

REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION MORTIMER DOWNEY
OPERATION LIFESAVER
WASHINGTON, D.C.
MAY 15, 1996

*(Introduction to be made by Tom Simpson,
President, Operation Lifesaver Board of Directors)*

On behalf of Secretary Pena and the Department of Transportation, I'd like to congratulate Senator Lugar on his award. He stands in a long line of distinguished members of Congress who have received this award, and it's well-deserved.

These awards highlight the fact that the progress on rail safety is the result of partnership -- a partnership between Congress and the federal Department of Transportation -- state and local transportation and law enforcement officials -- freight railroads -- the rail brotherhoods -- and Operation Lifesaver.

This partnership has made tremendous progress. Last year, I'm pleased to announce, we had the fewest highway-grade crossing fatalities in a decade -- just 578.

We can -- and should -- take pride in this progress -- even as we recognize that those 578 people died in accidents that shouldn't have happened. Secretary Pena recognizes this, and that's why he's committed this department to cooperating with our partners to improve

grade crossing safety -- providing the funding, the coordination, and the technical assistance they need.

However, most of these collisions are caused by people who drive around crossing gates or who trespass because they think these accidents are something that happens to other people. That's why the key to saving lives must be education.

It's human nature to cut corners, but people will do the right thing if they understand the real risks. We're doing what we can to educate them at the federal level through the leadership provided by Jolene Molitoris and her fellow DOT administrators -- Rodney Slater -- Gordon Linton -- Ric Martinez -- and our Associate Deputy Secretary Mike Huerta, who's helped to coordinate solutions which often involve more than one mode.

But the federal government can't do it alone. We need help -- and that's where Operation Lifesaver and its members come in. I can never thank you enough for the work you do.

Over the last two decades you've helped to cut the number of highway-rail crashes in half, despite the huge increase in traffic. You and your volunteers have made a significant difference in educating Americans, and I encourage you to keep it up.

Let's show the country the good that can be done

when government works in partnership with business,
labor, and volunteer groups like Operation Lifesaver.
Thank you.