



JPB Board of Directors  
Meeting of August 1, 2024

Correspondence as of July 31, 2024

# Subject

1. Caltrain's new policy is working!
2. Re\_ Caltrain's new policy is working! - Response from Kurt Topel
3. Re\_ Caltrain's new policy is working! - Response from Lanny Wilson
4. A Responsible Approach to Reducing Rail Suicides
5. Re\_ Caltrain's new policy is working! - Response from C. Joseph Am. Joseph Am. Joseph Am
6. Fwd\_ Caltrain's new policy is working!
7. FW\_ Comment on Caltrain's change in practice of information-shar

**From:** [Lanny Wilson](#)  
**To:** [Public Comment](#)  
**Cc:** [Kurt Topel](#); [Steve Laffey](#); [Steve Laffey](#); [Debbie Hare](#); [Hilary Konczal](#); [Hilary Konczal](#); [Betty Olivera](#); [Betty Olivera](#); [Karen Darch](#); [Karen Darch](#); [C. Joseph Amore](#)  
**Subject:** Caltrain's new policy is working!  
**Date:** Tuesday, July 30, 2024 10:38:52 AM

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**ATTENTION:** This email came from an external source. Do not open attachments or click on links from unknown senders.

To whom it may concern:

My name is Dr. Lanny Wilson, and I have chaired the DuPage Railroad Safety Council (DRSC) since its inception almost 30 years ago. Our mission is to "Eliminate deaths and injuries at railroad crossings and along railways". We are fortunate to collaborate with such organizations as the Federal Railroad Association (FRA) and Operation Lifesaver (OLI), My commitment to railroad safety began when my daughter died at a railroad crossing on March 2, 1994.

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This is persuasive data.

The DuPage Railroad Safety Council applauds Caltrain's decision. You are saving lives! Thank you.

Your partner in Railroad Safety,

***Lanny F. Wilson, M.D. (Chairman)***  
***DuPage Railroad Safety Council***

**P.O. Box 477**  
**Hinsdale, IL 60522-0477**  
**Tel: 630-975-9200**

**From:** [Kurt Topel](#)  
**To:** [Lanny Wilson](#)  
**Cc:** [Public Comment](#); [Steve Laffey](#); [Steve Laffey](#); [Debbie Hare](#); [Hilary Konczal](#); [Hilary Konczal](#); [Betty Olivera](#); [Betty Olivera](#); [Karen Darch](#); [Karen Darch](#); [C. Joseph Amore](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Caltrain's new policy is working!  
**Date:** Tuesday, July 30, 2024 11:53:19 AM

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Great letter, Lanny!

Kurt

On Jul 30, 2024, at 12:37 PM, Lanny Wilson <[lannyfwilsonmd@ameritech.net](mailto:lannyfwilsonmd@ameritech.net)> wrote:

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**From:** [Lanny Wilson](#)  
**To:** [Kurt Topel](#)  
**Cc:** [Public Comment](#); [Steve Laffey](#); [Steve Laffey](#); [Debbie Hare](#); [Hilary Konczal](#); [Hilary Konczal](#); [Betty Olivera](#); [Betty Olivera](#); [Karen Darch](#); [Karen Darch](#); [C. Joseph Amore](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Caltrain's new policy is working!  
**Date:** Tuesday, July 30, 2024 1:23:13 PM

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Thank you, Kurt!

I simply followed your lead. You have been an excellent railroad safety partner (and teacher - through the years).

Sincerely,  
Lanny

**Lanny F. Wilson, M.D.**  
**336 Forest Rd**  
**Hinsdale, IL 60521**  
**Tel: 630-975-9200**

On Tuesday, July 30, 2024 at 01:53:17 PM CDT, Kurt Topel <topelkurt@gmail.com> wrote:

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Kurt

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**P.O. Box 477**  
**Hinsdale, IL 60522-0477**  
**Tel: 630-975-9200**

**From:** [Kurt Topel](#)  
**To:** [Public Comment](#)  
**Subject:** A Responsible Approach to Reducing Rail Suicides  
**Date:** Tuesday, July 30, 2024 3:20:54 PM  
**Attachments:** [post\\_logo-smaller-2.png](#)

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**ATTENTION:** This email came from an external source. Do not open attachments or click on links from unknown senders.

Dear Caltrain Board Members,

I am writing to advocate for the support of Caltrain's new policy on non-disclosure of pedestrian rail strikes. As an independent rail safety researcher, I have dedicated years to studying the causes and impacts of rail suicides, and I strongly believe this policy is a step in the right direction.

Research has consistently shown that publicizing details of suicide methods can lead to copycat incidents, a phenomenon known as the Werther effect. By describing pedestrian strikes in media reports, distressed individuals may be reminded of the rails as a means of suicide. My own studies, encompassing approximately 1,500 cases, indicate that clusters of rail suicides often follow media coverage of such incidents. Therefore, reducing the visibility of these tragic events is a necessary step in preventing further loss of life.

Initial outcomes from this policy shift are encouraging. According to Dan Lieberman, Caltrain has reported a sharp decrease in fatalities since the policy's inception. The benefits of this policy extend beyond the immediate prevention of suicides. It also alleviates the emotional burden on first responders, cleanup crews, and witnesses who are often traumatized by these incidents. Additionally, it minimizes operational disruptions for Caltrain, preventing lengthy delays and road blockages that inconvenience both commuters and drivers.

I strongly urge the Board to support and uphold this policy. It is a responsible and necessary measure to reduce rail suicides, protect mental health, and ensure the efficient operation of Caltrain services. By prioritizing the well-being of individuals over the sensationalism of media coverage, we can make a meaningful impact on rail safety and community health.

Those protesting against the new policy will state that not talking about suicide will encourage stigma. Authorities do recommend that individuals and society reduce stigma by being more open and accepting of suicidal thoughts. However, no suicide prevention authority would advise reporting on the method employed or the time and location where another reader might obtain access to the same means.

There is a website, developed by the leading experts on suicide prevention, that provides advice to media professionals on the safe reporting of suicide. The first recommendation made at <https://reportingonsuicide.org>: Website quote verbatim

**Following these recommendations can assist in safe reporting on suicide.**

**AVOID:** Describing or depicting the **method and location** of the suicide.

INSTEAD: Report the death as a suicide; keep information about the location general

AVOID SAYING:

Kate Spade hung herself with a scarf on the closet door in her bedroom.

INSTEAD SAY:

Kate Spade died by suicide in her Manhattan home.

Why?

Graphic details and images of suicide methods may increase risk of suicide attempt or death for vulnerable, at-risk individuals.

For example, the public would be outraged if a news outlet published the following story:

Title: Firearm suicide victim was former Gunn student

Body: A 23-year-old killed himself yesterday in Palo Alto. He used a Glock 17, which is currently selling for \$499.00 at Eddy's Shooting Sports, 400 Moffett Blvd. Suite F, Mountain View CA 94043. Hours: Tuesday - Friday 12PM-5PM Sunday-Monday CLOSED

It is ludicrous that a media outlet would announce the method and the location to obtain the specific means the person used to kill themselves, and yet, that is what is reported in every pedestrian rail strike, whether or not it is subsequently determined to be suicide.

To illustrate how some media outlets portray rail suicides, the following are snippets of an actual story published February 24, 2024, in the Palo Alto Daily Journal, which is the news outlet that has run a story decrying Caltrain's new policy AND a follow-up opinion piece:



Title: *Railroad suicide victim was a Gunn student*

*...A 16-year-old girl who was struck by a Caltrain in Palo Alto died by suicide, according to the Santa Clara County Medical Examiner-Coroner's Office...*

*The girl was hit just before noon on Tuesday (Feb. 20) at the E. Meadow Drive crossing.*

I wish the courageous change in the Caltrain policy would eliminate Caltrain pedestrian deaths. Sadly, it won't. But it will reduce the chances of copycat suicides.

I am so passionate about this subject that I will gladly fly out to Silicon Valley at my own expense to provide you with more evidence that Caltrain has made the right decision.

Regards,

Kurt Topel  
Chicagoland Rail Safety Team



**From:** [C. Joseph Amore](#)  
**To:** [Lanny Wilson](#)  
**Cc:** [Public Comment](#); [Kurt Topel](#); [Steve Laffey](#); [Steve Laffey](#); [Debbie Hare](#); [Hilary Konczal](#); [Hilary Konczal](#); [Betty Olivera](#); [Betty Olivera](#); [Karen Darch](#); [Karen Darch](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Caltrain's new policy is working!  
**Date:** Tuesday, July 30, 2024 4:02:26 PM

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**ATTENTION:** This email came from an external source. Do not open attachments or click on links from unknown senders.

Great letter! Thanks for all you do!

Joe Amore  
Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 30, 2024, at 12:38 PM, Lanny Wilson <lannyfwilsonmd@ameritech.net> wrote:

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**From:** [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](mailto:Board (@caltrain.com))  
**To:** [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](mailto:Board (@caltrain.com))  
**Subject:** Fwd: Caltrain's new policy is working!  
**Date:** Tuesday, July 30, 2024 4:15:31 PM

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**From:** Lanny Wilson <lannywilsonmd@ameritech.net>

**Sent:** Tuesday, July 30, 2024 10:38 AM

**To:** Public Comment <publiccomment@caltrain.com>

**Cc:** Kurt Topel <topelkurt@gmail.com>; Steve Laffey <steve.laffey79@gmail.com>; Steve Laffey <stephen.laffey@illinois.gov>; Debbie Hare <deborah.m.hare@gmail.com>; Hilary Konczal <hkonczal@sbcglobal.net>; Hilary Konczal <hkonczal@metrarr.com>; Betty Olivera <bolivera@huronconsultinggroup.com>; Betty Olivera <bolivera@hcg.com>; Karen Darch <kydarch@comcast.net>; Karen Darch <kdarch@barrington-il.gov>; C. Joseph Amore <amorexpress@sbcglobal.net>

**Subject:** Caltrain's new policy is working!

You don't often get email from lannywilsonmd@ameritech.net. [Learn why this is important](#)

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**P.O. Box 477**  
**Hinsdale, IL 60522-0477**  
**Tel: 630-975-9200**

---

**From:** Donoghue, John <john.donoghue@hhs.sccgov.org>

**Sent:** Wednesday, July 31, 2024 3:13 PM

**To:** Public Comment <publiccomment@caltrain.com>

**Cc:** Kang, Jen (Jee eun) <jeeun.kang@hhs.sccgov.org>; Tatiana Ormaza <tatiana.ormaza@gmail.com>

**Subject:** Comment on Caltrain's change in practice of information-sharing on service interruptions

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Hello,

I am a Co-chair of the County of Santa Clara's Suicide Prevention Program's Communications Workgroup. I would like to submit the following public comment for tomorrow's meeting. I have pasted it below and attached a Word document. Thank you.

---

Regarding Caltrain's recent decision to change its practices around sharing information about causes of service delays and suspensions:

The County of Santa Clara Suicide Prevention Program's Communications Workgroup would like to recognize Caltrain's efforts to incorporate safe messaging and reporting guidelines in its practices. The workgroup extends gratitude to Caltrain for its consideration on how its interactions with media and the public may impact prevalence of suicide in local communities.

As suicide prevention advocates and professionals, our workgroup aims to increase awareness of suicide and suicide prevention in Santa Clara County. Our primary objectives are to reduce stigma, increase the use of behavioral health services, and prevent suicide contagion among county residents. Our work would not be possible without the partnership and efforts of media outlets and spokespeople at organizations such as Caltrain.

Our workgroup looks to research on suicide prevention and suicide contagion to guide its prevention efforts. A strong evidence base exists on the influence of media coverage of suicide on suicidal behavior. Specifically, research suggests that the content and volume of media coverage can be contributing factors to more suicidal behavior among vulnerable and at-risk individuals. To address this issue, suicide prevention, mental health, and public health experts from around the world developed Best Practices and Recommendations for

Reporting on Suicide (found on [www.ReportingOnSuicide.org](http://www.ReportingOnSuicide.org)). Our workgroup recognizes that Caltrain implemented its change in practice to align with these internationally-recognized recommendations.

In the past few years, we have welcomed Caltrain's participation in the Communications Workgroup and value the partnership in promoting suicide prevention and safe messaging around suicide. We look forward to following Caltrain's process and learnings as they pilot this practice change.

---

Jay Donoghue, MPH  
**Communications Manager**  
**Prevention Services Division**  
Pronouns: he, him, his

408-608-7318 (mobile)  
<https://bhsd.sccgov.org/home>

**24/7 Crisis & Suicide Prevention Lifeline:**  
**Call or text 988**  
[Chat online](#)



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