

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107115](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2023, there were nearly 1,900 crashes at railway-highway grade crossings—where railroad tracks and roads or pedestrian walkways intersect at the same level. These crashes have increasingly involved pedestrians. FHWA administers RHCP to improve safety at crossings nationwide, providing at least \$245 million per year to states. IIJA introduced several changes to the program, which helped expand funding flexibility and clarify funding eligibility.

IIJA includes a provision for GAO to review RHCP. This report examines (1) how states used program funding and what a subset of states reported about crossing improvements, (2) stakeholders' perspectives on program changes made by IIJA and how changes may affect safety improvements for crossings, and (3) FHWA's technical assistance to states.

GAO reviewed relevant statutes and regulations and analyzed program data and crash data submitted by a subset of states. GAO interviewed FHWA and state officials, local entities, and railroads from six states—selected for program funding amounts received, among other factors. State and local perspectives are not generalizable. GAO assessed FHWA's technical assistance against federal internal control standards.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that FHWA provide additional information about the types of pedestrian projects related to trespassing that might be eligible for RHCP funding. The Department of Transportation concurred with GAO's recommendation.

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RAILWAY-HIGHWAY CROSSINGS

Improvements Needed to Federal Technical Assistance About Pedestrian Projects Related to Trespassing

What GAO Found

The Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provides funding for states to improve safety at public crossings through the Railway-Highway Crossings Program (RHCP). GAO found that states used RHCP funding to address safety risks. For example, states added or upgraded existing equipment at crossings—such as bells, lights, and gates—from 2019 through 2023. During the same period, states reported that 77 percent of projects had zero crashes at the crossing before and after using program funding. State officials told GAO that RHCP projects help address the overall safety risks at crossings.

Example of a State Using Railway-Highway Crossings Program Funding to Upgrade Signals, Lights, and Gates



Source: Delaware Department of Transportation. | GAO-25-107115

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) introduced several changes to the program in 2021. For example, the act increased the federal cost share from 90 percent to 100 percent and expressly made pedestrian projects related to trespassing eligible for program funding. Stakeholders from six states GAO spoke with said these program changes expanded funding options and clarified funding eligibility. However, state officials said it is too soon to fully assess any safety effects from the program changes.

FHWA provides technical assistance to help states improve crossing safety, but GAO found that FHWA's technical assistance does not describe or provide examples of the types of pedestrian projects related to trespassing that may be eligible for RHCP funding. Department of Transportation officials told GAO that trespassing at grade crossings is a significant concern because pedestrian fatalities and injuries at grade crossings are increasing. FHWA officials told GAO a pedestrian project is one that provides safety for pedestrians, including those who are trespassing, but GAO found that FHWA's technical assistance was not clear about the types of pedestrian projects related to trespassing that are eligible for RHCP funds. Providing additional information about such projects would better position states to reduce pedestrian fatalities and injuries at grade crossings.