

Railroad

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railroads to improve safety. Out of the more than 3,000 counties in the United States, Cowen said Richland County ranks 82nd in railroad trespassing incidents. According to the Federal Railroad Administration, there have been four railroad-related deaths and five injuries in Richland County in the past three years.

One spot with a lot of pedestrian traffic is the crossing at Laurens and Greene streets. On one occasion, Clark said, officers had to arrest people who were jumping from train car to train car. Another time he had to stop a woman who was on her hands and knees crawling under the train car — trying to get back to her dorm after the bars had closed in Five Points.

"That's the one that baffles you," Clarke said. "They are usually in different states of intoxication."

Holland said the company has no choice but to change crews in Columbia. The Federal Railroad Administration requires that crews not work more than 12-hour shifts. Once the crew change is complete, the train either goes down to Augusta, Ga., or back up to Charlotte.

The Norfolk Southern train isn't on a strict schedule either, meaning it could stop in Columbia any time during the day.

"You can't set your watch to it — that's why you need to be on the safe side," he said.

Misty Skipper, a spokeswoman for CSX Transportation, said she is not aware of students crawling under stopped train cars but that the company is committed to the safety of their employees and the communities they operate in.

"We are continuously working to educate the public of the potential dangers of trespassing on railroad property, particularly on or around train equipment," she said. "Students should know that trains can move at any time, and they should never attempt to



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crawl under a train."

The South Carolina Department of Transportation could offer some relief to the situation over the next couple of years. The department plans for a grade separation project on Assembly Street, which would put the train tracks on a bridge and eliminate the crossings.

Dick Jenkins of the transportation department said that depending on the funding, the project could be complete in four years.

The situation is also compounded with the completion of the Greek Village. Clarke said that some houses are very close to the tracks that students have to cross to get to the football stadium.

The situation has prompted Clarke, along with some other USCPD officers, to take an intensive training course offered by

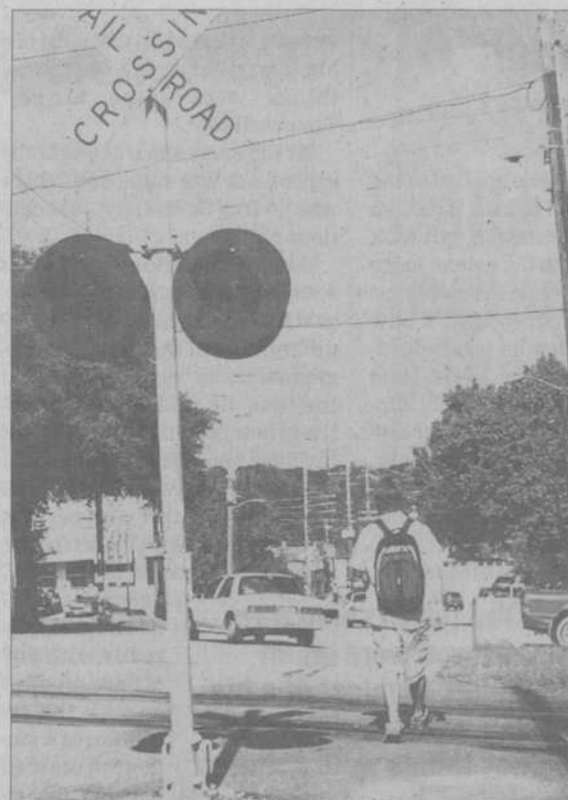
Operation Lifesaver. Cowen said that the ratio of a train to a car is about 4,000 to one, about the same as a car to a 12-ounce soda can.

"If a car can't stand up to a train, a person certainly couldn't either," she said. "If there is a tie at the crossing, you lose."

And while officials are concerned with railroad crossings, there haven't been any student injuries or fatalities — a fact that Clarke says is too good to be true.

"We've got 12,000 to 16,000 folks living down here; the odds are not in our favor," he said.

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecockudesk@hotmail.com



Brent Phillips, a third-year English student, crosses the railroad tracks at the intersection of Greene and Laurens streets while on his way to Five Points.

PHOTO BY MORGAN FORD/THE GAMECOCK

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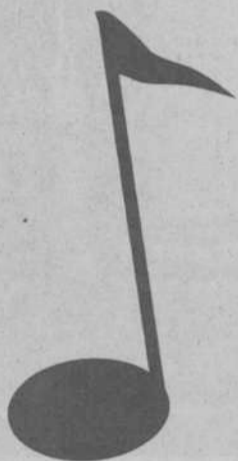
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