

Remarks from **Congresswoman Sylvia R. Garcia (D-TX-29)**

House of Representatives, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
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Thank you, Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and colleagues.

I'm here today to speak for Houston and Texas's 29th Congressional District. My district sits at the crossroads of global commerce, freight rail traffic, and recurring natural disasters.

In Houston, rail lines run through our neighborhoods, past our schools, and across our roads. And the scale of disruption is extraordinary.

Texas-29 leads the nation for blocked railroad crossing incidents every year from 2021 to 2025. And each year, my district recorded at least twice as many blocked crossings as the next closest district in the country (Texas-18). In 2025 alone, we had 3,134 blocked crossing incidents.

In the same five years, five people were killed, and 15 were injured in grade-crossing incidents.

These are thousands of moments where communities in Texas-29 are stranded, streets frozen, traffic backed up, and emergency services delayed.

These are not random numbers. These are children, workers, seniors, neighbors, and families who unfairly pay the price for unsafe rail crossings and unreliable infrastructure.

One of those children was Sergio Rodriguez, a 15-year-old student who was tragically killed on his walk to Milby High School when attempting to cross the tracks to get to school.

In Texas, students who live within 2 miles of school do not receive bus service, and about 40 percent of campuses are located near rail crossings. When we ask kids to walk but fail to secure the crossings they use each day, we have failed at protecting them.

This is why I continue to push for my bill, H.R. 6790, the "Don't Block Our Communities Act," or the D-BLOC Act, to give the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) the authority to investigate repeated blocked crossings and to enforce accountability on freight carriers that block intersections longer than 10 minutes.

This bill is simple, yet significant:

It limits blocked crossings to 10 minutes, except in emergencies.

It requires the Federal Railroad Administration to investigate repeated incidents, and gives it the authority to penalize repeated freight offenders.

My rail priorities also include federal support for grade separations, rail signal modernization, storm-resilient rail infrastructure, emergency access reliability, and rail safety education for communities living beside freight corridors.

That sounds like a lot, but every single one of these priorities will critically improve daily life for my constituents and the greater Houston community.

To begin, grade separations are not optional in Houston — they save lives.

We've made progress locally. Texas created a \$350 million grant program for grade separations, and Houston secured \$10 million for a pedestrian bridge near Milby High School. But local funding cannot solve national freight rail negligence alone.

We need federal leadership to match Houston's urgency.

That brings me to disaster readiness.

Houston is one of the most disaster-prone regions in America.

Our city sits on the Gulf Coast, where hurricanes, tropical storms and flash flooding are annual realities.

Hurricane Harvey caused \$125 billion in damage, historic flooding, and submerged entire neighborhoods.

I urge this Committee to explore mitigation efforts, like the Galveston Bay Barrier System, also known as the "Ike Dike," to help build local infrastructure.

In addition, our infrastructure must work during disasters.

When a hurricane and flooding hit the neighborhoods I represent, families need clear routes, reliable emergency relief access, and uninterrupted aid coming to affected communities, with the help of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

These priorities are ever more pressing as we continue to see the impacts of climate change and the increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.

Instead, we see the current administration slash FEMA's disaster workforce capacity, including surge and CORE staffing that hurricane-prone districts like mine rely on for rapid federal deployment.

Houston doesn't have the privilege to look the other way. We need an efficient and effective FEMA, fully staffed, ready, and funded.

So today, I ask this Committee to support:

- The passage of the D-BLOC Act to empower the Federal Railroad Administration to investigate and issue penalties;
- Expanded federal funding for grade-separation projects and rail safety education;
- Rail signal modernization;
- Reinforced FEMA disaster workforce capacity, especially for hurricane-prone districts;
- And critical investments in disaster-ready infrastructure, including in Texas's Galveston Bay Barrier System.

My district doesn't need or have the time for pity. We need solutions, funding, accountability, and action.

Thank you, I yield back.