People today are very busy and are facing considerable pressures due to the rapid pace of life, personal demands and business. “The distraction factor” is a significant fact of life. Cell phone, iPods, portable computers, reading devices, etc. have become safety hazards as well as conveniences.

The desired outcome of this symposium is to generate recommendations to induce a change in people’s behavior to reduce the number of incidents of train/pedestrian accidents and fatalities. This will require the development of creative and persuasive messages using a variety of communications strategies and vehicles.

The plan should include elements designed to reach young adults and children using social media, i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr. (Some very effective visuals have been produced in Great Britain regarding the hazards associated with young people texting.) The bottom line is how do we induce people to change their behavior and ultimately save them from themselves?

We must ask ourselves - are we in the rut of thinking a certain way? There is a need to break this mold. How do we change the way people view trains, especially higher speed passenger trains? This is a safety question of paramount importance as we move to more passenger trains moving at higher speeds. Does the answer lie in a combination of behavioral science, communication, engineering, education, enforcement or some completely new approach? What steps do we need to take now?

The “spike” in the number of recent incidents is what is driving the desire of The City of Lake Forest and Northwestern University to hold this symposium. The recommendations may be scientific and/or sociological/psychological. Many believe that the solutions may lie in a combination of education, engineering and enforcement. Others believe that the current messages are “tired” and that different methods of communication need to be developed, especially using the new social means of communication.

Northwestern University desires the opportunity to present the current research on railroad incidents and its capabilities to undertake further study. These capabilities range from education and engineering solutions to the social sciences. The breadth of skills and disciplines within the University is what makes Northwestern a leader in this project.

The City of Lake Forest desires to bring considerable attention to this matter and the need to separate the interface of pedestrians and trains as much as possible through engineering solutions. The City also believes that a combination of truly out-of-box thinking to create new communication approaches, education, enforcement, and engineering solutions may be the answer to mitigating these incidents.
The railroad carriers, regulators and industry associations believe that this is a vital matter due to the potential increase in the number and speed of passenger trains as an outcome of the high-speed rail passenger initiatives. In urban areas, commuter trains and light rail vehicles are becoming more commonplace. These modes tend to travel at ground level rather than elevated or in subways. The interface of people and trains is an issue that needs constant attention as people become complacent and the results of complacency can be fatal.

This symposium is held in partnership with Operation Lifesaver, the Federal Railroad Administration and the Association of American Railroads.

The symposium agenda will include introductory speakers setting the stage and framing the discussion, followed by short presentations representing a number of key perspectives. Symposium participants will then break into working groups, to examine issues and solutions within the Education, Engineering and Enforcement arenas. The entire group will reconvene to present the results of the discussion groups and the recommendation for further steps and research undertakings.