

Grandview Avenue

Until the late 1960s if you wanted to drive from the Hill Top to Grandview there was always a possibility there would be a delay getting across the New York Central Railroad tracks (Big Four and Toledo & Ohio Central railroads) between McKinley Avenue and the Scioto River on Grandview Avenue.

A 1922 Letter to the editor of the Columbus Dispatch carefully explains the problems and dangers drivers faced until c. 1970 when finally an overpass was built eliminating the grade crossing. Strangely enough the railroad yard was eliminated about the same time. In 2019 only one track is left to go under that long awaited overpass.



The Grandview Avenue area that is described in the 1922 letter to the Columbus Dispatch.

The T. & O. C. "West Columbus Yard" and roundhouse with the Big Four double track mainline on the north edge of the yard is shown. Grandview Avenue from the bridge over the Scioto River to the intersection with McKinley Avenue was the danger zone. The camera is looking east-northeast.

Photograph from the Columbus Citizen-Journal, Scripps-Howard Newspapers/Grandview Heights Public Library/Photohio.org Collection.

A DANGEROUS CROSSING

Columbus Evening Dispatch

May 16, 1922

To the Editor of the Dispatch

Sir:

This letter is to call attention to a very dangerous railroad crossing in the city of Columbus, in order that some remedial measures may be taken to prevent accident and almost certain loss of life.

A number of things consequent upon the growth of the city and improvements by the railroad companies have combined to bring about the present condition, and the writer is not criticizing any individual, corporations or city official for anything done, or not done, in the past that has contributed to the present state of affairs.

It is one of the penalties of progress. But it is to be hoped that the gravity of the situation may be impressed upon the mind of everyone concerned that some remedy will be applied before, and not after, as is too often the case, some tragedy has occurred.

This crossing is located just south of the Scioto bridge on Grandview avenue where four tracks cross that thoroughfare, and there are five interested parties: the Big Four Railway, the T&OC Railway, the Arrow Sand Company, the city officials, and the general public.



The Grandview Avenue Bridge over the Scioto River. The camera is looking south toward the Big Four crossing and the T. & O. C. Railway crossing and complex. The T. & O. C. roundhouse is on the left. McKinley Avenue is just beyond the roundhouse.

Photo from the Columbus Metropolitan Library Collection, 1967

Let us look at each of these in the order named.

The Big Four recently finished, and is now using a double track at this crossing. They also have a transfer track there, making in all three tracks for them.

None of their crossings is wide enough for the amount of traffic on that avenue, which is very heavy. Practically all the West Side use that route when going as far north as Fifth Avenue, and much heavy trucking goes in both directions.

Until this week the Big Four crossings were planked a distance of twenty feet – this week they extended the planking three feet on each side, making all their crossing now twenty-six feet. This is many feet less than the width of the bridge, not counting the footwalk on each side of the bridge.

It is obvious that the Big Four officials did not realize the gravity of the situation or they would have planked their crossings the full width of the bridge and added a footwalk for pedestrians, instead of adding only six feet.

The T. & O. C. Ry's new roundhouse is located at the corner of McKinley and Grandview avenues, and this crossing is at the extreme west end of their yards, with their main line crossing Grandview avenue.

But this track must be used for much of the switching that is done in the yards, which work necessarily interferes with and blocks public traffic during the afternoon, the very busiest part of the day. Some of this switching is also done while Big Four trains are passing and require the attention of the joint crossing watchman, and it is impossible for him then to look after all the tracks. By the way, this watchman is on duty only part of the day – from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The T. & O. C. roundhouse and other buildings shut out the eastward view of northbound vehicle drivers, which adds much to the hazards of the crossing. Their track is planked nearly as wide as the improved part of the avenue, but the avenue at this point is too narrow.

The third party is the Arrow Sand Company, a new industry located north of the Big Four tracks a few hundred yards east of the crossing, and whose outlet for trucks runs north of and parallel to the Big Four grade, and enters Grandview avenue at the south end of the bridge.

At present this road to and from the Arrow Sand Company's plant is too narrow where it enters the avenue to allow ingoing and outgoing trucks to pass each other. This bottle neck to their road compels the incoming empty trucks when meeting outgoing loaded ones to stop upon and near the crossing, thus blocking all other north and south bound traffic. His is bad enough, but there is a far worse feature that complicates the whole situation and multiplies the hazards.

The Big Four grade along which the sand company's road runs is high enough to shut out all views of everything to the south, and truck drivers are almost up to the avenue before they can see what, if anything, is upon or near the crossing on the south side. This is again made worse because they must climb quite a grade to get up into the avenue, and their custom now is to make a run for the grade, and this keeps the driver's attention focused upon his machine and not upon traffic conditions on the crossing, and he enters the avenue without proper control of his truck, and is plunged into the midst of whatever congestion of traffic may be there.

But the driver cannot well do otherwise – he must climb the grade, and his view is previously obstructed, so he simply takes chances and pushes forward. Sometimes there will be

as many as four trucks meeting at this bottle neck in the Sand Company's road, along with a number of machines going north and south all of which must stop on or near the crossing.



The Big Four and T. & O. C. railroads looking east toward Grandview Avenue. The Big Four tracks are on the left. The T. & O. C. tracks are curving to the right as they enter the West Columbus Yard. The T. & O. C. main line to Toledo is crossing the Big Four mainline.

The roundhouse is on the right, next "BJ" tower, and next the crossing watchman's tower on stilts. The Arrow Sand Company drive and Grandview Avenue's Scioto River bridge are off camera to the left. Grandview Avenue is crossing left to right between the two towers and alongside the roundhouse. The automobile crossing the tracks is on Grandview Avenue.

Photo by BJ Kern, c. 1950

The fourth party is the city of Columbus, whose street grade is altogether too narrow at this crossing.

The fifth party is the public, and while many who use this route take all possible precautions, there are others who complicate matters by refusing to obey the signals of the crossing watchman, and take the wrong side of the avenue, or run by him to the imminent danger not only to themselves, but of everyone else on the crossing.

There is only one permanent solution of the problem – that is, eliminate this grade crossing entirely. But that is an expensive remedy, and while the logic of circumstances will eventually compel this to be done, that in all human probability will be delayed indefinitely.

In the meanwhile the crossing is a menace to every individual who travels this thoroughfare, and to every passenger who crosses it on a railway train, and it is imperative that something be done at once if accidents are to be long avoided.

The Big Four should put in wider and smoother crossings for their three tracks – as wide at least as the bridge, with added walks for pedestrians.

The T. & O. C. should do the same with their main line track.

The Arrow Sand Company should elevate their road to the level of the Big Four tracks for a distance of forty or fifty yards east of the avenue. This would give truck drivers an unobstructed view of the avenue south as well as north, and permit them to enter the same with their machines under full control. They should further improve the situation by widening their road at the avenue entrance so that their empty trucks could pass the loaded ones without blocking the crossing.

The city should widen Grandview avenue from the Big Four tracks to the south side of the T&OC tracks.

These changes are all simple, practical, and the cost is not prohibitive, and every one of them is needed – it takes all to make anything like a safe crossing.

(Signature unreadable)