

Opinions divided about rail safety after teen hit by train at Roxboro-Pierrefonds crossing

High school students who take the train are often reminded not to dash for an oncoming train, but some admit to doing it anyways.



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Royal West students walk to school with a train in the background, at the Montreal West station in Montreal, Sept. 13, 2017. ALLEN MCINNIS / MONTREAL GAZETTE

On the Deux-Montagnes commuter train line that was the scene of a terrible accident (<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/teenage-girl-struck-by-train-in-pierrefonds-roxboro>) Tuesday, opinions are divided between passengers who argue rail safety comes down to a matter of personal responsibility vs. those who say more security measures are needed, particularly in an era of increased technological distraction.

Lovely LaPlante Chevy was on the 5:10 train scheduled to leave from Montreal's central station Tuesday when the announcer told everyone to disembark at 5:15 p.m., without telling them why. It was only later she heard a 17-year-old girl had been struck and seriously injured by a train she never saw coming at the Roxboro-Pierrefonds station. The girl was still listed in critical condition Wednesday.

It's a scene Laplante Chevy, who has been a train commuter for seven years, said she has witnessed many times, with people plugged into their headsets narrowly avoiding trains they cannot hear.

"I'm not saying they have to install barriers at every station, but something like a flashing sign indicating that a train is coming could alert people that aren't listening," she said. "Teens nowadays, with all their technology, are often in their own little bubble. At least if something is flashing you know something is coming by."

Rita Arcand, on the other hand, who has taken the same train for 15 years to get to her home in Laval, said Wednesday she's satisfied with the level of security offered. Ultimately, safety is up to the passenger, she said.

"We have to look and to be careful, she said. "It's the same thing when you're on the road. It's our responsibility."

Passenger Phong Nguyen, on his way to Ville St-Laurent, said: "I'm guessing a barrier at every pedestrian crossing would help, but is it necessary?" "It's like with street lights – you can't have a barrier at every street corner."

The day before the accident occurred, officials at Royal West Academy had spent time during an assembly discussing train safety.

Hundreds of high-school students use the Montreal West commuter-train station, which is adjacent to the busy intersection at Sherbrooke St. W. and Westminster Ave.

“They told us to not cross when the lights are flashing, have one headphone out and to make eye contact with drivers when we cross,” said a Grade 10 student.

Although he knows it can be dangerous to run for a train when the lights are flashing and the safety barrier is down, the student said he has dashed for a train on occasion to avoid missing the last train or getting home late.

“I always look both ways before doing it,” he said.

Montreal police spokesperson Manuel Couture said Wednesday police had concluded their investigation into the incident in which a Réseau de transport métropolitain (RTM) train on the Deux-Montagnes commuter train line hit the teenager who was crossing over the tracks at the station shortly before 5 p.m. They ruled it an accident.

Police said she was running to catch a downtown-bound train and did not see a train heading westward. She was dragged for about 50 feet after falling between the train and the platform and was identified by her mother, who was on the train that struck her.

As is customary with many accidents, police would not divulge the name of the victim, who apparently lives in the area.

The Royal West student said his friend was almost hit by a train last February because he crossed the tracks while wearing headphones and didn't hear the train coming into the Montreal West station.

When classes began this year, administrators and teachers were posted at the intersection to make sure students know the safest path to school.

Another Royal West student said he has, on occasion, run for a train when the lights are flashing.

“If the train is in the distance and I look both ways, I have crossed,” he said.

The student said he has consulted pamphlets distributed by commuter train operators about train safety and uses common sense when using the train.

There's no security barrier at the pedestrian crossing where the teenager was struck, only a sign that says: "For your safety, Stop, Look and Listen before crossing the tracks." Police said the girl was wearing earbuds when she was hit.



(<http://wpmedia.montrealgazette.com/2017/09/train-safety-tips1.jpg?quality=55&strip=all>)

An AMT security guard is seen at a level crossing at the Montreal West train station.

At the request of Royal West Academy, Montreal police have officers posted each morning at Sherbrooke and Westminster to monitor traffic at the complex junction, where there are three tracks with trains travelling in two directions.

Several stations along the Deux-Montagnes line don't have tunnels or bridges linking the tracks, so pedestrians have to walk along the tracks. The pedestrian crossing where the girl was hit is in the middle of the platform, and there are no barriers keeping pedestrians from walking when there is a train on the track. The situation is the same at the Bois-Franc station.

Royal West principal Tony Pita said school officials met with the police, officials from the Montreal West and commuter train staff several years ago to determine the safest route from the train station.

“We give them tips about the train and about crossing the street, which can be equally as dangerous in this area since the Turcot project started,” Pita said.

Some traffic has been detoured from Highway 20 through Montreal West during work on the Turcot Interchange.

If a student is spotted rushing for a train when barrier is down, school staff may meet with the student and the parents so they understand the implications of the behaviour, he said.

At Loyola High School, a security expert with the Réseau de transport métropolitain is coming to speak about train safety on Friday, said vice-principal Vincent Fulvio. He said students are disciplined if they are caught violating train safety rules.

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John Meagher and René Bruemmer of the Montreal Gazette contributed to this report.