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## Train control towers set to go up along rail lines

Thousands going up nationwide, 11 in Hall; structures stand 60 feet high

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The new year likely will see a series of train towers going up not only in Hall County, but across the state and nation.

The positive train control towers are a federal mandate via the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008. The 11 towers going up in Hall County are among a total of 430 needed in Georgia, and thousands across the country.

Information provided by the Federal Communications Commission describes positive train control as a “system designed to prevent train-to-train collisions, derailments caused by excessive speeds, unauthorized train movements in work zones and the movement of trains through switches left in the wrong position.”

This positive train control tower is located in Greene County, Ohio. It is representative of the towers that will be installed in Hall County.  
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Also, the National Transportation Safety Board has named this system as one of its “most-wanted initiatives.”

“They have a pretty low profile,” explained Norfolk Southern spokesman Rick Harris. “They are about 8 inches square at the bottom part, (and) about halfway up they actually pivot for maintenance purposes so nobody ever has to climb to the top of these towers to do maintenance.”

The towers stand at 60 feet tall, and are designed to have an antenna attached to the top to transmit and receive railroad signals to trains.

Resembling flagpoles, the towers will be placed on railroad right-of-way property in locations running up the railway basically from Flowery Branch through Oakwood and Gainesville, ending in Lula. The exact locations, according to a public notice in the Dec. 11 issue of The Times, are:

- Near the intersection of McEver Road and Lanier Islands Parkway;
- Approximately ¼ mile west from the end of Church Street in Flowery Branch;
- Approximately ¼ mile southwest of the railroad and the HF Reed Industrial Park Connector overpass;
- Around 450 feet northeast of the Main Street and railroad intersection in Oakwood;
- Approximately ¼ mile northeast of the Tumbling Circle and railroad intersection in Gainesville;
- Around 100 feet east of the railroad and Queen City Parkway overpass in Gainesville;
- Around 2/5 mile north of the Pine Valley and White Sulphur roads intersection;
- Approximately 750 feet northeast of the White Sulphur and Cagle roads intersection;
- Approximately 1.25 miles west of the Cagle Road and Ga. 23 intersection;
- Around 100 feet west of the railroad and Main Street overpass in Lula.

The railroad companies, including Norfolk Southern, are footing the bill to not only install these towers but develop the technology.

“The cost of this congressionally mandated program for the rail industry (is) more than \$10 billion before it’s all said and done,” Harris said. “Norfolk Southern has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on the development and deployment of this technology.”

The rail industry has requested an extension to the Dec. 31, 2015, deadline.

“The deadline is impossible to attain because of the complexity and the enormity of the installation,” Harris said. “There are a lot of technical and nontechnical challenges (that) make full deployment by 2015 very challenging. This has all been outlined in an industry report about progress on the implementation.

“We’re optimistic and hopeful that we can achieve the extension of the deadline, but not having that right now, we are working as hard as we can toward implementation.”

The public notice provides contact information for anyone who wants to provide comments on the potential effects of the project on historic properties; that person is Angela Kappen with Golder Associates, N27 W23960 Paul Road, Ste. 210, Pewaukee, WI 53072. Comments must be received by Jan 10.

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