

Opening Statement

Good morning and welcome to the Boardroom of the National Transportation Safety Board.

I am Robert Sumwalt, and I'm honored to serve as the Chairman of the NTSB. Joining me today are my colleagues on the Board, Member Christopher Hart, Member Earl Weener, and Member Bella Dinh-Zarr.

Today, we meet in open session, as required by the Government in the Sunshine Act, to consider the October 23, 2016 crash of a motorcoach into the rear of a stopped tractor trailer on Interstate 10, outside Palm Springs, California.

The crash took the lives of the bus driver and 12 of his passengers. The 30 remaining bus passengers sustained injuries, as did the truck driver.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Board and the entire NTSB staff, I would like to offer our sincerest condolences to the families and friends of those who died in this crash. To those who were injured, we hope you are on the way to the fullest possible recovery.

Today's staff presentations will touch on several issues on the NTSB's Most Wanted List of transportation safety

improvements, and I want to highlight two of them: Requiring medical fitness for duty and reducing fatigue-related accidents.

At the NTSB, we see these issues in crash after crash, and we're tired of commercial drivers being tired. In large part, the FMCSA can stop it, and they know they can stop it.

In this crash, not one but two commercial vehicle drivers – **people who drive for a living** – were unable to respond appropriately to cues that other motorists did act on.

Commercial motor carriers and their professional drivers bear a special responsibility, reflected in a safety net of rules and oversight protecting them and other road users.

But this safety net has holes in it, such as the unmet need to screen drivers for obstructive sleep apnea, or OSA. Some drivers with OSA **will** fall asleep at the wheel. It's predictable, it's preventable, and it's taking lives. The truck driver in this crash had multiple OSA risk factors.

In 2009, the NTSB recommended that the FMCSA develop guidance to screen for sleep apnea, and require that drivers be screened and, if necessary, treated.

The FMCSA has developed OSA screening guidance. But they don't publicize or disseminate their guidance, and it's hard for medical examiners to find.

Last year, the FMCSA and the Federal Railroad Administration began the rulemaking process to support OSA screening. But this past summer, they stopped the initiative cold.

The result is that any driver can still fall through this hole in the safety net. The FMCSA can fix it, they know how to fix it, and they should fix it.

This is far from the only issue involved in the crash that we will discuss today. Audits of new commercial transportation companies, FMCSA safety oversight of motor carriers, and oversight by those carriers of their drivers are also aspects of the safety net. So is motorcoach design.

And when advances in technology can improve vehicle safety or safety oversight, it's critical for commercial carriers to incorporate them.

One more safety issue we'll discuss is the management of traffic breaks, which played a key role in this crash.

We understand that most of the time, the safety net works, and when it works, it saves lives. This is not an abstract idea. It's real protection.

Safety professionals, whether in transportation companies or at any level of government, often can only see the lives that they have saved in the form of statistics.

But we **can** see, in very human terms, the tragic results when the system fails. That October morning on I-10 outside of Palm Springs, the system failed, and we had one of the most deadly highway crashes that we've seen in recent times.

Federal and state regulators, commercial motor carriers, and professional drivers can do better. Given the stakes, they must do better.

Now Managing Director Dennis Jones, if you would kindly introduce the staff.

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