



NTSB 2015 MOST WANTED TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

MAKE MASS TRANSIT SAFER

What is the issue?

Every day, millions of people take some form of mass transit to get to or from shopping, work, classes, or other destinations. According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) the role of mass transit is growing – faster than population growth and faster than highway travel. Mass-transit systems must constantly be monitored and improved to maintain and enhance safety, to catch small problems before they become big ones, and to provide extra layers of protection against disasters. There are just too many opportunities for the worst to happen.

Big metropolitan areas like Seattle, Washington, D.C. and New York City are especially dependent on mass transit. And mass transit accidents, especially those occurring on rails and subways, often have catastrophic consequences.

In June 2009, two Washington Area Metropolitan Transit Authority Metrorail trains collided, killing 9 people and injuring 52. In a ten-month period from May 2013 to March 2014, Metro-North Railroad was involved in five accidents in New York and Connecticut that killed six people and injured 126.

But mass transit accidents and incidents are not limited to the railways. For example, the January 2013 collision of the *Seastreak Wall Street* resulted in 80 injuries. It was the third significant ferry accident to occur in the New York Harbor area in the last 10 years.



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What can be done?

Mass transit comprises light rail, commuter rail, subways, ferries, streetcars, buses and trolley buses. Although each system has unique equipment, operating environments, and challenges, all can benefit from strengthening their organizational safety cultures. Deploying advanced technologies will also make mass transit safer.

Mass transit agencies should work to identify, define, prioritize, and mitigate the safety risks that threaten their operations and, therefore, threaten public safety. It is important to ensure efficient and effective communications and coordination among all stakeholders (for example, top and middle management, line supervisors, workers, unions, and support contractors) who are responsible for the design, maintenance, operation, and safety of the system.

Moreover, it is important to ensure that system safety trends are identified accurately and that improvements are implemented rapidly with appropriate consideration given to the affected system elements (training, maintenance/inspection schedules).

Mass transit agencies also need to continually improve their understanding of the role of human error in accidents and near-accident scenarios. The improved knowledge should be put to work by refining and strengthening operational policies, practices, and procedures to manage and mitigate the safety risks. Some known successful management practices include fatigue management systems and confidential near miss reporting systems.

For example, the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) has a no-nonsense answer to one big source of operator distraction. MARTA has a zero-tolerance policy for operator use of personal electronic devices. And MARTA means business: a leading cause for termination of MARTA's operators is operator distraction.

But other technologies can save lives, and mass transit agencies should not overlook them. Examples include collision warning systems for buses, positive train control for rail and subway systems, and fire detection and suppression systems for vessels. Video and data recorders can assist both in monitoring employee compliance with regulations and policies improving operational efficiencies and investigating incidents and accidents. Organizations will need to ensure that these technologies are properly and safely integrated.



Critical changes needed to reduce transportation accidents and save lives



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The NTSB's Most Wanted List highlights safety issues identified from the NTSB's accident investigations to increase awareness about the issues and recommended safety solutions.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation - railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the Federal Government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

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