

FINAL REPORT

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS



Under the provisions of the Rail Passenger Disaster Family Assistance Act of 2008

November 2010

In compliance with the Rail Passenger Disaster Family Assistance Act of 2008, the undersigned present the report of the Task Force.

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Task Force Recommendations

1. Develop a model plan to assist rail passenger carriers in responding to passenger rail accidents

1.1 The Task Force recommends that the NTSB “Federal Family Assistance Plan for Aviation Disasters (December 2008)” be used as the starting point for the development of the Rail Passenger Disaster model plan. The Task Force has reviewed a draft of the “Federal Family Assistance Plan for Rail Passenger Disasters” and has adopted this as the model plan.

Under the Rail Passenger Disaster Family Assistance Act of 2008, the NTSB has the responsibility to assist family members and coordinate public and private responsibilities in the wake of rail passenger disasters. The Board has similar responsibilities for major aviation accidents (under the Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act of 1996) and developed the NTSB Federal Family Assistance Plan for Aviation Disasters to serve as the model plan in the provision of family assistance in such accidents. Aspects of this plan are also used in the daily responsibilities of the NTSB Transportation Disaster Assistance Division (TDA) to assist family members in all modes of transportation. Relying on 17 years of transportation accident response experience, the plan focuses on meeting the four major areas of concern for family members: notification about the accident, short and long-term information sharing, victim identification, and management of personal effects. From the NTSB TDA experience, these four areas of concern are consistent across transportation modes. The plan also details the responsibilities for the air carrier, NTSB, American Red Cross, Department of State, and other federal agency partners. Because this plan has worked effectively in major accidents in all modes of transportation, it is well suited to serve as the basis of the rail passenger disaster model plan, with appropriate modifications.

The Task Force recognizes that the rail passenger business model will often address the issue of passenger list/manifest somewhat differently than the aviation model. However, NTSB experience in rail accidents, motorcoach accidents, and other “open population” transportation accident underscores the need for an effective process for accounting for those killed, injured and otherwise involved in these accidents, and to begin the process of family assistance services.

A copy of the plan is attached to end of this report.

2. Recommendations on methods to improve the timeliness of the notification provided by passenger rail carriers to the families of passengers involved in a passenger rail accident.

2.1 The Task Force believes that this Recommendation and Recommendation 4 both focus on the issue of passenger accountability. A robust system for accounting for passengers boarding and departing trains will lead directly to benefits in both notification and reporting of passenger counts to emergency services personnel.

Notification is the process by which family members are informed that a relative was a passenger aboard a train involved in an accident. Also known as “initial” notification, it is distinct from death notification which is usually handled by local or state medical examiners, coroners, or law enforcement agencies. In the early phases of an accident response, it may not be known who is alive or dead. Thus, the notification process informs family members of the accident and does not report any condition of the passenger in question. Under the Rail Passenger Disaster Family Assistance Act, initial notification is the responsibility of the rail passenger carrier.

Notification requires that a passenger manifest be compiled. Once compiled, notification then involves two actions:

- The rail passenger carrier contacts family members for which it has contact information as a result of ticket purchase procedures, rewards programs, or other information sources.
- The establishment of a toll-free phone number for family members to call to confirm if their loved one was listed on the manifest of the accident train. The name provided by the caller is compared to names on the manifest. For reserved trains, ticket purchase information can be used to generate a manifest. For unreserved trains (i.e. the passenger is not required to purchase a ticket in advance), a manifest is compiled with reservation system data, tickets obtained from the conductor’s ticket pouch, and information collected on-scene by first responders.

Both of these procedures are contingent on the timeliness of compiling a passenger manifest. The ability to account for passengers on a particular train is simpler for reserved trains and more complex in unreserved trains. However, current ticketing procedures and the nature of passenger movements in the rail passenger system cannot guarantee a 100% accurate manifest.

2.2 The Task Force recommends that rail passenger carriers implement a voluntary system to allow ticket purchasers to provide emergency contact information and to ensure the information is protected.

A voluntary system to collect emergency contact information during the reservation and ticketing process would help in the timely notification to family members of passengers who have provided this information. Emergency contact information would link to the train reservation so that a manifest system would show those passengers having emergency contact information available. To protect passenger privacy, the emergency contact information would only be accessible following an accident, and then only for the accident train.

2.3 The Task Force recommends current rail passenger carriers and future high-speed rail passenger carriers incorporate technology-based passenger accounting systems (such as smart card systems) that can collect, maintain and provide passenger information (with appropriate privacy guidelines) and ensure timely notification and access to passenger counts for emergency responders.

Following a rail passenger accident investigation in 2002, the NTSB issued a safety recommendation to Amtrak, FRA, and TSA to develop and implement an accurate passenger and crew accountability system (NTSB Safety Recommendations R-03-10, R-03-12, and R-03-13

respectively). As a result of these recommendations, the FRA contracted with the John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center to examine Amtrak's passenger accounting system, the costs of improving it, and the potential safety and business benefits of an improved system. The 2005 report ("Evaluation of Options for Improving Amtrak's Passenger Accountability System") details the costs, benefits, and disadvantages of various alternatives for Amtrak to upgrade its ticketing system to meet the NTSB recommendation including: automated onboard ticket collection system; automated onboard ticket collection system with improved information transfer; electronic tickets with platform gate readers and car door readers; electronic tickets with car door readers. The report presents two solutions (page 91):

- *As part of any effort to upgrade its passenger accounting systems, Amtrak could initiate a more detailed study of the potential costs and benefits of implementing a passenger accountability system based on electronic tickets with car door readers, in conjunction with implementation of planned programs of fleet replacement, station modernization, and support system development.*
- *Amtrak should define its end-state reservation, ticketing, and passenger accountability systems, and then incorporate the associated requirements for an improved passenger accountability system into its planned programs of fleet replacement, station modernization, and support system development, even if they do not meet all aspects of the NTSB recommendation.*

The report discusses the implementation of "smartcard" systems in various transit and rail systems. Nearly 200 rail passenger and transit systems in 48 countries are currently using smartcard technology to handle system access, payment, and other customer services. These include the Japanese rail system (Suica), the Hong Kong rail system (Octopus Card), the London transit system (Oyster Card). Within the United States, 17 transit systems use smart cards, including the MBTA (CharlieCard) and Seattle/King County (ORCA card).

Smart card systems can protect customer privacy while allowing for collection of information that could be used in the development of a passenger list. Smart cards technology can track when a passenger enter and depart a station or train. When purchasing a card in some of these systems, customers must show picture identification, thus adding a layer of security and the ability to track the smartcard back to the purchaser. Other systems allow online registration to allow online "recharging" linked to a credit card and for additional services and features. Registration requires customers to provide their contact information (name, phone, email); an added feature could inclusion of contact information for others in case of an emergency.

Combined with kiosks on rail stations/platforms or at the entrance doors to railcars that "reads" a smartcard, the system should be able to quickly account for passengers boarding and disembarking as each event occurs. Following an accident or other event, a preliminary passenger list (or at the very least an accurate count of the number of passengers aboard) would be accessible to emergency services personnel at the site of the accident.

Smartcard systems may also address another important need—national security. A smartcard system could require passengers to present photo identification in order to purchase the

smartcard. At unmanned stations, passengers would be required scan a government-issued identification during the purchase process.

3. Recommendations on methods to ensure that the families of passengers involved in a passenger rail accident who are not citizens of the United States receive appropriate assistance

3.1 The Task Force recommends that the responsibilities for the US Department of State currently listed in the Federal Family Assistance Plan for Rail Passenger Disasters serve as the guidelines for assistance to passengers who are not US citizens.

The adopted Federal Family Assistance Plan for Rail Passenger Disasters incorporates nearly all of the proven methods of the NTSB Federal Family Assistance Plan for Aviation Disasters. Under both plans, the US Department of State (DOS) is the primary federal partner in providing linkage to foreign governments and assisting family members of non-US citizens. The NTSB and the DOS have an existing Memorandum of Understanding that details the support DOS will provide for major aviation accidents. As outlined in the rail plan, DOS responsibilities include the following:

1. Assign a representative to the Joint Family Support Operations Center to coordinate DOS issues with other members of the operations center staff.
2. Provide official notification to foreign governments of citizens involved in the accident. Such notifications will take place after obtaining necessary information on foreign passengers from the passenger rail carrier.
3. Assist the passenger rail carrier in notifying US citizens who may reside or are traveling outside the United States that a member of their family has been involved in a rail passenger accident.
4. Provide interpretation/translation services (via DOS staff or a contracted provider) to facilitate communications with the victim's family and all interested parties. For family briefings held at the FAC or similar location or activity, simultaneous interpretation/translation services in multiple languages may be required.
5. Provide logistical and communications support to the extent practicable, in establishing contact with foreign authorities and individuals abroad to aid the passenger rail carrier and federal support staff in fulfilling their duties under the laws referenced above.
6. Assist families of foreign victims with entry into the United States and with the extension or granting of visas to eligible applicants.
7. Coordinate with the necessary foreign Mission(s) to facilitate necessary consulate and customs services for the return of remains and personal effects into the country of destination.
8. Coordinate with the necessary foreign Mission(s) to assist the medical examiner in acquiring the necessary information to facilitate the identification of foreign victims and to complete death certificates. Working with foreign consulates, assist in obtaining dental and medical records and DNA reference samples from foreign families.

- 4. Recommendations on methods to ensure that emergency services personnel have as immediate and accurate a count of the number of passengers onboard the train as possible.**

4.1 The Task Force believes the recommendations made under Recommendation 2 serve to meet this requirement.

Additional Information Rail Passenger Disaster Task Force

Task Force Meetings Held

December 14, 2009: NTSB Conference Center, Washington, DC

February 17, 2010: NTSB Conference Center, Washington, DC

Acknowledgements

Mark Kenny

Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

Mat Lipscomb

Family member, collision of Amtrak Train 59 and semitrailer, Bourbonnais, Illinois, March 15, 1999

Gary Maslanka

Director, Railroad Division, Transport Workers Union of America

Jonathan Schwartz

Survivor, collision of Amtrak train 94 and Conrail locomotives, Chase, Maryland, January 4, 1988.

References

National Transportation Safety Board, Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance,
Federal Family Assistance Plan for Aviation Disasters (December 2008)

<http://www.nts.gov/Publictn/2008/Federal-Family-Plan-Aviation-Disasters-rev-12-2008.pdf>

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Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, John A.
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NTSB Safety Recommendations R-03-10, R-03-12, and R-03-13 and subsequent
correspondence.

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