



NTSB 2017-2018 MOST WANTED LIST OF TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Improve Rail Transit Safety Oversight



RAIL

MWL
MOST WANTED LIST



It is critically important that rail transit systems be constantly monitored and improved to maintain and enhance safety.

What is the issue?

Every day, millions of people commute by rail to or from work, home, or other destinations. Yet, safety oversight of rail transit is unreliable and inconsistent in some cases, increasing the risk of an accident. Rail transit accidents continue to cause injuries and deaths. For example, we saw the devastating results of two Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) accidents in recent years. On March 24, 2014, CTA train No. 141 collided with the bumping post near the end of the center pocket track at O'Hare Station. The lead car rode over the bumping post and went up an escalator at the end of the track. Thirty-three injured passengers and the train operator were taken to the hospital. On September 30, 2013, a set of unoccupied CTA passenger cars collided with CTA passenger train No. 10 at the Harlem-Congress passenger station in Forest Park, Illinois, at about 24 miles per hour. As in the O'Hare accident, 33 passengers and the train operator were taken to local hospitals and later released.

We have also investigated a number of relevant Washington Area Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA) Metrorail accidents. For example, on June 22, 2009, in Washington, DC, two WMATA Metrorail trains collided near the Fort Totten station, killing nine people and injuring 52. In another WMATA accident, on January 12, 2015, a Metrorail train stopped after encountering heavy smoke originating from electrical arcing near the third rail south of the L'Enfant Plaza Station in Washington, DC. Ninety-two people were injured in the accident and one passenger died. Following the L'Enfant Plaza accident, we urgently recommended that WMATA Metrorail oversight be moved from the Tri-State Oversight Committee (TOC) to direct federal oversight under the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). However, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act placed this issue under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The FTA relies on the TOC, whereas the FRA directly oversees safety and has the power to inspect and enforce federal rules. In several of its audits of WMATA, the FTA acknowledged (before the L'Enfant Plaza investigation) that the TOC was not capable of exercising oversight over WMATA's Metrorail system, thereby compromising safety. In 2013, the FTA notified the TOC that it did not meet the requirements of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, and it did not receive certification as a state safety oversight agency (SSOA).



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What can be done?

According to the American Public Transportation Association, mass transit is growing faster than the population and faster than highway travel. Metropolitan areas such as Washington, DC; New York City; and Chicago are especially dependent on rail transit. That's why it is critically important that rail transit systems be constantly monitored and improved to maintain and enhance safety, to catch and correct the small problems before they become big ones, and to provide extra layers of protection against disasters.

Rail transit must be subject to competent oversight bodies that have standards and rules (and the power to enforce those rules). Although each rail transit system has unique equipment, operating environments, and challenges, all need strong safety oversight.

Creating and enforcing safety standards and accountability in rail safety oversight will compel transit agencies to address safety issues and increase system maintenance. These standards and regulations will help increase rail transit agencies' organizational safety culture.

The Metrorail smoke event at L'Enfant Plaza put a national spotlight on one SSOA's inability to oversee transit safety, and on the fact that corrective action was not taken in time, despite warnings from the FTA. It also brought into question the strength of rail transit oversight nationwide.

Rail transit riders deserve strong safety oversight, whether they are in Washington, DC; Chicago; San Francisco; New York; Atlanta; or any of the dozens of other American cities with rail transit systems. ■



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

The NTSB 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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Related Accidents*

Date	Location	Accident ID
June 22, 2009	Washington, DC	DCA09MR007
September 30, 2013	Forest Park, IL	DCA13FR014
March 24, 2014	Chicago, IL	DCA14FR007
January 12, 2015	Washington, DC	DCA15FR004

*For detailed accident reports visit www.nts.gov

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**Critical changes
needed to reduce
transportation
accidents and
save lives.**

