



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: August 28, 1997

In Reply Refer To: R-97-43

Honorable Douglas Duncan
County Executive
Montgomery County
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, Maryland 20850

About 5:39 p.m. on February 16, 1996, Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC) train 286 collided with National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) passenger train 29 near Silver Spring, Maryland. En route from Brunswick, Maryland, to Union Station in Washington, DC, MARC train 286 was traveling under CSX Transportation Inc. (CSXT) operation and control on CSXT tracks. MARC train 286 passed an APPROACH signal before making a station stop at Kensington, Maryland; proceeded as if the signal had been CLEAR; and, then, could not stop for the STOP signal at Georgetown Junction, where it collided with Amtrak train 29. All 3 CSXT operating crewmembers and 8 of the 20 passengers on MARC train 286 were killed in the derailment and subsequent fire. Eleven passengers on MARC train 286 and 15 of the 182 crewmembers and passengers on Amtrak train 29 were injured.¹

The CSXT, as well as a local resident, contacted the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services (MCFRS) 911 dispatcher about the collision at 5:41 p.m. Within 1 minute, the first fire engine company was notified, and it arrived on scene within 5 minutes of notification. All MCFRS commands had been established by 6:15 p.m. The National Transportation Safety Board concluded that even though the MCFRS personnel responded promptly to the emergency, they could do nothing to save any of the accident victims because passenger coach cab control car 7752 was already completely engulfed in flames when the first firefighter arrived on scene. The Safety Board investigation did identify problems with the MCFRS preparedness for railroad passenger train accidents; the CSXT, the Maryland Mass Transit Administration (MTA)/MARC, and the MCFRS contingency planning; and the interaction between these three agencies.

The MCFRS activated the fire annex section of the Montgomery County Emergency Management Agency (MCEMA) disaster plan; however, the fire annex section did not provide for interchange with the CSXT or MARC, which was evident when interactions were not consistently maintained between the

¹For more detailed information, read Railroad Accident Report--*Collision and Derailment of Maryland Rail Commuter MARC Train 286 and National Railroad Passenger Corporation Amtrak Train 29, near Silver Spring, Maryland, on February 16, 1996* (NTSB/RAR-97/02).

supervisors or dispatchers or both of the MCFRS, the CSXT, and MARC. The MCFRS personnel were not receptive to the CSXT offers for assistance. The fire annex section did not provide for railroad representatives to respond to strategic locations to contribute their expertise and assistance.

The CSXT attempted to assist in evacuating passengers by moving trains closer to the accident site and only complicated the emergency response efforts. Although this attempt was consistent with the CSXT practice for controlling train movements and providing assistance, the MCFRS was not familiar with railroad operations because no procedures had been coordinated between the CSXT and the MCFRS. As a result, the accident scene was evacuated about 6:30 p.m. by emergency responders who feared that another train was entering the accident site. The MCEMA disaster plan contained no procedures for responding to railroad passenger train accidents. The Safety Board concluded that the MCEMA disaster plan lacked procedures for responding to railroad passenger train accidents, such as simulating the accident response with coordinated management, which could have emphasized the importance of being familiar with passenger cars and of coordinating activities between the MCFRS, the MTA/MARC, and the CSXT. To be familiar with the means of emergency egress from a passenger train and to coordinate activities with the railroads are extremely essential procedures needed for emergency response. Therefore, the Safety Board believes that the MCEMA should develop comprehensive procedures for responding to railroad passenger train accidents and include these procedures in its disaster plan.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Montgomery County Emergency Management Agency:

Develop comprehensive procedures for responding to railroad passenger train accidents and include these procedures in your disaster plan. (R-97-43)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations R-97-9 through -21 to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA); R-97-22 through -25 to the Federal Transit Administration; R-97-26 through -31 to the CSXT; R-97-32 through -35 to the MTA; R-97-36 to the U.S. Department of Transportation; R-97-37 to the Federal Emergency Management Agency; R-97-38 to the Governor and the General Assembly of Maryland; R-97-39 through -42 to the Association of American Railroads; R-97-44 to the Baltimore County Emergency Management Agency, the Baltimore City Emergency Management Agency, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Jefferson County Commissioners, and the Berkeley County Commissioners; and R-97-45 to the American Short Line Railroad Association, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the United Transportation Union, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and the American Public Transit Association. The Safety Board also reiterated Safety Recommendations R-87-16, R-92-10, and R-93-12 to the FRA; R-92-16 to the General Electric Company; and R-92-17 to the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation R-97-43 in your reply. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6430.

Chairman HALL, Vice Chairman FRANCIS, and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in this recommendation.

By: 
Jim Hall
Chairman