

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: February 11, 1981

Forwarded to:

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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-81-29

On July 29, 1980, the National Transportation Safety Board concluded a 2-day national hearing on rail rapid transit safety. The hearing was prompted by an increasing concern over safety oversight responsibility for rail rapid transit systems, particularly fire safety issues and emergency evacuation of rail rapid transit passengers from underground or underwater tunnel locations. Twenty-five witnesses from transit industry management and labor, including the International Transport Workers Union of America (TWU), local fire departments, national fire safety organizations, and State and Federal agencies testified at the hearing. TWU's participation in this public hearing was of invaluable assistance to the Safety Board in our examination of rail rapid transit safety. 1/

The safety problems identified as a result of this hearing and other Safety Board investigatory work indicate that the involvement of TWU is appropriate to address minimum training and equipment needs for rail rapid transit employees. During peak hours, a single rail rapid transit train can carry a "crushload" of 1,500 to 2,000 passengers. Under such conditions, the loss of life in an accident, fire, or other emergency could well be catastrophic. That such an accident with enormous risk to passengers, fire and emergency service personnel, and transit employees can occur has been amply demonstrated by the train fire in the Transbay Tube of the Bay Area Rapid Transit District on January 17, 1979; 2/ the train fire in a tunnel and station of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority on September 6, 1979; and the three separate train fires in the tunnels of the New York City Transit Authority on June 25, 1980, and December 10 and 11, 1980.

1/ For more detailed information read, "Safety Effectiveness Evaluation of Rail Rapid Transit Safety" (NTSB-SEE-81-1).

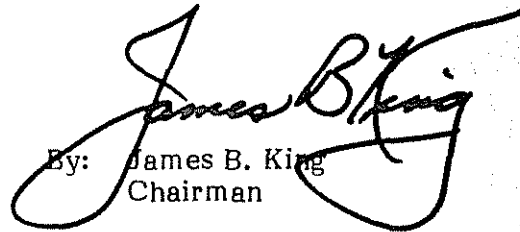
2/ For more detailed information, read "Railroad Accident Report--Bay Area Rapid Transit District Fire on Train No. 117 and Evacuation of Passengers While in the Transbay Tube, San Francisco, California, January 17, 1979" (NTSB-RAR-79-5).

The Safety Board's evaluation of rail rapid transit safety, coupled with testimony received at the hearing, revealed that fire and emergency service personnel, union management, and national fire service organizations believe that training and equipment needs of rail rapid transit systems must be improved. The Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) is the Federal agency accountable for transit safety. Therefore, the Safety Board has recommended that UMTA determine the minimum training and safety equipment needs of these systems. We believe that the TWU's dedication to the safety of its rail rapid transit employees and its expertise based on input from its local unions would be of assistance to UMTA in the determination of training and equipment requirements for rail rapid transit employees. Additionally, testimony received at the hearing indicated that transit employees did not receive enough hands-on training with emergency equipment. The Safety Board believes that the quality and timeliness of transit employee training are a major safety concern.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the International Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO:

Offer to assist and cooperate with the Urban Mass Transportation Administration in its determination of minimum training and equipment needs to improve the ability of rail rapid transit employees to respond to emergencies (including smoke and/or fire conditions) in transit environments. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-81-29)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation. GOLDMAN, Member, dissented in this recommendation.

  
By: James B. King  
Chairman