

R-345H

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: February 11, 1981

Forwarded to:

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Executive Vice President  
American Public Transit Association  
1100 17th Street, N.W.  
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-81-31

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 American Public Transit Association (APTA), local fire departments, national fire safety organizations, and State and Federal agencies testified at the hearing. 1/

The safety problems identified as a result of this hearing and other Safety Board investigatory work warrant the immediate attention of APTA. 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 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).

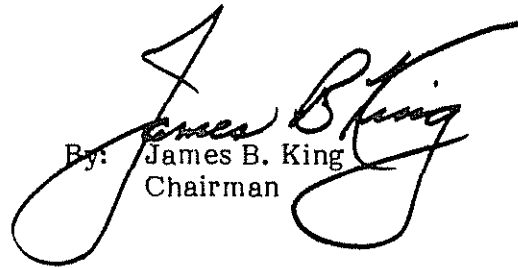
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The Safety Board's evaluation of rail rapid transit safety revealed that a number of fire and emergency service organizations would be willing to join with APTA in efforts to eliminate or minimize fire safety problems. The record of the hearing indicated that APTA had not encouraged the participation of fire and emergency service, or other safety organizations, in its safety meetings and other safety activities. The Safety Board believes that APTA should fully involve such organizations in its safety activities.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the American Public Transit Association:

Encourage and facilitate participation by organizations having related safety interests in safety meetings and other safety activities of the Association. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-81-31)

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

  
By: James B. King  
Chairman