



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Transit
Administration**

Administrator

400 Seventh St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

MAY 8 2007

Subject: Track Worker Protection and Maintenance Oversight

Dear Colleague:

Over the last 18 months, 11 track workers have lost their lives in accidents that occurred on the nation's heavy rail and commuter rail systems. More than a dozen track workers have been seriously injured. While rail transit remains among the safest modes of transportation, I am concerned by the escalating number of incidents involving our transit employees nationwide.

Between October 2005 and April 2007, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) data show a three-fold increase in the number of rail transit worker fatalities and a significant increase in injuries. While the most serious accidents have occurred at a handful of agencies, we are all vulnerable when our industry's employees are placed at risk.

As a show of solidarity with the agencies that have experienced these accidents, I urge the Executive Directors and General Managers at each of our heavy rail and commuter rail agencies to immediately request a briefing regarding what their agencies are doing to protect workers. Critical issues involved in recent accidents include failure to notify dispatchers and operators of the location of work crews, failure to establish adequate work site clearance plans, failure to conduct adequate on-site track safety job briefings, failure of operators to follow speed restrictions, and failure of work crew leaders to remain at the site.

I also urge our State Safety Oversight Program Managers to contact the rail transit agencies in their jurisdictions to review current track worker protection programs. Only through strong management commitment and vigilant oversight can we ensure the protection of our employees, who put their lives on the line to keep our systems safe and secure.

FTA Initiatives

In the coming months, FTA will be implementing new initiatives to address track worker protection and maintenance oversight issues. These initiatives focus on three areas:

- Technical Assistance
- Training & Outreach
- Research

Technical Assistance

In late 2006, FTA identified its "Top 10 Safety Action Priorities" as part of its *Rail Transit Safety Action Plan*. FTA also conducted a joint study with FRA on commuter rail safety issues. Both of these documents are available on FTA's website at: <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/Publications/order/default.asp#Safety>). Two of FTA's Top 10 Safety Action Priorities directly relate to track worker protection and the enhanced oversight of maintenance activities. FTA will soon be updating its safety and security website to provide information, guidance, standards, templates, and recommended practices for addressing each of these Top 10 Priorities.

In the interim, specifically for track inspection and track worker protection issues, FTA urges interested parties to review the following:

American Public Transportation Association (APTA)

<http://www.aptastandards.com/PublishedStandards/Rail/tabid/84/Default.aspx>

- APTA Rail Transit Standard for Work Zone Safety, RT-S-OP- 004-03
- APTA Rail Transit Standard for Transit Track Inspection and Maintenance, RTS-FS-002-02
- APTA Recommended Practice Recommended Practice for Wayside AC Signal Power System Inspection and Testing, APTA-RT-RP-SC-001-02
- APTA Recommended Practice for Wayside DC Signal Power System Inspection and Testing, APTA-RT-RP-SC-002-02

American Railway Engineering and Maintenance of Way Association (AREMA)

<http://www.arema.org/eseries/scriptcontent/index.cfm>

- Manual for Railway Engineering, including Volume 1 Track, Chapter 5 and Volume 3, Infrastructure and Passenger, Chapter 12, Rail Transit.

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_03/49cfr213_03.html

- 49 CFR 213, Track Safety Standards

http://www.fra.dot.gov/downloads/Safety/life_tips.pdf

- Roadway Worker Protection Life Tips

Training & Outreach

To support the needs of industry, FTA will be conducting workshops and training specifically aimed at identifying and resolving the underlying causes that contribute to these accidents.

- Maintenance Oversight Workshops: Many of our heavy rail transit agencies are struggling with looming budget deficits, increasing demands for revenue service, and extensive capital investment programs to upgrade aging infrastructure. In managing these challenging issues, there are a number of inter-related and complex factors that limit:
 - The resources available to perform maintenance,
 - The training available for maintenance and operations personnel,
 - The access of maintenance personnel to track under non-revenue service conditions, and
 - The integration of technology into track inspection and maintenance practices.

Over the next 18 months, at each of the nation's 13 heavy rail transit agencies, FTA plans to conduct a 2-day workshop with maintenance, operations and safety personnel and with executive leadership to explore these challenges and to attempt to identify possible options for improvement. FTA plans to use these workshops to galvanize the attention of industry on maintenance issues. These workshops will also support the development of guidelines on improved maintenance practices in the heavy rail environment.

- Track Inspection Training: Over the next year, FTA plans to develop a training course specifically for track inspectors and supervisors, to address the unique demands of track inspection in the rail transit environment. This course will incorporate elements of FRA's 49 CFR Part 213, as well as APTA's rail transit standards and the AREMA guidance. This course will initially be offered at the nation's 13 heavy rail transit agencies. Over time, FTA will expand this course to commuter rail agencies and light rail agencies.
- Safety and Security Roundtables: Beginning with the next Safety and Security Roundtable in July in Chicago, FTA will actively engage participants in discussions and presentations related to track worker protection and maintenance oversight issues. FTA urges safety representatives to attend this July workshop and to bring with them their ideas, concerns, and challenges.
- TransitWatch: FTA is working to update the TransitWatch program to include safety issues for employees and passengers. Through this new initiative, transit agencies will have templates, brochures, posters and other materials available to support adherence to safety rules and to prevent at-risk behavior.
- Outreach with Executive Leadership: In partnership with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and APTA, FTA will be conducting outreach with Executive Directors and General Managers regarding track worker protection and maintenance oversight issues during upcoming APTA conferences.

Research


FTA will continue its partnership with APTA in the Rail Transit Standards Program to identify and address issues raised as a result of the Maintenance Oversight Workshops and the Track Inspection Training. Wherever possible, FTA looks to partner with APTA in developing consensus-based standards as the best form of technical assistance to industry.

FTA will also continue to sponsor research through the Transportation Research Board, Transit Cooperative Research Program and the University Transportation Centers. There are opportunities to use available technology to enhance the safety of track workers, to improve the identification, tracking and prioritization of maintenance issues, and to integrate materials testing and quality assurance/quality control practices more effectively into transit maintenance programs.

Conclusion

As an industry, we are confronting a serious set of issues that challenge our abilities to protect employees and ensure the safety and reliability of our infrastructure. I thank you for your on-going efforts to partner with FTA in meeting these challenges.

Sincerely,


James S. Simpson