

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: March 6, 1978

Forwarded to:

Honorable Brock Adams
Secretary
Department of Transportation
400 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-78-10

The National Transportation Safety Board has adopted its report of the head-on collision of two Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) trains on the Shaker Heights Line on July 8, 1977. 1/ Sixty persons were injured and property damage was estimated at \$100,000.

Causal factors noted in the accident were failure to have established rules, procedures, and special instructions to assure safe train operations. In addition, several obvious deficiencies were found which should not exist in transit operations, especially those which receive Federal funds.

This accident report clearly illustrates how a rail system can degenerate when the property is not reviewed by an outside agency. Specific enforceable safety requirements should be established which will assure that track, transit cars, and operating practices meet an acceptable level of safety. Actual safety regulation and enforcement could be performed either by a State authority or, if necessary, by a Federal agency, as is the current practice in pipeline safety. However, the Department of Transportation should be accountable for insuring that adequate safety oversight of rapid rail properties is established.

On August 19, 1977, the Safety Board recommended to the Federal Railroad Administration, as a result of another accident on the GCRTA, that the FRA "Establish operating and procedure standards for rail rapid transit systems." The Board has not received any information of action taken by the FRA in response to this recommendation. Recent court actions have questioned the authority of the FRA to regulate rail rapid transit systems.

1/ For more detailed information, Read "Railroad Accident Report - Head-on Collision of Two Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority Trains, Cleveland, Ohio, July 8, 1977" (NTSB-RAR-78-2).

In June 1971, 2/ the Safety Board recommended to the Urban Mass Transportation Administration that transit grant applicants be required to submit a system safety plan which describes the safety management and engineering tasks that are to be accomplished in support of the new system. The Board further recommended that this plan be used as a partial basis for selecting the applicants to be funded. UMTA has the practical authority to require that specific safety plans be prepared as one of the conditions in applications for grants to develop or upgrade rail rapid transit systems. Although significant progress has been made by UMTA in encouraging transit authorities to develop system assurance and reliability plans, specific safety plan requirements have not been formalized and published. Even though it is certainly a step in the right direction, it is doubtful if this system would provide the desired degree of safety for rail rapid transit systems due to the lack of enforcement after the safety plan is in effect.

In addition to the accident at Cleveland on July 8, 1977, the Safety Board has investigated and published the probable causes of five major rail rapid transit accidents. All six accidents could have been prevented by the enforcement of practical, comprehensive safety regulations.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Secretary of the Department of Transportation:

Develop oversight capability to insure that the safety of rail rapid transit systems will be regulated and enforced by a responsible State or Federal agency. Within the Department of Transportation, accountability for the oversight should be assigned to the Administration that controls Federal grants to aid rail rapid transit. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-78-10)

BAILEY, Acting Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and KING, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.



By: Kay Bailey
Acting Chairman

2/ "Special Study of Rail Rapid Transit Safety" (NTSB-RSS-71-1).