

Log R-628B



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Safety Recommendation

Date: August 6, 1991

In reply refer to: R-91-38

Honorable Samuel K. Skinner
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Safety Board has recently completed a safety study, "Oversight of Rail Rapid Transit Safety."¹ In the past, the Safety Board had addressed the issue of oversight of rail rapid transit safety only on the systems on which the Safety Board had conducted accident investigations. The Safety Board had not addressed the broader issue of the adequacy of safety oversight of rail rapid transit systems in general. Based on its recent investigations of accidents that have occurred on the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) and the New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA); its previous (mid-1980s') investigations of accidents on SEPTA, NYCTA, the Chicago Transit Authority, and the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority; and the findings of this study, the Safety Board believes that there is a need to address the issue of safety oversight of the rail rapid transit industry in general. The potential for substantial loss of life through collisions and derailments at high speeds, and through fire and smoke conditions necessitates continual oversight of rail rapid transit safety, especially given the economic difficulties of maintaining these systems as they age and begin or continue to deteriorate.

Comprehensive and continual oversight of rail rapid transit safety is needed in addition to the Safety Board's selective investigations of accidents and occasional studies. Further, the Urban Mass Transportation Administration's (UMTA) initiation of investigations cannot be considered a comprehensive and effective oversight program. The Safety Board for more than a decade has continued to believe that the primary responsibility for oversight of rail rapid transit safety rests with State and local governments. However, the Safety Board is concerned that this responsibility is not being met. Consequently, the Safety Board has issued a safety recommendation to all States in which rail rapid transit systems operate to develop or revise, as needed, existing programs to provide for continual and effective oversight of rail rapid transit safety.

¹ National Transportation Safety Board. 1991. Oversight of rail rapid transit safety. Safety Study NTSB/SS-91/02. Washington, D.C.

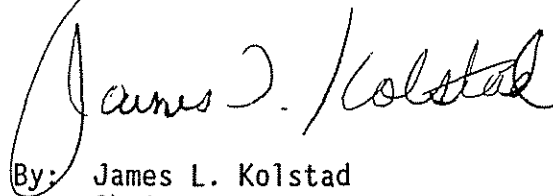
The Safety Board also continues to believe, however, that the Federal government, UMTA in particular, has a role in assuring that the oversight responsibility is met by State and local governments. The variation in existing oversight activities exercised by the States that do have oversight programs suggests that State and local governments need guidance that describes the elements of an effective oversight program. Such guidance should include the frequency with which inspections, audits, and reviews of documents, records, the physical plant, and equipment should take place. The provisions of such guidelines, in the Safety Board's view, is a proper function of UMTA. The Board also believes that it is the proper role of UMTA to ensure the implementation of effective safety oversight programs by State and local governments through its funding authority. For your information, we have enclosed a copy of the safety recommendations issued to UMTA as a result of this study.

In conjunction with this study, the Safety Board received details of the drug and alcohol testing programs implemented by all major rapid transit rail systems operating in the United States. Although the Safety Board commends the transit industry for implementing testing programs, the information received also indicates that there are some inconsistencies in the testing being conducted among the systems. Although the inconsistencies within the transit industry cause the Safety Board concern, the Board has expressed its concern to the Department of Transportation about the broader issue of inconsistencies in testing in all transportation modes. Through Safety Recommendations I-89-4 through -12, issued in 1989, the Safety Board will continue to address the uniform implementation of testing programs in all modes of transportation. However, the Safety Board urges the Secretary of Transportation to include rail rapid transit in its ongoing efforts to address these safety recommendations and, if necessary, seek the legislative authority to do so.

Therefore, as a result of the safety study, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation:

Include rail rapid transit in the standardized consistent drug/alcohol testing procedures requested by the National Transportation Safety Board in Safety Recommendations I-89-04 through -12. If necessary, seek legislative authority to do so. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-91-38)

Chairman KOLSTAD, Vice Chairman COUGHLIN, and Members LAUBER, HART, and HAMMERSCHMIDT concurred in this recommendation.


By: James L. Kolstad
Chairman

Enclosure: Letter to UMTA issuing R-91-33 through -36