



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

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**Date:** January 14, 1992

**In Reply Refer To:** R-91-71 and -72

Mr. W. Graham Claytor, Jr.  
President  
National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak)  
60 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002

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About 1:26 p.m. central daylight time on April 23, 1990, eastbound National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) train No. 6, the California Zephyr, derailed at Batavia, Iowa, while operating on the Burlington Northern Railroad (BN). During the derailment, passengers were thrown from the seats, striking the floor, walls, tables, and other passengers. One passenger received serious injuries and 75 passengers received minor injuries. Damage from the derailment was estimated at \$1,835,000.<sup>1</sup>

After the derailment, Safety Board investigators inspected all the passenger car interiors at the accident site for sources of injury. In each coach, investigators found that several seats with mechanically sound locks were unlocked and that some of the unlocked seats had rotated. Investigators also found that one Trison lock in car 34001 was defective. A few weeks after the Batavia accident, the Safety Board mailed 116 questionnaires to passengers involved in the derailment. Of the 72 responses that we received, 12 passengers said their seats had swiveled or shifted in the accident.

On September 12, 1990, Safety Board investigators conducted an unannounced examination of another Amtrak train at Omaha, Nebraska, and found unlocked seats in each coach. The car seats had both Trison and AMI seat locks. From interviews with passengers and on-board service personnel, investigators determined that passengers frequently depressed the locking pedal under the seat because they thought that the pedal was for some other purpose, such as reclining the seat.

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<sup>1</sup>For more detailed information, read Railroad Accident Report--"Derailment of Amtrak Train No.6 on the Burlington Northern Railroad at Batavia, Iowa April 23, 1990" (NTSB/RAR-91/05).

After Safety Board investigations of accidents involving Amtrak passenger trains at Russell, Iowa,<sup>2</sup> and Stockton, California,<sup>3</sup> Amtrak initiated a program to replace AMI seat locks with Trison and new style Coach & Car locks. According to an Amtrak spokesman, the company has used up its stock of Trison locks and has been solely using Coach & Car locks in its seat lock replacement program. The spokesman also stated that Amtrak anticipates no further use of the Trison lock. Since the time of the Batavia accident, the Trison company has gone out of business.

After the Stockton, California accident, the Safety Board recommended that Amtrak:

R-90-49

Establish systemwide procedures to ensure that all seatlocks are engaged in the locked position before offering the equipment for revenue service.

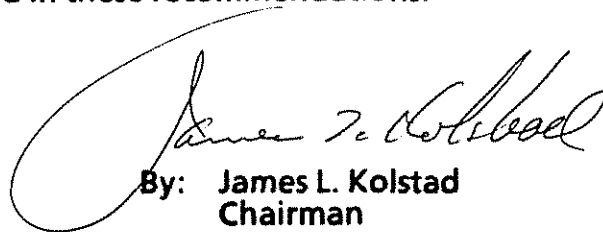
In 1990, Amtrak instituted an initial terminal inspection program for seat locks at locations where trains are originated. As a result, on August 21, 1991, Safety Recommendation R-90-49 was classified as "Closed--Acceptable Action." However, as the Safety Board discovered in its investigation of the Batavia derailment and its September 1990 examination of a train at Omaha, Nebraska, seat locks may become inadvertently unlocked by passengers en route. The Batavia accident also showed that some of the installed Trison locks could be defective as a result of manufacturer or installation.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak):

Implement procedures for on-board-service personnel to periodically check passenger seats en route for unlocked antirotational devices and take action to ensure seats are functional. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-91-71)

Inspect all Trison seat locks to ensure that all are functional. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-91-72)

KOLSTAD, Chairman, COUGHLIN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, HART and HAMMERSCHMIDT, Members, concurred in these recommendations.



By: James L. Kolstad  
Chairman

<sup>2</sup>Railroad Accident Report--Collision and Derailment of Amtrak Train 6 on the Burlington Northern Railroad, Russell, Iowa, October 12, 1987 (NTSB/RAR-88/04).

<sup>3</sup>Railroad/Highway Accident Report--Collision of Amtrak Passenger Train No.708 on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway with TAB Warehouse and Distribution Co. Tractor-SemiTrailer, Stockton, California, December 19, 1989 (NTSB/RHR-90/01).