



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

**Date:** December 8, 1987

In reply refer to: R-87-38

Honorable Robert P. Casey  
Governor of Pennsylvania  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

On August 23, 1986, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) single-car train 167 was en route to Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, on the Norristown High Speed Line (NHSL) when a passenger requested to be let off at the Beechwood/Brookline Station. The operator was unable to stop the car using normal braking. Subsequently, he applied the airbrakes in emergency, released the deadman pedal, and applied the mechanical handbrake on each end of the car. The car continued forward and began to accelerate as it descended the grade into the 69th Street Terminal at Upper Darby. The car overrode the bumping block at the end of the track, derailed, penetrated a terminal wall, and came to rest about 6 feet inside the terminal building. Of the 55 passengers on board, 44 were injured; 11 of the 44 injured passengers were hospitalized. In addition, one person inside the terminal building was injured. The operator received minor injuries. Damage to the equipment and building was estimated to be \$225,000. <sup>1/</sup>

SEPTA apparently chose to control the NHSL in a manner apart from its regional rail operation. Substandard glazing practices, disregard for the safety of mechanics who work under cars without switch lock protection, and lack of fundamental "hours of service" requirements indicate that SEPTA needs oversight by an independent agency.

State regulatory and enforcement authority for the NHSL is fragmented between the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's Bureau of Public Transit, the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission, and the Pennsylvania State Police. There does not appear to be any clear delineation of authority. The limited authority that exists in the State agencies has been used to set only a few minor equipment standards. Standards for maintenance of way and operations are nonexistent. According to the State police inspector, even the equipment standards are designed such that SEPTA is self-certifying.

After conducting a special investigation of the safety of the New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA) in 1981, <sup>2/</sup> the Safety Board recommended that the State of New York take legislative and/or executive action to authorize a new or existing independent agency to oversee and regulate the safety of the NYCTA system. Subsequently, the State established the New York State Public Transportation Safety Board and empowered it to oversee and regulate rail rapid transit lines in the State. The State of California also has established an agency that actively regulates rail rapid transit

<sup>1/</sup> For more detailed information, read Railroad Accident Report--"Collision and Derailment of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority Single Car Train 167, 69th Street Terminal, Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, August 23, 1986" (NTSB/RAR-87/04).

<sup>2/</sup> Special Investigation Report--"Eight Subway Train Fires on New York City Transit Authority With Evacuation of Passengers" (NTSB-SIR-81-05).

systems. More recently, after investigating a series of accidents on the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, <sup>3/</sup> the Safety Board recommended that the State of Ohio initiate legislative action to establish a new independent agency, or authorize an existing agency, to oversee and regulate the safety of rail rapid transit systems in Ohio. The Safety Board believes the State of Pennsylvania should take action to establish an agency with oversight responsibilities for rail rapid transit systems.

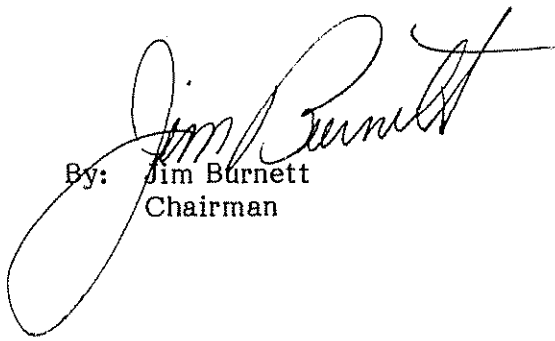
Therefore, as a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the State of Pennsylvania:

Initiate legislative action to establish a new independent agency, or authorize an existing agency, to regulate and enforce the safety of rail rapid transit systems in Pennsylvania. (Class II, Priority Action)  
(R-87-38)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations R-87-39 through -45 to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility ". . . to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation R-87-38 in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, NALL, and KOLSTAD, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

  
By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman

<sup>3/</sup> Railroad Accident Report—"Rear End Collision of Two Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority Red Line Rapid Transit Trains Near the West 98th Street Station, Cleveland, Ohio, August 18, 1986" (NTSB/RAR-87/05).