



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

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FTA Safety Bulletin: Guidance on Safety Management System (SMS) Support Services

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WASHINGTON - The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) continues to receive questions from public transportation agencies regarding vendors offering Safety Management System (SMS) development and training support services. In speaking with these agencies, FTA has learned that some of the proposed SMS activities are not in line with the principles set forth by the FTA in its SMS Framework.

The SMS is a formal, top-down, organization-wide approach to managing safety risks. The FTA is committed to an SMS approach, which is why SMS is the basis for FTA's proposed National Public Transportation Safety Program. Public transportation agencies should be familiar with the SMS Framework and associated training courses, prior to contracting for SMS support, to ensure that services align with FTA's vision for SMS implementation.

The FTA strongly recommends that the transit industry become familiar with the SMS Framework's descriptions and attributes of an effective SMS: the FTA-adopted components and sub-components, and the initial SMS development phases and tasks.

While SMS is both scalable and flexible, there are core processes and activities that agencies should adhere to while developing their own SMS. Below is a list of ways to recognize whether a proposed service is aligned with FTA's requirements:

SMS is:

- A management system (i.e., used by management for prioritizing the allocation of resources towards those areas of high safety concern)
- Primarily proactive
- A system which identifies hazards and analyzes their potential consequences
- A system that assesses safety risks associated with those potential consequences
- A system which implements risk mitigations to control safety risk
- Driven by the collection of safety data and safety objectives rather than business goals or services

SMS does NOT:

- Require or involve the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification
- Equal Quality Management System (QMS)
- Focus solely on compliance or corrective action plans, but on establishing safety risk mitigations and the ongoing monitoring of the mitigations.

Statements such as, “SMS is just like what we’re doing, but with a different name,” or “SMS is just like QMS, but with a focus on safety,” or statements referencing ISO certification, may be indications that the proposed program is not aligned with the FTA’s requirements; which may hinder an agency from implementing an effective and successful SMS, or may overburden an agency with unnecessary requirements and costs. Although both the SMS and QMS are management processes that conceptually share similar processes and activities, their objectives differ. The objective of SMS is to proactively control hazards and their consequences. Designating safety as a quality attribute under a QMS will not sufficiently meet that objective or satisfy FTA’s SMS requirements. Similarly, the ISO certification will not meet FTA’s SMS requirements.

Since the publication of the SMS Framework, the FTA has also developed and distributed SMS Awareness; an introductory level e-Learning course based on the SMS Framework, and SMS classroom teaching. For more information on the SMS Awareness course, please visit the FTA Office of Transit Safety and Oversight’s Resources page.

In addition, the FTA will continue to develop and provide SMS guidance material, technical assistance tools, and training for the public transportation industry. If you have questions concerning SMS, please contact Ms. Lynn Spencer, FTA’s Director of System Safety, at (202) 366-5112 or Lynn.Spencer@dot.gov.



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