



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Transit
Administration**

Headquarters

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

April 18, 2016

Mr. Paul Wiedefeld
General Manager and Chief Executive Officer
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
600 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Subject: Immediate Actions to Address Fire/Life Safety and
the Protection of Workers on the Right-of-Way

Dear Mr. Wiedefeld:

As you know, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has conducted 107 Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) inspections that cover track, the Rail Operations Control Center (ROCC), vehicle and systems maintenance, automatic train control and traction power from October 2015 through April 8, 2016. During these inspections, FTA identified 229 defects requiring 66 remedial actions.

During FTA's recent track integrity safety blitz, which concluded last week, our inspection teams identified critical concerns regarding fire/life safety and compliance with roadway worker protection (RWP) procedures on the WMATA Metrorail system. Although we are still compiling our final report from these inspections, the seriousness of these findings and a clear concern for public safety compel me to direct WMATA to take immediate action.

Specifically, and as communicated to you Friday, April 15, the FTA is directing WMATA immediately to: (1) inspect and correct the degraded condition of fire/life safety equipment and features in the Metrorail tunnels, and (2) conduct a safety briefing for all employees who work along the right-of-way, operate trains, or authorize train movements to make sure they understand the rules in place to protect workers on the tracks.

Fire/Life Safety

During our inspections of the track and traction power systems in the WMATA tunnels, the FTA teams found numerous defects that could potentially impact the evacuation of a passenger train during an emergency. Additionally, these defects present serious safety risks for workers in the tunnels. These defects include, specifically: a high percentage of partially functioning or non-functioning lights on tunnel walls—discharged and expired fire extinguishers throughout the tunnels—out-of-order emergency traction power shut-off switches and telephones—construction debris and material stored in emergency walkways and worker clear-up locations—missing, poorly secured, and filth-covered emergency and safety signage—and missing third rail safety

coverboards. In combination with one another, these defects create a systemic safety condition that significantly limits WMATA's ability to manage a fire or smoke emergency in the tunnel.

To resolve these concerns, WMATA must immediately:

- Inspect, and re-charge as appropriate, all fire extinguishers located in the tunnels, and assign a single department with clear responsibility for managing this inspection and maintenance activity moving forward.
- Inspect, clean and repair all Emergency Trip Switch (ETS) boxes in the tunnels, including the diagrams/labels on the inside of doors that indicate ETS box location and the affected third rail sections controlled by the box, the blue lighting fixtures, the emergency telephones, and supporting wiring. The inspection must also test each ETS box to ensure that it connects to the ROCC as required. Also, WMATA must assign a single department with clear responsibility for managing this inspection and maintenance activity moving forward.
- Identify and correct conditions that impede the safe egress of passengers in the tunnel, and the safety of workers in proximity to passing trains. These hazardous conditions include, specifically, the storage of construction material and debris on safety walks, and obstructions in the gauge of the track, such as removed rail and clips and other construction-related debris.
- Inspect and correct the extensive lighting defects in the tunnels, including a focused effort to re-lamp florescent fixtures on tunnel walls.
- Inspect and clean all signage on tunnel walls, including location signage and "No Clearance Area" signs to ensure visibility and reflectivity as required.
- Inspect and repair the spotlight lighting in the interlockings used to support Automatic Train Control (ATC) technicians making repairs during an emergency.
- Inspect, and re-stock as appropriate, the red boxes at the end of each interlocking to ensure that clamps and blocks and other required supplies are available for when switches have to be clamped and blocked during an emergency.
- Develop a plan for replacing missing third rail coverboards and begin implementation 30-days from the date on this letter.

Roadway Worker Safety

During FTA's track and traction power inspections, while walking with WMATA crews in tunnels and other locations, the FTA teams observed numerous violations of WMATA's roadway worker program (RWP) rules and procedures. Most notably, FTA found that speed restrictions were not being followed by train operators upon approach to work crews; hand

signals were not used correctly; job briefings were not performed to alert crews when situations or protection changed; and workers consistently violated the 15-second ample time rule, clearing with 5 or fewer seconds in front of trains.

The FTA therefore directs WMATA to immediately conduct safety briefings in order to ensure that WMATA management, supervisors, roadway workers, train operators, and rail operations controllers understand all applicable rules and requirements designed to protect maintenance employees on the right-of-way. As part of these safety briefings, WMATA must accomplish the following:

- Review requirements for conducting job safety briefings, including what should happen when conditions or protections change for the work crew or when new workers or equipment join the work zone.
- Review requirements for the specific radio communications that must take place with the ROCC and among the work crew before any track is fouled and whenever on-track safety conditions change.
- Review and clarify requirements for WMATA employees to use foul time when moving through “no clearance” areas in tunnels and elevated structures.
- Review and clarify requirements for “ample time” at WMATA. Explain that the 15-second rule applies from the time the worker is clear in a place of safety to the time the train passes, and does not include the time required to clear.
- Review the use of hand signals, and required train speeds.
- Emphasize best practices for on-track safety rules compliance (i.e., staying in the clear unless necessary to perform work that is in the foul of the track, looking both ways before crossing track, and ascertaining absolutely that on-track safety has been provided prior to fouling any track).
- Review requirements and procedures for redundant signal protection using shunts, and ensure roadway workers know where and how to acquire shunts.
- Finally, for the ROCC and train operators, clarify the requirement for radio repeat-backs regarding all unusual train movements and speed restrictions. Instructions must be immediately repeated back in their entirety and the Rail Controller must verify the accuracy of the movement authority or speed restriction from each train affected prior to restoration of normal traffic routing or speed couplers.

Not later than 10 calendar days from the date of this letter, please submit to the Director of FTA’s WMATA Safety Oversight (FWSO) Office, Sean Thompson (Sean.Thompson@dot.gov), a work plan that sets forth actions that WMATA already has taken or will take to inspect and correct the degraded condition of fire/life safety equipment and features in the Metrorail tunnels.

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With respect to roadway worker safety, WMATA must immediately conduct safety briefings for employees who work on or operate over the rail transit right-of-way and confirm with FTA no later than Friday, April 22, 2016, the substance and date of completion of the requisite briefings.

I commend your commitment to take any and all necessary steps needed to immediately address these safety concerns. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with Mr. Thompson with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Thomas Littleton
Associate Administrator

cc: Andy Off, Acting Deputy General Manager Operations, WMATA
Angel Peña, Managing Director, Quality and Internal Compliance Operations, WMATA
Louis Brown, Acting Chief Safety Officer, WMATA
Emile Smith, Chair, Tri-State Oversight Committee