



NORTHERN VIRGINIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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WMATA Board Directs Report on Rail Defect

The WMATA Board of Directors yesterday ordered the transit agency's interim general manager to complete an operational investigation within 10 days and publicly explain how a known track deficiency went unrepaired for nearly a month. "The board is outraged and dismayed that anyone working at Metro would have critical safety information and not act on it immediately. It is totally unacceptable that the wide-gauge track problem reported yesterday by the interim general manager could go unaddressed and unrepaired for four weeks. This is a breakdown of the organization's chain of command and our safety culture. We obviously have much work ahead of us to improve the organization's safety culture, and we will do so," said Metro Safety Committee Chair Michael Goldman, speaking on behalf of the WMATA Board of Directors Thursday afternoon. "However, Jack Requa's transparent release of information, as well as his actions to order immediate track inspections and gather information to hold people accountable at every level, is what the board expects and what the circumstances demand."

The board's statement followed Requa's announcement that a track defect, detected July 9, caused a train to derail near Smithsonian Metro Station on Aug. 6. The train was not carrying any passengers. Such detection should have triggered an immediate shutdown and repair of the damaged rail, according to Requa. "It is unacceptable to me, and it should be unacceptable to everyone within the chain of command all the way down to the track laborers and track inspectors who are out on the front lines. We found this and should have addressed it earlier," he said.

WMATA Sends FY2014 Audit to General Assembly & DRPT Director

In accordance with a budget amendment adopted by the Virginia General Assembly, the WMATA Board of Directors has sent a copy of its 2014 financial audit and a report indicating the completion of corrective actions identified by the FTA. Copies of the audit and quarterly report — transmitted Aug. 11 and July 16, respectively — went to the Director of DRPT and Chairmen of the Senate Finance, House Appropriations, and both Senate and House Transportation committees.

The independent auditor's opinion, which accompanied the audit, is qualified with respect to Metro's restricted net position (i.e. total funds remaining after all expenses paid). Some federal capital costs may shift to nonfederal sources and vice versa as WMATA management and the FTA work to conclude on-going grant analyses, accounting and reconciliations for unreimbursed costs. This was identified in the FTA's 2014 Financial Management Oversight (FMO) Report.

The FMO identified 25 material weaknesses and 31 significant deficiencies requiring corrective action. WMATA completed the last three corrective actions in advance of the June 30 deadline. As a result of the FMO, FTA limited WMATA's authority to draw down federal funds under its existing grants without prior written approval, as is the general practice for FTA grantees. The restriction created a cash-flow problems for WMATA, forcing it to rely on lines of credit to fund expenses. FTA is testing WMATA's new financial practices reflected in the responses before removing the financial restrictions.

[Audit Firm's Opinion](#)

WMATA Safety Update

On June 17, FTA released a [*Safety Management Inspection Report*](#) documenting 54 findings (44 for Metrorail and 10 for Metrobus) and requiring WMATA to respond to 91 actions. WMATA must prioritize corrective actions by risk and identify resources – reallocation of budget line items or new revenue – to implement those actions. [*Three key areas of concern*](#), according to FTA Acting Administrator Therese McMillan, are:

- lack of compliance with WMATA’s own safety program
- lack of adequate/timely safety training and certification for WMATA employees
- need to balance safety-critical track work with demand for passenger service.

By mid-September, WMATA must provide a response that includes a tracking matrix identifying specific actions that will be performed to address each element in the safety directive and the parties responsible for their implementation, the milestone schedule, and a verification strategy for completing the work. WMATA is already addressing many of the findings.

WMATA Addressing NTSB Recommendations. The NTSB investigation into the smoke and electrical arcing accident at WMATA’s L’Enfant Plaza Station is ongoing. The federal agency, at its [*June 23-24 hearing*](#), shared information about the fatal incident with the public. Following the January accident involving a Metrorail train, the NTSB issued four recommendations – [*R-15-008*](#), [*R-15-009*](#), [*R-15-010*](#) and [*R-15-025*](#) – asking WMATA to assess its tunnel ventilation system, develop and train staff in emergency tunnel ventilation procedures, and ensure that all power cable connector assemblies are properly constructed and installed in accordance with engineering design specifications. WMATA is addressing all of the current recommendations.

Virginia Must Act on Metro Safety Commission. To comply with federal requirements, Virginia, along with Maryland and the District, must pass a bill in its upcoming legislative session to establish and fund a new state safety oversight agency, known as the Metro Safety Commission (MSC). This new entity, which will replace the Tri-State Oversight Commission, will be financially independent of WMATA and have investigative and enforcement authority. Establishment of the MSC is essential if the region is to receive \$4.5 million in federal grants.

Cellular Access in Metro Tunnels Limited. Testing by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments earlier this year found that 90 percent of cellular calls from station platforms went through but only 28 percent of calls made from tunnels were successful. Improved cellular access depends on implementation of an agreement, known as the Neutral Host Project, between WMATA and four major cellular carriers. A contractor hired by the wireless companies filed bankruptcy in 2013 before completing its work in Metro’s tunnels.

WMATA Info & Update Links

- [*Audit Firm’s Opinion*](#)
- [*Safety and Security Update*](#)
- [*FTA Safety Inspection Report*](#)
- [*FTA Administrator’s Presentation*](#)
- [*WMATA Response*](#)
- [*NTSB Safety Investigation*](#)
- [*NTSB Safety Recommendation R-15-008*](#)
- [*NTSB Safety Recommendation R-15-009*](#)
- [*NTSB Safety Recommendation R-15-010*](#)
- [*NTSB Safety Recommendation R-15-025*](#)
- [*GAO Report*](#)

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