

U.S. Department
of Transportation

Office of The Administrator

400 Seventh St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Federal Railroad
Administration

February 21, 1996 Dear Colleague:

With the terrible tragedies of the last two weeks in New Jersey and Maryland, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are addressing issues related to the equipment, facilities, and operating practices and procedures of both Amtrak and other location's commuter rail passenger agencies operating cab cars, electric multiple units (EMU), or diesel multiple unit (DMU) service.

Last night we faxed to you a copy of FRA Emergency Order No. 20. This Order mandates (i) changes in railroad operating rules and requirements for clear marking and testing of emergency exits and (ii) the submission of an interim system safety plan that will review current practices with respect to operating cab car, EMU, or DMU service. These steps implement immediate actions to reduce the risks of accidents and injuries on this type of passenger service, while allowing the operating agencies to develop interim procedures over the next 45 days.

In the longer term, we believe that the most effective means of reducing the risks of train-to-train collisions and overspeed derailments that endanger occupants of cab cars, EMU cars, and DMU cars is the implementation of automatic train control (ATC) or other advanced technologies, such as positive train control systems (PTC). With funding authorized by the Swift Rail Development Act, FRA is currently promoting development of PTC technologies on two corridors designated for high-speed service under section 1010 of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991. FRA is also working with the Union Pacific Railroad and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad to assist in their positive train separation demonstration projects in the states of Washington and Oregon. These efforts should answer many of the remaining technological questions regarding implementation of compatible communication-based train control systems. All railroads should be considering these new technologies since they enhance safety and customer service, as well as increase system capacity.

Accordingly, FRA and FTA request that each rail passenger operating agency, in consultation with state governments and freight railroads, identify potential plans with respect to technology and practices, specifically including plans for implementation of ATC or PTC systems to provide for the enhanced safety of employees and passengers. This request is intended to underscore our sense of urgency that the long-term issues related to train control options be explored while the interim solutions to the immediate safety problems are being developed.

Where available, we request that this information include the intended method of operation, projected costs, projected benefits, and timetable for implementation. FRA and FTA are particularly interested in receiving estimates of projected increases or decreases in train densities over the 20-year period beginning January 1, 1997, on lines where passenger service is provided. We will use this information in refining the development of our corridor risk analysis model.

The model is a tool to be used to identify the types of rail corridors that should be considered for priority implementation of ATC and PTC systems. This information will also enhance the dialogue regarding public and private investments in such interoperable systems.

FRA and FTA have scheduled a meeting in Washington, D.C., to be held at 9:30 a.m. on Monday, February 26, at the Department of Transportation, Room 3200. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the Secretary's approach to the immediate and long-term safety issues at hand, including the implications of the Order for your passenger service, as well as our request for your approach to longer term technological solutions to these safety and operational issues.

Please let us know who from your office will be attending this meeting and what specific issues you would like to discuss by contacting Mr. Jerry Fisher of the FTA at (202) 366-2896 or by fax at (202) 366-7951.

We look forward to working with you, in a spirit of partnership, toward creating a safer railroad transportation system.

Sincerely,

signed by
Jolene M. Molitoris
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration

signed by
Gordon J. Linton
Administrator
Federal Transit Administration