

John Catoe
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Press Conference

I asked you all here to provide an update on our response to last week's tragic accident. First, I want to extend my sympathies, and those of all Metro employees, to the families of those killed in the accident. Last week, I said that Jeanice McMillan, the operator of the trailing train, was a hero and her actions may have saved lives. I am saddened by her death and by the deaths of the eight other passengers on that train, I know this world is diminished by their loss. Our thoughts also go to those who were injured. This is a difficult time for them, and I want to convey our hopes for their recovery.

Safety is at the foundation of everything we do, and a tragedy like this burns that purpose into our hearts and minds. We grieve for those who were lost and we hope for a quick recovery for those who were injured. We have always taken our responsibility for safety seriously, and we will not rest until we know the cause of last week's accident and have put fixes in place.

As you know, the investigation of this accident is not complete and the final report may not be completed for quite some time. Although, we do not know all of the factors that were at the root of the accident, we do have some indications upon which we can base our actions.

One of the first things we did was to place the operation of all of our trains in manual mode. Without commenting on the NTSB investigation, it is safe to say that the automatic train control system is designed to prevent collisions, yet the collision happened. I felt that it was wise to place the trains in manual mode, while we investigate each of the 3,000 track circuits installed on our rail system. To date, we have checked 65% of those circuits, and they have all passed inspection.

In addition, as an added precaution, we will not put our trains back into automatic mode until we have a group of train signal experts from outside Metro come and evaluate our system and our procedures for using it. The American Public Transportation Association will support the efforts of this independent review team, which will have a wealth of real-world experience. Deputy General Manager, Gerald Francis, will personally be responsible for the implementation of this team's recommendations.

Trains are also running at speeds of 35 miles-per hour on the Red Line, and of course at much slower speeds through the investigation site. The slower speed throughout the Red Line is to help us regulate the flow of trains. Once the investigation is complete, we will determine if there will be changes to our operating procedures. I know the Fourth of July event on the National Mall is coming up, and we have publicized our service plan for that. I do not anticipate any changes to July 4th service at this time. If changes are needed, we will inform customers.

Now, there has been a great deal of discussion about the 1000-series railcars involved in the accident. I have been given no indication that any of the root causes of this accident were due to the use of the 1000-series railcars. These cars are the oldest part of our fleet, but they are safe to operate, and they have been maintained and rehabilitated throughout their 30 to 35 years of use.

I must also say, though, that just as newer model automobiles have more safety features, newer railcars have better crash-resistance.

When the initial recommendation came from the NTSB to modify or replace those railcars, a study was commissioned. That was in 2002, and the study found that further rehabilitation of those cars to improve crashworthiness by adding an under frame reinforcement was “neither practical nor desirable” because that modification could result in more injuries. Our plan was to replace those railcars at the end of their service life. At that time, the NTSB found that to be acceptable.

Just as most people can't trade up to the newest model automobile every time an automobile manufacturer designs a stronger vehicle with added safety features, we can't trade-up to the newest railcar designs every year. For instance, people couldn't abandon their older automobiles when airbags began being installed in the newer models, even though the newer models with airbags were safer.

In 2006, the NTSB recommended that Metro retrofit the 1000-series cars, or "accelerate" their retirement. As a retrofit was not practical, as early as last year we chose to replace them. The 7000-series procurement process is underway, so, in effect, we have begun to replace the 1000-series cars at the next available opportunity. We are ready to go. All we need is the money.

Because immediate replacement isn't practical because of the financial and time constraints we operate under, our focus was and is to run those railcars as safely as possible.

We are always looking for practical solutions to the problems we face. As a result of this tragedy, we have racked our brains for ways to make those railcars less vulnerable. We have decided to run those 1000-series railcars in the center, or within “the belly,” of our trains, rather than as the leading or trailing cars of a train. This could make them less vulnerable to a collision. As of today, 80 percent of the railcars have been shifted.

This change to our operation will take a few more days to complete, and I think it is important to understand what’s involved.

Because all of these vehicles operate on a fixed rail, you need to a good deal of coordination to change the order of the railcars. This has a certain level of complexity. If you want to visualize this, I guess the best example would be sort of like a Rubik’s cube, or the puzzles where you would move tiles around to create a picture, but there was only one empty space to work with. In short, it takes planning and it is time intensive.

That task is complex enough if you are re-arranging cars within a single railyard, but it is compounded by the fact that we will have to move cars between railyards. The majority of the 1000-series cars are on the Red Line, which means they are housed at two of our rail yards, Brentwood and Shady Grove. We can only do this at night, and for every rail car we move out of Brentwood and Shady Grove we have to move a railcar back into those railyards. So, ultimately we will be moving several hundred cars between railyards, and several hundred more within the railyards. Again, we expect to complete the complete task in the next day or so.

Another change we are making will be in the organization of our operations department, while this investigation is still ongoing. About two years ago, we consolidated all of the resources to maintain and operate our trains under the authority of the Assistant General Manager of Rail Operations Delivery. At that time, we had considered also placing the resources that operate and maintain the signal and traction power systems under that assistant general manager as well.

At the time, it seemed too much to move at one time, but I think there is no better time to make that change than now. The idea is to bring all staff who are affiliated with signal and track responsibilities, whether they are engineers or maintenance staff, together under one senior manager to better coordinate their work. We think that making this change now will facilitate the ongoing investigation, and also improve our operation in the long-term.

This was a terrible accident, and we truly welcome the investigation and recommendations we know are forthcoming from the NTSB. You know, the NTSB has a crucial and highly valued role in this sort of investigation. I see the NTSB as an independent arm of the federal government, whose job is to find the cause of accidents and make recommendations that would reduce risk to the lowest possible level. There is great value to that. Their recommendations are made, and should be made, without consideration of the constraints faced by those who run transportation companies and enforce transportation regulations.

They are independent of that, and that is why their recommendations have great value to us. If we had no time or financial constraints, we would certainly implement every recommendation without question or delay.

Unfortunately, there has been one crucial element missing in the replacement of these cars. That element hasn't been our desire to replace the rail cars, it has been the lack of taxpayer money to do it. The money, over \$800 million, has not been there.

So, in the absence of that money, we have done what is practical and devoted our efforts to preventing a collision. We will continue to devote ourselves to those efforts, and to operating our rail cars in a way that will minimize the impact of collisions. We have always taken our responsibility for the safety of our passengers and our employees very seriously. Safety is the underlying purpose for every action we take, and this tragedy burns that purpose into our hearts and minds. We will do whatever we can to prevent further accidents in the Metro system.

I have time to take a few questions.