



Headquarters
295 DEVONSHIRE STREET
(5th Floor)
BOSTON, MA 02110

Tel. (617) 542-8212
Fax (617) 695-9982
Toll Free 1-866-DIAL-589
(3425)

LOCAL DIVISION 589
AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION, AFL-CIO-CLC
BOSTON CARMEN'S UNION

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OPEN LETTER TO THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

May 18, 2009

Dear Chairman Rosenker:

Thank you for your prompt and decisive response to the most recent collision on the MBTA's Green Line. The purpose of this letter is to highlight a very serious concern relative to safe operation on the MBTA's Green Line and to provide an important recommendation to the NTSB concerning the recent train collisions involving the MBTA's light rail vehicles.

Unfortunately the NTSB is aware that over the last few years a disturbing trend has developed resulting in serious accidents on the Green Line. In one horrific instance an operator was fatally injured.

While the Union fully appreciates that the investigations take time and require a comprehensive review of the circumstances surrounding each accident, we are concerned that the MBTA is unwilling to take a step back and look at more systemic safety issues within the agency. The dismissive attitude among MBTA management towards investments in modern safety systems that would make the Green Line a much safer operation is indicative of a management that is unwilling or unable to embrace a comprehensive approach to improve Green Line safety.

The Union fully endorses and supports the prohibition of cell phone use, implementation of better hiring practices and better training procedures. We are also supportive of additional efforts to make the MBTA system safer.

However, we are very concerned that the same commitment is lacking amongst senior management at the agency. During the last week union officials have

asked MBTA management to consider more robust solutions that will improve passenger and rail safety on the Green Line. In response the General Manager has asserted that these recommendations are “distractions” and nothing more than “red herrings”.

The Green Line’s signal system is antiquated. It needs to be replaced with equipment that will make the operation safer. While our recommendations have been rebuffed as impractical or too expensive to implement, transit officials across the country have identified, and are implementing, so called “*fail safe*” signal technologies that would work on the Green Line.

It is in this context that we appeal to you. Each time there is a serious accident T management conveniently *checks the box* and quickly attributes the accident to operator error. . . Then management issues a new directive and they close the file.

It is clear that the safety issue is systemic. Unless MBTA management is forced to embrace a comprehensive approach that includes investments in new systems and technologies, we fear that it is simply a matter of time before the next serious accident occurs.

We believe that MBTA management needs to act without delay to install a modern signal system on the Green Line that will ensure positive train control throughout the rail network. It is our understanding that technology solutions are readily available for the Green Line and have been implemented on similar rail systems throughout North America, Europe and Asia.

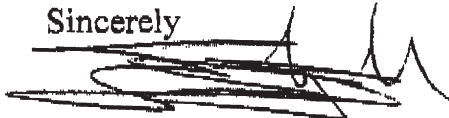
It is our further understanding that the MBTA’s brand new radio system may provide a platform for the implementation of a modern *Communications Based Train Control* system. Thus, a considerable amount of work is already complete to modernize the Green Line’s antiquated signal system.

When it comes to passenger safety, MBTA operators should be held to very high standards. But T management should be held to the same high standards. With the technology available today there is no excuse for not equipping the Green Line with a “*fail safe*” signal system. The lives and safety of passengers and employees depend on it.

The Green Line is the MBTA’s most heavily travelled transit line. It is our

In closing, we would like to emphasize that we are fully supportive of very high standards for operator safety and professionalism. We value the NTSB's leadership in the transportation industry and look forward to your findings and recommendations concerning the rash of accidents on the Green Line

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephan G. MacDougall', written over a horizontal line.

Stephan G. MacDougall
President/ Business Agent
ATU Local 589

Cc: Governor Deval Patrick
Congressional Delegation
Massachusetts Joint Chairs Transportation
FTA Regional Administrator
ATU, International President Warren George
Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation
MBTA Board of Directors
MBTA General Manager