

Transit Safety and Oversight Spotlight

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration

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Message from the Associate Administrator

September 2020
Vol. 5 No. 7

Dear Transit Colleagues:

As we enter the fall season, the health and safety of our public transportation partners and passengers continues to be FTA's number one priority. As of September 18, 2020, FTA has awarded a total of 745 Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act grants totaling over \$23.1 billion to transit agencies across the country. FTA has obligated 93 percent of the CARES Act funds, which includes 94 percent of the urban funds, 77 percent of the rural funds and 68 percent of the tribal funds. Transit agencies have disbursed over \$11.1 billion into the economy to address immediate COVID-19 response needs, and FTA will continue to support transit agencies in their COVID-19 recovery efforts. FTA strongly encourages transit agencies to prioritize spending of the obligated CARES Act funding to support local economic recovery.

FTA continues to provide updated COVID-19 guidance and resources for transit agencies and recently launched the [COVID-19 Recovery Discussion Forum](#). The forum offers a platform for peer-to-peer exchange of transit ideas and practices during recovery from the COVID-19 public health emergency and provides an opportunity to ask questions and request and share resources with the transit community during and after FTA's [COVID-19 Recovery Listening Sessions](#).

This month, FTA is hosting a listening session focused on managing vehicles and facilities in a new service environment. We encourage you to continue the conversation with your peers after the listening sessions in the forum. Past listening session recordings and presentations are also available on FTA's website.

We are finalizing preparations for the [2020 Joint State Safety Oversight \(SSO\) and Rail Transit Agency \(RTA\) Virtual Workshop](#) on October 6-8, 2020. Representatives from FTA's headquarters and regional offices, as well as other Federal agencies, will provide program updates and discuss requirements to strengthen rail transit safety oversight and other safety priorities. Session topics include: Operating in a Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Environment; Building Confidence in Transit during COVID-19; PTASP Implementation: Integrating Lessons Learned; Safety Risk Management Process and Corrective Action Plans Management. If you plan to attend, please register by September 30, 2020. We hope to see you virtually at the workshop!

Also, in October along with other members of FTA's executive team, I will be speaking at [Rail~Volution's Virtual Conference](#) during the COVID-19 Response and Recovery: A Federal Perspective session on October 29, 2020 from 12:30 to 1:30 pm. I look forward to sharing FTA's COVID-19 recovery efforts with transit industry stakeholders dedicated to building more livable communities through transit.

Thank you for all you have done during these difficult times. Since the beginning of this public health emergency, the transit industry continues to perform critical roles to keep America's communities moving.

Sincerely,

Henrika Buchanan



Henrika Buchanan,
Associate Administrator,
Transit Safety and Oversight

COVID-19: Available Guidance and Resources for the Transit Industry

FTA continues to provide [updated resources](#) and encourages transit agencies to stay informed as new COVID-19 information is released. The following resources are available:

- **NEW: [FTA COVID-19 Recovery Discussion Forum](#)** – Offers a platform for peer-to-peer exchange of transit ideas and practices during recovery from the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- [COVID-19 Recovery Vendor List for Public Transportation](#) – Provides links to vendors offering products such as face masks and shields, chemical disinfectants, operator barriers, signs and decals, testing kits and more.
- [FTA COVID-19 Resource Tool](#) – Provides a one-stop-shop for Federal COVID-19 guidance and recommendations.
- [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) from FTA Grantees Regarding Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)

Sign Up for Updates

[Click here](#) to sign-up for FTA COVID-19 updates.

Questions?

Contact your [FTA Regional POC](#) for COVID-19 related questions.

Upcoming Safety Training

U.S. DOT's [Transportation Safety Institute \(TSI\)](#) is increasing its delivery of virtual classes by adding more course delivery dates and offering Safety Management Systems (SMS) Principles for Transit as a virtual course. The [FY21 training schedule](#) is available on FTA's website.

The status of in-person TSI courses depends upon each host's local guidance. Please contact TSI at transit@dot.gov or (405) 954-3682. TSI can verify the status of all scheduled courses and assist with any other course-related questions.

E-Learning Self-Paced Online Courses

Bus Nomenclature	On demand on TSI Website	Available 24/7
Curbing Transit Employee Distracted Driving	On demand on TSI Website	Available 24/7
Fatigue and Sleep Apnea Awareness for Transit Employees	On demand on TSI Website	Available 24/7
Rail Nomenclature	On demand on TSI Website	Available 24/7
Roadmap to Drafting an Agency Safety Plan for Bus Agencies	On demand on TSI Website	Available 24/7
SMS Awareness	On demand on TSI Website	Available 24/7

Virtual Live Training

SMS Principles for Transit	Virtual Live Training	October 7-9, 2020
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Restoring Public Confidence in Transit

On Friday, July 31, 2020, the FTA hosted its second COVID-19 Listening Session: Supporting the Health, Safety and Confidence of Transit Riders attracting over 278 participants. This session focused on how transit agencies support the health, safety and confidence of transit riders in their COVID-19 recovery efforts.

Panelists from Tri-Valley Transit (Middlebury, Vermont), The Rapid (Grand Rapids, Michigan), Chicago Transit Authority (Chicago, Illinois) and Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (Las Vegas, Nevada) shared strategies, service planning, tools and resources they use to protect transit workers and maintain healthy operations.

Solutions include: having masks and hand sanitizer available onboard; placing plastic barriers between drivers, riders and rows of seats; placing COVID-19 information in multiple languages on signs; establishing capacity limits (15 on 40 foot buses, 10 on 35 foot buses and 4 on paratransit vehicles); deploying new buses for high-risk shopping hours; disinfecting buses daily using steam, ultraviolet light and disinfectant; creating a bus crowding dashboard so passengers can view crowding by route and identify the best times to ride to avoid crowds.

These efforts demonstrate the proactive measures that have been taken to maintain healthy operations and keep transit workers and passengers safe. To learn more, view the [presentation slides](#) and [recording](#) on FTA's website.

Monitoring Compliance and Sufficiency of Operations and Maintenance Procedures

FTA's [Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan \(PTASP\) regulation](#) (49 CFR Part 673) establishes requirements for Agency Safety Plans (ASPs). These requirements include specifications for monitoring safety performance, including monitoring compliance with and sufficiency of operations and maintenance procedures.

Monitoring Compliance with Operations and Maintenance Procedures

Transit agencies must establish activities to monitor their system for compliance with their operations and maintenance procedures (§673.27 (b)(1)). Many transit agencies are already familiar with compliance testing—it often forms the basis of operator or mechanic certifications and recertifications, job observations, and other standard forms of employee evaluation. What can compliance monitoring tell us about our agency?

To monitor compliance, transit agencies are encouraged to look beyond certification or job performance evaluations and to assess if employees demonstrate compliance with agency procedures. Of course, the desired answer to this question is “yes, our employees comply with our procedures all the time.” However, in a working environment, 100 percent compliance may not be occurring 100 percent of the time is rare. To manage safety, it's important to understand how compliance assumptions and realities could impact an agency's safety performance.

What can compliance monitoring tell us about our agency?

The compliance monitoring process allows an agency to examine its activities from all angles. For example, comparing compliance rates between day and night shifts may reveal a discrepancy and, potentially, identify a hazard that your agency may want or need to address through your Safety Risk Management process. By monitoring your agency's processes, you could discover that the compliance rates for a set of procedures are dropping to an unacceptable level.

Compliance vs. Sufficiency

You may choose to use the following definitions:

Compliance means following the procedures as they are written.

Sufficiency means the procedures are adequate to achieve the outcome intended.

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Investigating these discrepancies and changes can reveal the “why” of the situation. Maybe compliance on the day shift is different than the night shift because the on-the-job trainers are different for those shifts. Maybe compliance rates are dropping because mechanics have identified a different way to perform a process.

Compliance monitoring helps agencies determine if employees are carrying out work as intended. Monitoring the sufficiency of procedures helps agencies determine whether their procedures have the desired outcome(s).

Monitoring the Sufficiency of Operations and Maintenance Procedures

Transit agencies must establish activities to monitor their system which help make sure their operations and maintenance procedures (§673.27(b) (1)) are sufficient. Although many transit agencies already evaluate procedures for sufficiency, they may not have a consistent and specific process to do so.

To monitor the sufficiency of operations and maintenance procedures, transit agencies can consider two questions:

1. What does this procedure ensure or prevent?
2. What indicators tell us whether our agency has successfully ensured or prevented that outcome?

What can our agency learn from monitoring the sufficiency of operations and maintenance procedures?

From the example in the table we can see that the rail transit agency is not completing all safety critical work orders within the prescribed timeframe. To address the results of this monitoring activity, the transit agency may choose to review how it implements its maintenance procedure, including available resources, training and worker efficiency, to identify opportunities for improvement.

Safety Critical Work Order— Time to Complete	Percentage
24 Hours	45%
1 Week	30%
1 Month or More	25%

Let’s use the time to complete safety critical work orders as an example. A transit agency has a policy that requires safety critical work orders for track fastener replacement to be completed within 24 hours. A recent review of 6-months of maintenance records shows that only 45 percent of these work orders are completed within 24 hours. This monitoring activity shows that the agency is not following its procedures and that its existing efforts may not be sufficient to ensure required repairs.

Voluntary ASP Reviews

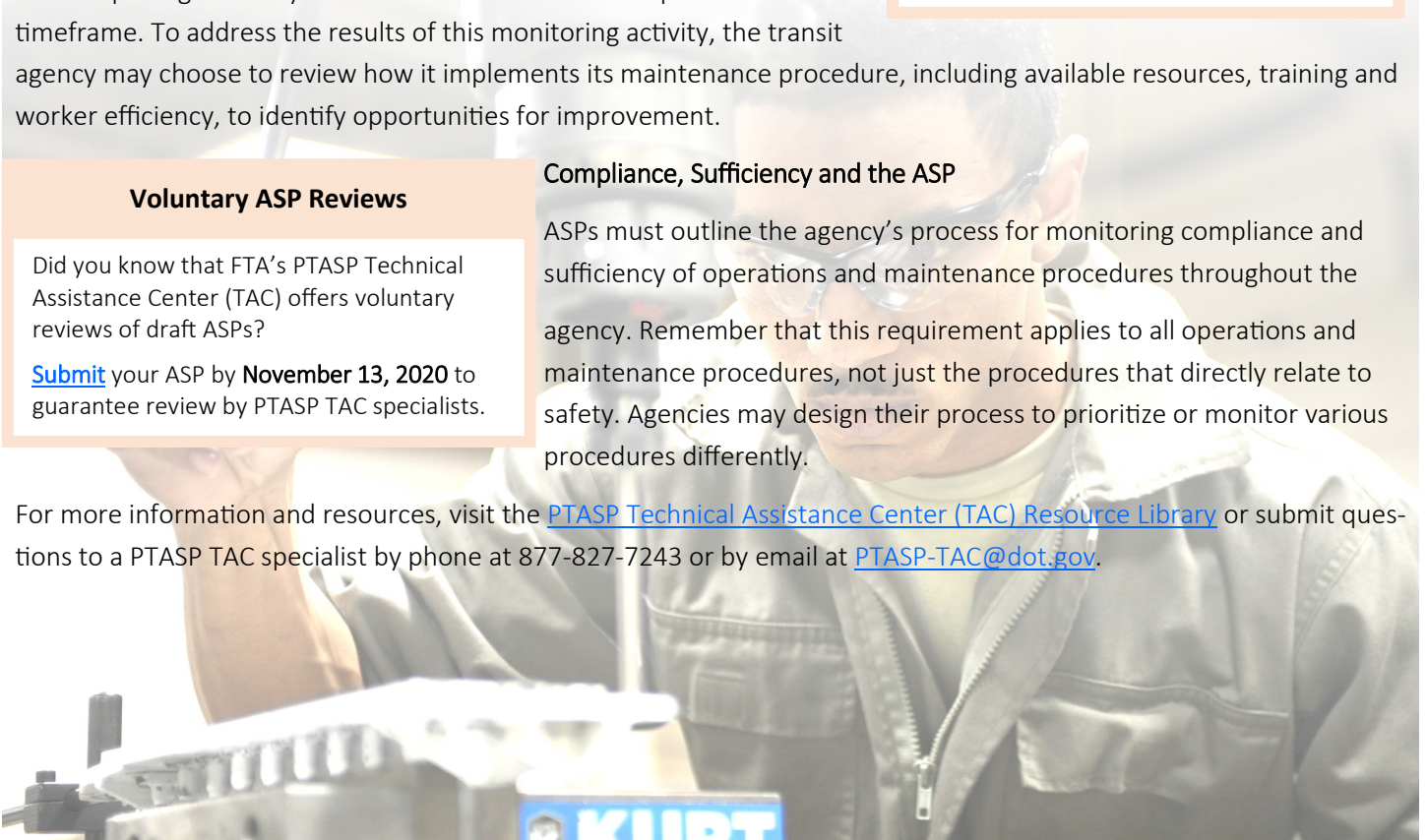
Did you know that FTA’s PTASP Technical Assistance Center (TAC) offers voluntary reviews of draft ASPs?

[Submit](#) your ASP by **November 13, 2020** to guarantee review by PTASP TAC specialists.

Compliance, Sufficiency and the ASP

ASPs must outline the agency’s process for monitoring compliance and sufficiency of operations and maintenance procedures throughout the agency. Remember that this requirement applies to all operations and maintenance procedures, not just the procedures that directly relate to safety. Agencies may design their process to prioritize or monitor various procedures differently.

For more information and resources, visit the [PTASP Technical Assistance Center \(TAC\) Resource Library](#) or submit questions to a PTASP TAC specialist by phone at 877-827-7243 or by email at PTASP-TAC@dot.gov.



Operation Life Saver Hosts 2020 Rail Safety Week

The goal of [Rail Safety Week \(RSW\)](#) is to raise awareness of the need for rail safety education and empower the general public to keep themselves safe near highway-rail grade crossings and railroad rights-of-way. Join FTA in observing RSW this year, September 21-27, 2020.

This year RSW activities in states across the U.S. will emphasize social media and virtual safety messaging. Thursday, September 24 will focus on commuter and transit safety, including 12 state programs working with local transit agencies to raise awareness. Participating states include: California; Connecticut; Georgia; Indiana; Massachusetts; Minnesota; New Jersey; North Carolina; Tennessee; Texas; Virginia and Washington.

Operation Lifesaver's website hosts great [rail safety resources](#), including [videos](#) and [RSW graphics and materials](#). For questions, please contact news@oli.org.



Training for Bus Operators: Humped or Blocked Highway-Rail Crossings

Buses with low ground clearance could become stuck on the tracks at humped highway-rail crossings and place themselves, and their passengers, at risk of death and injury from a potential collision. A humped crossing, or high-profile crossing, refers to a highway-rail intersection where the road surface is so high that a vehicle could become stuck. As some bus operators may not be aware of how to respond to this potential condition, transit agencies have the opportunity to provide a short, yet powerful training on this safety topic that can save the lives of their bus operators and passengers.



Example of a warning sign present at high-profile or humped rail grade crossings.



Example of an Emergency Notification Sign (ENS) posted at humped rail grade crossings.

For context, on March 7, 2017, a motor coach driver in Biloxi, Mississippi drove over a marked humped crossing. The undercarriage of the coach became lodged on the tracks and the operator was unable to move the bus.

The driver was unaware of proper safety measures and only began evacuating passengers when the lights of the oncoming train became visible. This resulted in a disastrous collision with a freight train, killing four people and injuring 38. Although this accident did not involve bus transit or FTA-regulated rail transit, some of the causal and contributing factors of a transit vehicle becoming trapped or disabled on a highway-rail grade crossing are relevant to transit safety.

Further, similar conditions caused a collision between an Amtrak train and a Jacksonville Transit Agency bus

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Operation Lifesaver has created this [30-second video](#) that transit agencies can share with operators online or in person during training sessions, safety briefings or staff meetings.

Along with the video, trainers should describe the proper steps for bus operators to take if their vehicle gets stuck at a humped highway-rail crossing:

1. Immediately evacuate the bus.
2. Call the number on the blue and white Emergency Notification Sign to notify authorities of the immediate hazard posed by the potential collision at that specific crossing.

Swift actions taken by operators can prevent injuries, fatalities and substantial damage. For more information, research, data and resources about grade crossing safety, refer to [FTA Safety Bulletin 19-03, Safety Considerations Associated with Rail Transit Grade Crossings](#). For additional questions, please contact [Joanne Waszczak](#), Division Chief for Program Operations in the Office of Safety Review.

TSO Profile



Erica Hicks,
Administrative Staff Assistant

This month's profile includes a Q&A with Erica Hicks, Administrative Staff Assistant.

How would you explain your job to someone you've never met? As an Administrative Staff Assistant, I perform administrative assistance and other duties to best support the needs of the Federal Transit Administration. These duties include managing the day to day schedule of the Chief Safety Officer, preparing correspondence packages for office approval and appropriate signatures, developing and implementing workflow process procedures to improve office efficiency and scheduling appointments, meetings and conferences. I often work independently to coordinate meeting schedules and ensure distribution of meeting materials.

What aspect of your role are you most excited about? The aspect of my role I'm most excited about is being able to assist my colleagues with delivering critical safety projects and programs to the transit industry. I pride myself on being a team player.

What were you doing prior to this role? Previously, I was the Administrative Liaison for the Senior Deputy Director and Associate Director of Risk Management Examination Branch at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. I supported approximately 25 staff members including senior management in three different sections, assisted the Washington and Regional Offices identify and mitigate risks posed by Insured Depository Institutions (IDI) under \$10 billion in total assets, managed the database for certified numbers for banks and banking reports correspondence. Additionally, I served as the point of contact for the Chief, Senior Deputy Director and personnel.

How do you think your prior experience prepared you for your FTA career? My prior experience prepared me for FTA because it enabled me to take on an advanced position and further develop my administrative and program management skills.

What led you to work in transit? I wanted to further my skills as an Administrative Assistant, and I was given the opportunity to land a position at the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT).

What is your favorite form of transportation and why? My favorite forms of transportation are driving and riding the train. Riding the train is super convenient and it is always a great way to meet new people.

What are your hobbies and interests outside of work? My favorite hobbies are shopping and dining. I also enjoy exploring new cultures and gaining experiences through traveling.

FTA Hosts Virtual Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan Workshops

In August, FTA hosted two [Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan \(PTASP\)](#) Virtual Workshops with more than 110 participants in attendance. The workshops focused on PTASP regulation requirements and provided strategies for developing Agency Safety Plans by the December 31, 2020 deadline. FTA will host two additional PTASP Virtual Workshops on [September 29-30](#) and [October 13-14](#)—register now! You can also view the [participant guide](#) and read what a few participants said about the workshops:

"It was a great workshop that really broke down and discussed every component of the Agency Safety Plan (ASP) and the Safety Management System (SMS). Going into detail in Safety Risk Management, Safety Promotion and Safety Assurance helped me become more knowledgeable and will help me develop a better process."

"The PTASP Virtual Workshop was an excellent course. Any person who is working on the development of his/her agency's ASP would benefit greatly from the workshop. The presenters were all extremely knowledgeable and presented the information in a clear and concise manner."



U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration

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<https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/safety/transit-safety-oversight-tso>

Upcoming Speaking Events and Webinars

[FTA Joint State Safety Oversight \(SSO\) and Rail Transit Agency \(RTA\) Virtual Workshop](#)

October 6-8, 2020

[PTASP Webinar: Agency Safety Plan Lessons Learned](#)

October 22, 2020 | 2:00 PM EDT

[Rail~Volution Virtual Conference](#)

October 29, 2020 | 12:30 PM EDT

[TRB Transit Safety and Security Conference and APTA Mid-year Safety and Security Seminar](#)

November 17-18, 2020