

# Transit Safety and Oversight Spotlight Newsletter

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Transit Administration

January 2021  
Vol. 6 No. 1

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## Message from the Associate Administrator

Dear Transit Colleagues:

Happy New Year! As we continue advancing our safety and oversight initiatives over the next year, we will continue to focus on addressing the needs of the transit industry in its recovery from the COVID-19 public health emergency. In 2021, FTA will continue our COVID-19 technical assistance by updating resources on [FTA's COVID-19 website](#), and hosting listening sessions and webinars. I encourage you to stay informed through [future listening sessions and webinars](#), and participate in [FTA's COVID-19 Recovery Discussion Forum](#).

Last month, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRRSAA) was signed into law appropriating \$14 billion in additional COVID-19 relief funding for transit. The funding includes \$13.3 billion for Urbanized Area Formula grants (Section 5307), \$50 million for the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Section grants (Section 5310) and \$678.7 million for Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311). These funds may be used to cover operating expenses at 100 percent Federal share and supplement the \$25 billion previously provided to the transit industry under the CARES Act. Additional information on CRRSAA can be found on [FTA's COVID-19 website](#).

Last month, FTA issued Notices of Enforcement Discretion for the [Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan \(PTASP\)](#) and [Public Transportation Safety Certification Training Program \(PTSCTP\)](#) regulations. In 2021, FTA will continue to provide technical assistance as agencies finalize their Agency Safety Plans (ASPs) and begin to transition to implementation. FTA is working hard to convert additional PTSCTP courses to a virtual format to support the industry with meeting the training requirements. We also plan to resume FTA oversight of State Safety Oversight Agencies (SSOA) and grant recipients virtually in 2021.

2020 has been a challenging year for the transit industry. I am proud to serve in a role that is committed to improving the safety of America's public transportation systems. While 2020 was a difficult year, we rose to the occasion, and I am proud of what we have accomplished together. As we prepare for the new year ahead, I look forward to supporting you in 2021.

Sincerely,  
Henrika Buchanan



Henrika Buchanan

Associate Administrator for  
Transit Safety and Oversight  
& Chief Safety Officer

## 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:

- [COVID-19 Recovery Discussion Forum](#) – An online platform for peer-to-peer exchange of transit ideas and practices during COVID-19 recovery.
- [COVID-19 Resource Tool](#) – A compilation of Federal COVID-19 guidance and recommendations, updated weekly.
- [Frequently Asked Questions from FTA Grantees Regarding COVID-19](#) – Provides clarity regarding how COVID-19 preparations impact certain FTA requirements and includes recent FAQ updates from December 28, 2020.

### 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 [TSI@dot.gov](mailto:TSI@dot.gov) or 405-954-3682. TSI can verify the status of all scheduled courses and assist with any other course-related questions.

eLearning Self-Paced Online Courses		
Bus Nomenclature	<a href="#">On demand on TSI Website</a>	Available 24/7
Curbing Transit Employee Distracted Driving	<a href="#">On demand on TSI Website</a>	Available 24/7
Fatigue and Sleep Apnea Awareness for Transit Employees	<a href="#">On demand on TSI Website</a>	Available 24/7
Rail Nomenclature	<a href="#">On demand on TSI Website</a>	Available 24/7
Roadmap to Drafting an Agency Safety Plan for Bus Agencies	<a href="#">On demand on TSI Website</a>	Available 24/7
SMS Awareness	<a href="#">On demand on TSI Website</a>	Available 24/7
Virtual Live Training		
Overseeing the Safety Management Process for SSOAs	Virtual Live Training	February 8-11, 2021 March 29-April 1, 2021 April 12-15, 2021
SMS Principles for Transit	Virtual Live Training	March 1-3, 2021 April 5-7, 2021
SMS Safety Assurance	Virtual Live Training	January 21, 2021 February 18, 2021 March 11, 2021 April 22, 2021

## Transit Agencies Continue to Uplift Communities During COVID-19

In November 2020, FTA announced its partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH) to educate stakeholders on how the two agencies can jointly support access to transportation, educational support services, food, medical appointments and other essential services. As communities continue to face challenges during the COVID-19 public health emergency, the [USDOT-FTA and HUD-PIH Partnership for COVID-19 Recovery](#) initiative will continue in 2021. Here are some of the innovative and inspiring solutions using transit vehicles and available funding to support communities in need:



Photo Credit: Transdev

Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) and Transdev North America (Transdev)—Baltimore, MD: MTA and Transdev partnered to help essential Greater Baltimore Medical Center (GBMC) employees get to work. Transdev identified schools, churches and government buildings for shuttle pick-ups. MTA and Transdev transported local, essential hospital workers from these designated pickup locations to the GBMC.

The City of Albuquerque (ABQ Ride) and Albuquerque Public Schools (APS)—Albuquerque, NM: ABQ Ride and APS created “Wi-Fi on Wheels,” placing mobile Wi-Fi units at APS schools and extending Wi-Fi capabilities outside of City facilities. The program updated ABQ Ride buses with technology to offer free internet access at parking lots across the city.



Photo Credit: Metropolitan Council

Metro Mobility—St Paul, MN: Metro Mobility provided free store pick up and home delivery to Certified Metro Mobility customers who purchased grocery and household essentials from local stores.

Monterey–Salinas Transit (MST)—Monterey County, CA: MST partnered with the Salvation Army and Meals on Wheels to deliver meals to seniors. The COVID-19 public health emergency is challenging for everyone, particularly homebound seniors who are unable to shop and cook for themselves.



Photo Credit: AP Photo/Ted S. Warren

Transit agencies continue to face uncertainties as they anticipate what services and investments to implement amid COVID-19 recovery. Fortunately, many transit agencies have partnered to provide essential services and directly support their communities. FTA applauds the many transit workers for their dedication and service to those in need.



## Implementing an Agency Safety Plan During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

The COVID-19 public health emergency continues to present challenges for transit agencies across the nation. FTA acknowledges that these ongoing disruptions seriously impact the transit industry's ability to meet the compliance and certification requirements of the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) regulation (49 CFR Part 673).

Currently, most agencies are close to certifying their Agency Safety Plans (ASPs) or beginning to implement their ASPs. However, many are facing major changes in operations — such as reduced budgets and staff — and may no longer be able to implement their ASPs as planned. FTA's second [Notice of Enforcement Discretion](#) announced that FTA will refrain from enforcing the PTASP regulation until July 21, 2021, which allows agencies to adjust their ASPs to reflect their new operation realities before certifying.

### PTASP Notice of Enforcement Discretion

On December 11, 2020, FTA published a new [Notice of Enforcement Discretion](#), providing enforcement relief for FTA recipients and subrecipients unable to meet the certification requirements for the PTASP regulation (49 CFR Part 673). The new PTASP Notice of Enforcement Discretion advises that, until July 21, 2021, FTA will refrain from taking enforcement action pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 5329(g).

### Using Safety Management Systems (SMS) to Adapt to Changing Environments

Implementing the PTASP regulation, including developing and implementing an ASP, may seem daunting when there is increased pressure to do more with less. However, SMS is built for scalability: this means that SMS principles and practices work in both the smallest and largest transit systems. For example, one person may operate the entire Safety Risk Management (SRM) process by themselves at a small agency, whereas operating the SRM process at a large agency may involve multiple people and departments.

SMS scalability also means that SMS principles and practices can be scaled within an agency in response to its current circumstances, such as when a public health emergency disrupts an agency's regular operations. What if, for instance, an agency finds that they can no longer implement their Employee Safety Reporting Program (ESRP) as planned? Scaling your ESRP in response to your current operating reality is just one way you could take advantage of the flexibilities offered by SMS and the PTASP regulation.

Other examples include:

- Changing the frequency of SMS activities, such as decreasing how often your agency monitors compliance with operations and maintenance procedures, to reflect a reduced workforce;
- Holding virtual meetings rather than in-person meetings to continue activities as planned; and
- Prioritizing hazard identification on COVID-19-related hazards.

You **do not** need to recertify if you revise your ASP in between annual certifications. Document the changes (for example, in a memo) and include them in your annual ASP review and update process.

For more information on certification, see the [Certification Fact Sheet](#) and [Understanding the Agency Safety Plan Review, Approval and Certification Process](#).



### Transit Agencies Example: Scaling an ASP to Reflect Current Resources

A transit agency drafted their ASP in early 2020, describing an ESRP with multiple options for employees to submit reports. In their ASP, the agency stated they would have a web-based reporting tool, a phone application, a phone hotline, an email address and a paper-based form.

However, the COVID-19 public health emergency has impacted these plans by shrinking the resources available for developing and maintaining multiple reporting formats. The agency decides to scale back its ESRP to reduce the resource burden by implementing only the hotline, email address and paper-based form. They decide that this is a reasonable first step toward implementing the ESRP and put their plans to develop the more costly and complicated web-based reporting tool and phone application on hold.

The agency documents this change in an internal memo. During the annual ASP review and approval process, they update the section on their ESRP approach to note current reporting formats and include a development timeline for the other ESRP formats based on their current operational circumstances.

COVID-19 may have led to changes in transit operations, but ASP development, implementation and update processes allow agencies to assess their current situation and adjust their ASPs and SMS as needed. If your agency is in the ASP development phase, you can make these changes directly in the ASP. If your agency has already certified your ASP, your agency can document these changes and revise your ASP during your next annual ASP review and update (as directed by your agency leadership and State Safety Oversight Agency, for rail transit agencies only).

Visit the [TAC Resource Library](#) for guides, fact sheets and webinars on the PTASP regulation. Contact the PTASP TAC at 1-877-827-7243 or [PTASP-TAC@dot.gov](mailto:PTASP-TAC@dot.gov) for assistance with any PTASP-related topic.

## Bi-State Safety Oversight Team Keeps Metrolink Patrons on Track to Safety

*By: Justin Sobeck, Program Manager, Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT)*

Formed in 2017, the Bi-State Safety Oversight (BSSO) team, which is comprised of the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) and Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) personnel, has the distinction of jointly overseeing rail transit safety initiatives for the Bi-State Development (BSD) Metrolink light rail system. BSD is celebrating 70 years since President Harry S. Truman signed an interstate compact between Missouri and Illinois, creating the agency to serve and enrich the Greater St. Louis region. In 1963, BSD acquired 15 privately or otherwise held transit firms, and began operation of St. Louis' first regional transit system. Among the acquisition were the remaining streetcar systems in St. Louis, which were operated until May of 1966 when the last former St. Louis Public Service Company routes were discontinued and replaced by buses.

By the late 1980's, regional rail transit was back on the radar and became a major discussion point. Idled by the utilization of larger and higher capacity freight cars, and dwindling rail traffic, the City of St. Louis acquired the Eads Bridge through a land swap with the Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis. Built in 1874 and named for designer-builder James B. Eads, the Eads is historically important as the first bridge spanning the Mississippi River south of the confluence with the Missouri River, and for being the longest rigid span at the time of construction until 1877. It was also the first large scale application of metal as a structural material and led to a shift from wrought iron to steel as the material of choice for larger structures.

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BSD received the bridge from the City of St. Louis in 1989 along with the tunnel approach under the city streets in Missouri and an elevated approach in Illinois. This new right-of-way allowed for further planning of Metrolink, the region's light rail system. A thorough restoration of the bridge between 2012-2016 has enhanced the structure, and the reduced load of light rail vehicles that traverse it now, instead of freight and passenger trains, has extended its life. Members of the BSSO team participated in a February 2020 walk of the span's rail deck as part of a National Highway Institute – Fracture Critical Inspection Techniques for Steel Bridges class tour.

The initial 18-mile system from Lambert-St. Louis International Airport to Fifth and Missouri in East St. Louis was opened to the public in early 1993. The opening of the new system garnered a visit from then President Bill Clinton. Extended again in 1999, 2001, 2002 and 2006, Metrolink has a combined 35 route miles in Illinois and Missouri with a new expansion planned to MidAmerica Airport near Mascoutah, IL, which will link the region's two largest airports by rail.

Historically, the MoDOT Multimodal Operations Rail Safety office was deemed the SSO entity for the system, including the original two miles into Illinois. Further extensions led to the creation of the St. Clair County Transit District, with assistance from IDOT as the State Safety Oversight Agency (SSOA) for Illinois, and the two agencies had an informal agreement to handle the dissimilar oversight burdens. With the advent of the FAST Act and pending Part 674 certification, St. Clair County ceded the SSOA role to IDOT's Office of Intermodal Project Implementation. To more effectively provide consistent joint oversight of Metrolink, the Bi-State Safety Oversight (BSSO) team was crafted, pooling the collective resources of both IDOT and MoDOT.

In 2017, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was executed, forming the BSSO and outlining the respective responsibilities of each agency. The MOU also treated the entire 38-stop, 46-mile system as one seamless entity for both parties. An aspect of this agreement is Metrolink's continued use of a Missouri operator's Hours of Service requirement, which is applicable to the entire system into Illinois, and collectively enforced by the BSSO. Further assisting with this one team, one entity approach, is the BSSO's shared use of contract support, keeping communication channels open in all directions. With IDOT staff based in Chicago, IL, and MoDOT SSOA staff working remotely in the St. Louis region, before the COVID-19 travel and on site restrictions were enacted, the BSSO had been familiar with providing oversight support in a remote environment.

The BSSO team is especially proud of its recent collaborative effort in the review and approval of Metrolink's Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) and ongoing Safety Management System (SMS) implementation efforts, working with the Metrolink System Safety team. Of the relationship with BSSO, Metrolink System Safety, Security and Emergency Management Director, Andrew Ghiassi, said, "Collaboration with our State Safety Oversight is a key part of the success of our safety culture at Bi-State Development, executed through continued communication and transparency." The BSSO meets at least quarterly with key Metrolink staff to review and discuss hazards, Corrective Actions Plans, accidents, events, internal audits and other oversight related matters. The BSSO has further found that in depth, topic specific breakout sessions are useful to delve into the details with the respective responsible parties and have been a useful tool to continue to deliver meaningful oversight in a virtual environment, leaving the Bi-Monthly or Quarterly meetings for higher-level updates. This blended approach allows the BSSO to effectively cover key Metrolink safety initiatives, while being respectful of everyone's availability.



Jonathan Stevanovich (left), IDOT Program Analyst and Justin Sobeck (right), MoDOT Program Manager, participated in the February 2020 Eads Bridge tour on behalf of the BSSO.

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Ongoing initiatives with BSD and Metrolink include monitoring capital projects underway at Central West End and Union Station platforms, as infrastructure is expanded and modernized, along with newly expanded and staffed Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), Transit Asset Management and Emergency Preparedness roles. IDOT and St. Clair County Transit have announced a light rail expansion project, a new 5.5-mile route extension from the current Shiloh-Scott east terminus of the system to the main terminal at the MidAmerica St. Louis Airport. The BSSO and Metrolink are on track to provide safety oversight and safe transit service to the patrons of the Bi-State area for years to come.

## FTA Issues Safety Bulletins on End-of-Railcar Door Signage and Inward- and Outward-Facing Image and Audio Recorders

### FTA Safety Bulletin (SB) 20-1: End-of-Railcar Door Signage and Messaging

On December 30, 2020, FTA issued [SB 20-1: End-of-Railcar Door Signage and Messaging](#) to Rail Transit Agencies (RTAs) to share safety considerations for the use of safety messaging and signage on end-of-railcar doors.

The term “end-of-railcar doors” describes a specific configuration used to couple two or more rail vehicles. These doors are located at the front and rear of a railcar and open onto an exterior space between or beyond the railcars. RTAs display a variety of end-of-railcar door messaging and signage to discourage passenger use of railcar doors; however, the signage and the messaging is not standardized across the industry and, in some cases, within the RTA. Inadequate signage and messaging on the dangers of passing between end-of-railcar doors poses a safety risk to transit employees and passengers.

The FTA encourages, through SB 20-1, RTAs to evaluate the design and placement of the warning signs and messages within their railcars and consider adopting voluntary or international safety standards. SB 20-1 provides links to resources that contain information on developing end-of-railcar door signage and messaging.

### FTA Safety Bulletin (SB) 20-2: Inward- and Outward-Facing Image and Audio Recorders

On December 30, 2020, FTA issued [SB 20-2: Inward- and Outward-Facing Image and Audio Recorders](#) to provide information to State Safety Oversight Agencies (SSOAs) and RTAs on the implementation of inward- and outward-facing image and audio recorders in rail transit compartments.

Rail transit vehicles that are not equipped with inward- and outward-facing cameras and audio recorders may pose an increased risk to rail transit agencies with repeat accidents, operator rule violations and unidentified hazards. RTAs may consider the installation of inward- and outward-facing image and audio recorders to support the safety risk management and safety assurance activities required under the [Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan regulation \(49 CFR part 673\)](#). RTAs also may consider adopting existing voluntary standards to support their implementation of inward- and outward-facing audio and image recorders

SB 20-2 provides links to resources to help RTAs assess the requirements for inward- and outward-facing image and audio recorders and available funding under FTA’s formula programs. FTA will host a webinar on both Safety Bulletins on Tuesday, January 26, 2021 at 2:00 pm Eastern Time. [Registration](#) is required to attend the webinar.



## FTA Safety and Oversight Employee Spotlight: Tom Wilson



**Tom Wilson**  
Emergency Relief Program  
Manager, Federal Transit  
Administration

**How would you explain your job to someone you've never met?** I manage a grant program that helps public transportation providers recover from the unplanned expenses that come in the wake of a natural disaster so they can rebuild and get back to serving their communities quickly.

**What excites you most about your job?** It is hard for anyone to budget ahead for a hurricane, an earthquake – or even a months-long pandemic. And yet, that is exactly when transit agencies are asked to go above and beyond, working over-time to help their communities respond. At the same time, transit vehicles, facilities and other infrastructure can be damaged, which hampers the transit agency's ability to continue operating the services that people rely on. So, I am excited whenever FTA can be the partner that has their back, helping reimburse those unexpected expenses and rebuild the infrastructure that allows them to continue our common mission. On a day-to-day basis, though, I would say the problem-solving nature of the job is what keeps me really engaged. Because Emergency Relief is a relatively new program, a lot of the questions that come our way have never been asked before.

**What were you doing prior to this role?** Before joining the Office of Program Management, I was FTA's speechwriter and social media lead for six years. Working and traveling with FTA Administrators and other leaders gave me a broad understanding of our work and the role we play in America's communities. Now, I am grateful to have the opportunity to dive deeper. Before that, I was a Communications Director and Speechwriter at the state level. My undergraduate degree is in anthropology, which may seem like an odd background for a Program Manager, but the way I look at it, my job is to dig into and understand the esoteric knowledge and practices of federal grants management and subject matter experts and then turn around and communicate that information in a way that's easily understood by recipients, regional staff and members of the public—and I do not even have to eat any weird foods!

**What is your favorite form of transportation and why?** Trains, of course! My grandfather was a railroad engineer and sparked my love of the big machines early on. But it is also a particularly comfortable way to travel – when it is not overly crowded. Commuting by train, for me, is “found time” that I can relax, read, nap, whatever. Of course, the current 60-second commute down my stairs is even better. But if I have to get out into the world, give me a train, please.

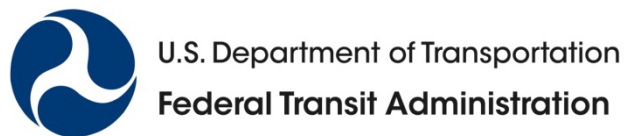
**If you could learn any skill, what would it be?** I would like to be able to play the cello. I love the sound, which to me is reminiscent of the range and dynamics of the human voice. It is also a great accompaniment for the acoustic guitar, my main instrument.

**If you could only pick three foods to eat for a month, which foods would you choose?**

- Pizza. I checked, and there is nothing in statute or guidance that would prohibit me from selecting a food with endless variety.
- Granny Smith apples, cut into slices. I am going to need some fruit, I reckon.
- French fries? This seems like an awfully unhealthy diet for a month, but I need a salt-delivery-device.

**What are you most looking forward to in 2021?** Museums, concerts and dining out. Here is to hoping for a happy and healthy year!





Federal Transit Administration  
Office of Transit Safety and Oversight  
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE  
Washington, DC 20590

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## Upcoming Speaking Events and Webinars

### [FTA Webinar: Overview of FTA Safety Bulletins 20-1 and 20-2](#)

January 26, 2021 | 2:00—3:00 pm EST

### [PTASP Webinar: Implementing an Agency Safety Plan During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency](#)

January 27, 2021 | 1:30—3:00 pm EST

