



*A bold voice for transportation workers*

## **IT'S TIME TO IMPROVE BUS DRIVER SAFETY AND HEALTH**

Too often, our nation's intercity bus drivers face unique health and safety challenges that are not being addressed by employers and policymakers at all levels. Bus driver assaults are on the rise, causing unacceptably high rates of injury and worker anxiety. Making this work even more stressful, many bus drivers are not provided enough time in their workday for the bathroom breaks most Americans take for granted. The time has come for federal authorities, labor and management to sit down and find solutions to these problems.

Attacks on drivers are now commonplace and transit operators face physical dangers every day when they show up to work. These incidents include assault with a deadly weapon, sexual assault, punching, spitting and verbal abuse. They may be precipitated by cutbacks in bus frequency, elimination of routes, fare evasion, passenger complaints, service problems or rule enforcement (for example, an operator may ask a rider not to smoke). To make matters worse, bus drivers often work alone, which leaves them exposed to the worst abuses often without the ability to identify witnesses to the crimes.

These assaults do not simply cause physical and emotional hardship for bus drivers. The violence can quickly spread within the closed confines of a bus and passengers are also often harmed. Assaults that occur while a bus is moving may cause the driver to lose control of the vehicle, putting pedestrians, passengers and other vehicles in imminent danger.

A variety of solutions have been proposed including vehicle design changes and more policing. The installation of plexiglass partitions would separate drivers from passengers and make it difficult for potential assailants to attack or spit on operators. In Europe, driver side doors are commonplace and have saved drivers' lives. Better enforcement is also essential. The presence of uniformed police officers would decrease the likelihood of dangerous passenger behavior. Penalties should be increased and the courts should enforce sentencing guidelines. All too often, the judicial system allows defendants to avoid serious penalties for infractions that frighten or injure operators.

Many transit agencies are also increasing the focus on evidence collection. Last year, after considerable urging by Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 members, the New York City MTA began offering rewards of up to \$2,000 for information that leads to arrest and indictment. This program, Transit Watch, is designed to encourage witnesses to stay onsite after an assault occurs in order to provide evidence against attackers. Transport for London, which operates the Tube subway system, has had considerable success with the use of DNA "Spit Kits" to identify attackers. Since the program began in 2003, spitting on operators decreased by 75 percent and over 400 attackers have been convicted. These types of programs need to be aggressively implemented throughout the country.



In recent years, TWU and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) have worked with public transportation agencies to convene summits in Philadelphia and New York City to address assaults on transit workers. These productive discussions should be used as a national model to address this growing concern.

To put a national spotlight on this problem, we urge the Department of Transportation and Federal Transit Administration to hold a Summit on Bus Driver Assaults with TTD, transit unions, public transportation leaders and the Departments of Justice, Labor and Homeland Security.

Bus operators also face serious occupational health problems because many transit agencies do not provide suitable time or facilities to take bathroom breaks. Many routes do not begin or end in a location with restrooms. When they do, the facilities are not always safe or hygienic. And during the route it can be difficult to pull over to the side of the road and run into an unfamiliar building to use the bathroom.

This situation creates serious health problems for operators. Due to the stresses caused by tight schedules and inadequate bathroom access, bus operators often face a variety of medical issues, including urinary tract infections, incontinence and even bladder cancer. Nobody should be forced to tolerate a working environment that creates health problems of this sort.

Public transportation agencies must provide their employees the appropriate time and facilities to use the bathroom. Along bus lines it is not uncommon for transit agencies to make arrangements with businesses, including convenience stores and small shops, to address this issue. However, these arrangements are often not kept current or monitored effectively. Budget cuts and other economic issues often have priority. We urge transit agencies to continue to explore these types of alternatives to provide for drivers' most basic human needs.

No worker should have to worry about long term physical problems caused by their occupation and no employer should allow employees to face these risks. The time has come for labor and management, in coordination with the federal government, to sit down together and tackle these tough problems before anyone else is injured, killed or faces a serious health problem.

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