

Transportation Labor Opposes Transit Industry Effort to Thwart Worker Voices in Safety Committees

With public transportation ridership on the rise in the United States, there is a pressing need to address the accompanying increase in safety concerns across transit systems. These safety concerns include, but are not limited to, physical and verbal assaults against frontline workers and passengers; pedestrian incidents; mitigating exposure to infectious diseases; aging or faulty equipment and infrastructure; and more.

Labor unions representing transit workers have spearheaded safety efforts for decades and have made gains in federal legislation, rules, and regulations. For example, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) now requires transit agencies to identify and reduce safety risks through the use of Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans (PTASPs). These plans are critical tools to help address transit worker and rider assaults; respond to evolving public health concerns; develop training tools for workers, including de-escalation training; reduce pedestrian and vehicular incidents; establish risk reduction targets, safety performance criteria, and good repair standards for equipment and infrastructure; and more.

In addition, recent federal actions require transit agencies to implement joint employer and employee Safety Committees. These Safety Committees are responsible for reviewing and approving the agency's PTASP; identifying and recommending safety risk mitigations; setting annual safety performance targets for the safety risk reduction program; supporting the operation of each transit agency's Safety Management System (SMS); and more.

Now, there are efforts by transit agencies to skirt around labor-management cooperation and assert veto power in these collaborative spaces. **Transportation labor stands in staunch opposition to the so-called Safe Transit Accountability Act ([H.R. 4900](#)), legislation which seeks to restrain worker power and favor transit executives as they work together to address the many safety failings within our public transportation system.**

Labor advocates have continuously fought to facilitate meaningful federal transit safety policy improvements and for worker feedback to be taken seriously in the agency safety planning process. Transit agencies have not only failed to cultivate a safer environment for employees and riders, but have actively resisted implementing valuable feedback from frontline workers. Transit employees operate the vehicles, repair the track, walk the stations, service the equipment, and interact with passengers. No one is more familiar with safety hazards and associated risks than them. For too long, management's safety strategy has often been reactive instead of proactive.

In the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), lawmakers understood the crisis facing our public transit network and adopted a provision that requires public transit agencies

serving metropolitan areas to form safety committees with an equal number of management and frontline worker representatives who are tasked with approving PTASPs. Frontline transit workers have already seen incredible improvements in just the first few years of this new system, reaping positive results throughout major U.S. metropolitan areas. In fact, three safety plans were successfully completed by the Maryland Transit Administration and ATU Local 1300 without a need to evoke the tie-breaking process. Cities around the country have seen tangible improvements, including a 30% reduction in transit employee assaults in New York City, the installation of physical barriers to protect operators in Philadelphia, procurement of higher quality personal protective equipment for maintenance workers in Houston, and implementation of a passenger ban and rider code of conduct in Baltimore.

Despite these safety plans yielding life-saving results, some transit agencies are seeking a legislative change that would undermine this partnership by appointing an “accountable executive” who would serve as the sole tiebreaker of any safety committee dispute. If management has the final say on PTASPs, valuable insight from employees is lost in the process. The transit operators who fear for their lives and worry about making it home safely to their families are the eyes and ears of our transit systems; they have informed, valuable insight about the safety of the system overall and risks to passengers as well. Maintaining the current collaborative process where committees decide the tie-breaking decision is critical for continued success. This process ensures that both parties come to committee discussions prepared to work, view each other as cooperative partners, and attend discussions with good faith intentions to participate meaningfully. As a result, these joint committees produce improved safety outcomes and increased trust and communication that supports better relationships even outside of this safety forum. Sidelining workers’ expertise by establishing a tie-breaking “accountable executive” with the authority to reject committee recommendations would result in a slide backwards to previous conditions that Congress has already deemed unacceptable.

Transit safety is public safety, and we share the same concerns that the current administration has about the well-being of commuters and the transit workforce. The Safe Transit Accountability Act would not make our transit network safer for anyone – it would reinforce the same failed policies that created the current crisis. Transit agency CEOs cannot accurately or adequately address the public transit crime crisis from the comfort of their offices. Our members are the eyes, the ears, and the backbone of the American transit network. Transit agencies do not run without employees, and neither can transit safety committees.

Policy Statement No. S26-09

ADOPTED 6.7.26