

News From  
U.S. Senator

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# Barbara Boxer

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**STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR BARBARA BOXER  
COMMERCE COMMITTEE BRIEFING ON RAIL SAFETY  
SEPTEMBER 23, 2008**

I want to thank Chairman Inouye, Senator Lautenberg and the Senate Commerce Committee for giving me the opportunity to host this important briefing today.

On Friday, September 12, 2008, a Metrolink commuter rail train carrying 225 passengers returning home to Simi Valley during rush hour collided head on with a Union Pacific freight train in Chatsworth, California.

Tragically, 25 people lost their lives in that terrible crash and another 135 suffered injuries. Forty of those injuries are critical and many sustained injuries that may require lifetime care.

My thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families at this time.

I also want to thank the first responders and community leaders for all of their heroic efforts during this tragedy.

In the wake of this tragedy, it is important we examine—as best we can at this time—the factors and events that led up to this collision, so that we can take steps to ensure that something like this never happens again.

Last Tuesday, I joined Senator Feinstein in introducing legislation that would require positive train control systems to be implemented by 2014 nationwide, and in areas of high risk by 2012.

Positive Train Control is a crucial tool in the ongoing efforts to prevent head on train collisions.

In fact, the National Transportation Safety Board has been calling for the implementation of positive train control systems since the inception of its Most Wanted Transportation Safety Improvements list in 1990. In its most recent list, the NTSB states, “The board believes..... positive train control is particularly important in places where passenger trains and freight trains both operate.”

This safety issue was further highlighted when a freight train and a commuter train collided head-on in Placentia, California, in 2002, which led to the deaths of two people.

In September 1999, the Federal Railroad Administration's Railroad Safety Advisory Committee (RSAC) reported that: Positive Train Control could prevent approximately 40 to 60 accidents, about 7 fatalities and 55 injuries each year.

The Positive Train Control system works by combining digital communications with Global Positioning System technology to monitor train locations and speeds.

These systems can detect: excessive speed; improperly aligned switches; whether trains are on the wrong track; unauthorized train movements; and whether trains have missed signals to slow or stop. If engineers do not comply with signals, the system automatically puts on the brakes.

Both the House and Senate have passed comprehensive rail safety legislation this session that includes provisions to implement positive train control systems. However, I strongly believe as negotiations move forward, it is imperative that we move to speed up the timelines for implementation and ensure that these systems are in place for high risk areas by 2012 and other areas by 2014.

Senator Feinstein and I feel a great sense of urgency and are working to get legislation passed this Congress.

I also believe we need to examine other issues related to this tragedy, including the cap on damages for victims of rail accidents, the impact of worker fatigue, the use of personal communication devices when operating trains, the training and certification requirements for employees of both freight and commuter rail, and whether Federal grants are appropriate and warranted.

As gas prices continue to rise and more and more families turn to public transit, we must take additional steps to ensure the safety of our commuters.

I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on the Senate Commerce Committee to improve rail safety for both commuter and freight rail.

Today, it is my hope that we will be able to shed some light on this accident and come away with some clear, consensus ideas for improving safety as we move forward.

I am pleased that we are joined today by:

The Honorable Kitty Higgins, Board Member, National Transportation Safety Board;

The Honorable Joseph H. Boardman, Administrator, Federal Railroad Administration;

Ron Roberts, Chairman of the Board, Metrolink;

Dennis Duffy, Executive Vice President of Operations, Union Pacific;

Thank you all for appearing on such short notice. I look forward to hearing from you all today.

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