

September 25, 2008
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Metro Board Urges New Safety Measures for Metrolink

DOWNLOAD: Joint motion (combined items 49 and 50) by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Supervisor Michael Antonovich, Supervisor Don Knabe, Mayor Ara Najarian, and Director Richard Katz on enhanced commuter rail safety. (PDF)

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) Board today unanimously adopted a motion that recommends a series of immediate safety improvements that it wants the Metrolink Board, operator of Southern California's commuter rail system, to pursue to prevent future train accidents.

The motion's key recommendations are to immediately staff Metrolink locomotive cabs with two qualified engineers, implement "Automatic Train Stop" technology on trains already equipped to handle the technology, and install video cameras and digital video recorders or equivalent technology to monitor engineers and other staff inside locomotive cabs.

"This tragedy requires that we do everything we can to improve the safety of our commuter rail system," said L.A. City Mayor and Metro Board Chair Antonio Villaraigosa, who led the motion. "We must implement as many safeguards as possible and create redundant layers of safety for the protection of transit riders throughout Southern California."

The motion calls for Metrolink to immediately establish a "Commuter Rail Safety Peer Review Panel" to evaluate Metrolink's existing safety plans and operating procedures, as well as to review such plans for freight lines. Freight rail operators will be challenged also to employ Automatic Train Stop technology for their trains that operate in the Metrolink service area.

Metro will immediately identify and program \$5 million to install a positive train control system and/or other effective collision avoidance system within Los Angeles County and report back to the Metro Board in October with cost estimates and other requirements. Metro will also work with Metrolink's other funding partners in four other counties of Southern California to secure, identify and program funds to implement a collision avoidance system in their own region served by Metrolink.

Positive train control systems prevent train collisions and over-speed accidents by using global positioning systems (GPS) and automatic control systems to override mistakes made by human operators. Positive train controls are considered particularly important in regions like Southern California where Metrolink commuter trains share the same track as freight trains.

The National Transportation Safety Board estimates that implementing positive train controls on the nation's 100,000-mile rail network would cost \$2.3 billion, or \$23,000 per mile. Locally, the Los Angeles County portion of the Metrolink service area includes nearly 186 miles. Accordingly, a positive train control system could cost approximately \$4.3 million to implement within the county.

Metrolink's CEO would also be responsible for developing a comprehensive commuter and freight rail master plan that evaluates and recommends additional safety technology and infrastructure upgrades.

The motion also asks that Metro staff report back next month on the feasibility, including implementation and costs, for installing shoulder harness/lap belts on all Metrolink trains.

Additional recommendations include official "support" positions on federal legislation to install positive train control and other collision avoidance systems nationally and to provide federal assistance to families in rail passenger accidents. The motion includes several legislative advocacy efforts intended to increase commuter train safety throughout the Metrolink network.

Metro-157

Editors Note: "Metro" should be used when referring to this agency.

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