



**HEARING ON
THE JUNE 22ND RED LINE METRORAIL ACCIDENT**

**“BACK ON TRACK: WMATA RED LINE METRORAIL
ACCIDENT”**

**Testimony of
John B. Catoe, Jr.
General Manager, WMATA**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce,
Postal Service and the District of Columbia of the
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

**July 14, 2009, 2:00 p.m.
Room 2154
Rayburn House Office Building**

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Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Chaffetz, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am John B. Catoe, Jr., General Manager of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, known as WMATA, or Metro. My testimony today will provide an overview of the basic facts related to the tragic Metrorail accident that took place on June 22, 2009, and inform the Subcommittee about the steps that Metro has taken since the accident to ensure the safety of riders and employees.

At the outset, let me extend my sympathies, and those of all Metro employees, to the families of those who died in the accident. I am saddened by their deaths, but I know my grief cannot compare to that of their families and friends. Our thoughts also go to those who were injured. This is an incredibly difficult time for them and their loved ones, and all of us at Metro hope for their speedy recovery.

Let me also take a moment to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of the first responders and everyone else who worked to save lives and to offer comfort to those affected by this accident. Our first responders from the Metro Transit Police Department, along with our rail operations and safety staff worked with teams from a large number of local fire departments and emergency rescue squads, and emergency

aid providers throughout the night on the 22nd and into the following days and weeks. I am grateful for the assistance of the first responders that day and for the many people who offered assistance in numerous ways. At the risk of inadvertently omitting any particular group, I wish to acknowledge the first responders as well as other entities that offered technical and other support: American Public Transportation Association; Bay Area Rapid Transit; Blue Cross and Blue Shield; Chicago Transit Authority; Cigna; COPE EAP; CSX police; District of Columbia Fire Department; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Federal Transit Administration, Hilton Hotels; JW Marriott Hotel; Kaiser Permanente; London Underground; Los Angeles Metrolink; Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority; Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority; Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority; Metropolitan Police Department; National Capital Chapter of the American Red Cross; National Transportation Safety Board; New York City Transit; Salvation Army; Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority; Salvation Army; Transportation Security Administration.

While Metro is a transportation provider, safety is at the foundation of everything we do. We have always taken our responsibility for safety seriously, and we will not rest until we know the cause of last month's accident and have addressed it.

Events of June 22

Let me give you the basic facts about the events of June 22, 2009. At 4:58 p.m., a six-car Red Line Metrorail train collided with another six-car Red Line train that was stopped on the track ahead. Both trains were headed in the direction of Shady Grove. The stopped train was on the track north of the Fort Totten Metrorail station, waiting for another train to clear the platform so that it could enter the station. The first car of the striking train came to rest on top of the trailing car of the stopped train.

Local fire and rescue units were quickly on the scene, along with Metro safety and rail officials and other senior personnel, Metro Transit Police, and officials from the National Transportation Safety Board. Tragically, nine people lost their lives, including the operator of the striking train, and more than 70 were injured.

Because this accident occurred at the height of rush hour on our busiest rail line, we did our best to continue service on two separate segments of the Red Line on either side of the accident site. Red Line service was severely delayed, and as quickly as possible we established free shuttle bus services to help Red Line customers get around the incident. Through the use of email alerts, announcements, and notices on our website, our customer call center, and postings on social media resources such as Twitter, Metro advised riders to utilize the Green Line or Metrobus services and to avoid the Red Line if possible. We also issued a series of press releases so that the

local media could get the word out about the accident and resulting service disruptions.

The track between the Takoma and Fort Totten Metrorail stations was re-opened on June 27. From that date through July 2, trains ran at speeds of 35 miles per hour on the Red Line and at much slower speeds through the investigation site. As of July 3, we have lifted the speed restriction except on the segment of the line between the Takoma and Fort Totten Metrorail stations while the NTSB continues its investigation. As a result of restricted speeds and the necessity of operating one train at a time on that segment, other trains along the line will necessarily move more slowly and we are not able to operate as many trains along the line. Metro appreciates the patience of our customers as we continue to work to provide the best service possible under the circumstances. I am as anxious as they are to restore the entire Red Line to normal service.

Metro Actions since June 22

The National Transportation Safety Board is the lead agency in charge of investigating the causes of the June 22 accident. Metro is cooperating fully in that investigation. While it may be months before the NTSB issues a final report, we are not waiting for the final report before taking action to enhance safety for our riders and employees. We have already taken a number of steps to ensure that the system is as safe as possible.

Metro has placed the operation of all of our trains, on every line, in manual, rather than automatic, mode. Automatic Train Control (ATC) is a system that Metro has been using since the Metrorail system opened in 1976 to operate trains during rush hours and other times of day. Until the cause of the accident is determined, I felt that it was prudent to operate in manual mode.

Metro has physically investigated each of the 3,000 track circuits installed on our rail system, and is running daily computerized analytical tests. Metrorail tracks are divided into segments called "blocks." Blocks include "track circuits," which are electrical circuits that are part of a signal system that sends information, authorization, and speed commands between the track and trains. Among other things, track circuits detect the presence of other trains and provide information that is used to maintain safe distances between trains.

Without commenting on the investigation, I can say that the track circuits have been a focus of concern for Metro since the accident. During a special review of the data after the accident, Metro discovered that a specific track circuit in the area of the accident intermittently lost its ability to detect trains. This is not an issue that would have been easily detectable to controllers in Metro's Operations Control Center (OCC).

Prior to the accident, Metro conducted computerized analytical tests on a monthly basis to review what is taking place electronically in the rail system. Metro is currently conducting such tests on a daily basis. We have found no similar anomalies in other track circuits in the system.

In addition, shortly after the accident I directed Metro staff to physically investigate each of the 3000 track circuits on our rail system to check that the circuits are working properly and sending the correct signals. We have now completed our check of those circuits, and determined that 99.97% of them needed no adjustment whatsoever. Three circuits – two in our rail yards and one on the main track – were within the safety tolerance range, but because they were on the lower end of that range, we made adjustments to them.

Metro has requested an independent, external review of our Automatic Train Control system. As an added precaution, we have asked a group of train signal experts from outside Metro to evaluate our automatic train control system equipment and procedures. The American Public Transportation Association will support the efforts of this independent review team, which brings a wealth of real-world experience in track signaling and circuitry.

Metro is running its oldest cars in the center of trains. News reports have also focused on the fact that the cars in the striking train were among the oldest in Metro's fleet, purchased between 1974 and 1978 from Rohr Industries for the opening of the

subway system. These cars make up approximately 25% of Metrorail's fleet. The 1000-series railcars, which have been maintained and rehabilitated throughout their years of use, are safe, or we would not be operating them.

We have a procurement process underway to replacing those cars, as they are approaching the end of their useful life. We are ready to purchase the replacement cars as soon as funding is secured. In the meantime, we are running those 1000-series railcars in the center, or within "the belly," of our trains, rather than as the leading or trailing cars of a train. As of today, 100 percent of those railcars have been shifted.

Metro is continuing to communicate regularly with customers about what to expect on the Red Line. We recognize that it is an inconvenience to a great many of our customers that we have so far been unable to return to pre-accident levels of service on the Red Line. As discussed above, this situation is due to the restrictions currently in place for trains traveling through the accident area. We are doing all that we can to increase the level of service on the Red Line. In recent days, we have increased the total number of trains and the number of eight-car trains servicing that line in recent days. At the same time, we are continuing to make every effort to provide our customers with current, accurate information to assist them in planning their daily travels. We have issued numerous press releases regarding Red Line service since the accident, our email alert system provides regular updates to our

55,000 subscribers, and the passenger information signs in our stations display information throughout the system regarding the service disruptions.

Metro's Capital Needs

The tragedy of June 22 has focused attention once again on the need for greater investment in Metro's aging infrastructure. The first line of the Metrorail system opened in 1976, and we are rapidly approaching middle age. At the same time, ridership is at an all-time high, and is projected to grow still more in the coming decades.

Last fall, Metro released a comprehensive assessment of the agency's capital needs over the next ten years. This capital needs inventory totals \$11.4 billion, and does not include any expansion of the system beyond its current service area. The inventory contains needs covering Metro's rail, bus, and paratransit systems, and includes the replacement of the 1000 series cars as well as upgrades to the automatic train control system, including track circuits and a number of other equipment and subsystems.

As Members of this Subcommittee are well aware, Metro was created primarily to serve the federal government. Today, nearly half of Metrorail's peak period riders are federal employees, and the federal government relies on Metro for daily

transportation of visitors to the capital and for national events such as presidential inaugurations, state funerals, celebrations and festivals on or near the National Mall.

Recognizing Metro's unique relationship to the federal government and that Metro is the only major transit system in the United States without a significant dedicated funding stream, this Subcommittee, the full Oversight and Government Reform Committee, and our local Congressional delegation worked hard to develop legislation, enacted in October 2008, that authorized \$1.5 billion in federal funding over ten years for Metro's capital and maintenance projects, to be matched by an equal contribution from Metro's local funding jurisdictions.

Before Metro can receive the funding, the authorizing legislation requires the Interstate Compact that created Metro to be amended to include three new provisions: the local match for the federal appropriation must be derived from dedicated sources; Metro must have an Office of Inspector General (*note*: Metro established this office and hired its first IG before the legislation passed); and Metro's Board of Directors must be expanded to include four federal Board members (two voting members and two alternates).

The District of Columbia, State of Maryland, and Commonwealth of Virginia have passed identical legislation making these amendments to the Compact. The amendments will go into effect once Congress passes, and the President signs, a

Joint Resolution approving them. Joint Resolutions have been introduced in both the House and the Senate.

I want to thank the members of the Subcommittee for their work on the federal authorization for Metro, and urge Congress to do two things: quickly approve the Joint Resolutions on the WMATA Compact, and include the first \$150 million of the \$1.5 billion authorization in the FY2010 appropriations bill. This funding would be used to meet some of Metro's most urgent needs, including replacement of our oldest rail cars and associated infrastructure and support systems.

Conclusion

Safety always has been and always will be our number-one priority. People in this region and around the country are asking whether it is still safe to ride Metrorail or other similar systems. I want to stress that public transportation in general, and heavy rail or rapid transit systems such as Metrorail in particular, are one of the safest modes of transportation available. If the alternative is driving an automobile, the numbers speak for themselves. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Transportation, from 2000-2007, there were 151 fatalities on heavy rail systems; during that same period, about 327,214 people nationwide were killed in traffic accidents.

We still do not know what caused the tragic accident on June 22. It is my expectation that the NTSB investigation will provide us with an answer to that question in the near future, and that their findings, coupled with Metro's internal review and the independent external review, will guide us in determining what needs to be done to make the Metrorail system even safer and to avoid such a tragedy in the future.