

TriMet Safety & Service Excellence Task Force

Meeting Date: Thursday, July 29, 2010

Start of meeting: 5 p.m.

End of meeting: 7 p.m.

Location: Portland Building (1120 SW 5th Ave.)
Room C – 2nd floor

Session: Public Meeting

Task Force Attendees: Tom Walsh [chair], Shirley Carter, Roger Pringle,
Stephanie Routh

Task Force Members Absent: Robert Burchfield, Greg Butler, Jan Campbell,
Dorothy Elmore, Tony Mehalovich, Deb Meihoff,
Rob Sadowsky, Amy Weeden

TriMet Staff [on agenda]: Josh Collins, Denis Van Dyke, Allison Horn [minutes]

TriMet Staff [in attendance]: Neil McFarlane, Rick Van Beveren [TM Board],
Shelly Lomax, Mary Fetsch, Jessica Tump

Public [Organization/Issue]: Jeff Kirkpatrick, Darla Sturdy [Aaron's Bridge to Safety] + 2
guests, Jason McHuff [rosecitytransit.org], Joy Kovacs,
John Putman, David Sale

Welcome/Introductions:

Tom Walsh began the meeting by welcoming the members of the Safety & Service Excellence Task Force and those who had taken time from their day to attend today's public session. Tom expressed the seriousness of the work ahead for the task force, and commended TriMet General Manager Neil McFarlane for demonstrating courage by asking for assistance and advice through an independent review conducted by the task force.

Background/Committee Charge:

TriMet General Manager Neil McFarlane expressed how the April 24 fatality refocused his perspective that safety is our first priority. He shared a bit about his background, how as executive director of capital projects he found that one of the best ways to measure the excellence of a contractor was to look at their record of safety.

Mr. McFarlane stated that the ability to ask for help and to strive for continuous improvement is a prevalent attitude among all TriMet employees, so it was not a difficult decision to call for the formation of the task force in the wake of the April 24 tragedy. Mr. McFarlane shared that he envisions that the task force will provide an independent review of safety and service excellence, and will provide a product to help guide TriMet to the highest levels of safety and customer service.

TriMet Board President Rick Van Beveren expressed his thanks to those serving on the task force. He shared that TriMet's Board of Directors has also sharpened its focus on safety since the fatal crash of April 24 and is committed to supporting the work of the task force. The board's interest is to hold TriMet management accountable for safety improvements—through TriMet's own efforts as well as the complementary aspects of TriMet's partners in transportation (pedestrians, bicycles, traffic signaling, etc.)

How the Task Force Will Do Its Work:

Former TriMet General Manager Tom Walsh described that the task force would engage in a broad level of input from customers, employees, stakeholders and others through a combination of public sessions and work sessions. Mr. Walsh stated that the task force's approach would be thoughtful and patient, and would operate independent of TriMet management. In addition, the task force is determined to deliver a stunning product by October 20, 2010.

Beyond the October deadline, Mr. Walsh shared that the task force will define success by measuring a significant improvement in safety throughout the TriMet system, as well as other improvements that will be brought about by a significant improvement in safety, including customer service, employee attitudes, service performance, etc. He indicated that every employee will feel the impact of a significant improvement in safety.

Schedule of Upcoming Meetings/Opportunity for Public Contribution:

Mr. Walsh described the schedule of upcoming public meetings where there would be opportunity for public comment at each session:

- Wednesday, August 11, 2010 5-7 p.m. Portland Building, Room C
- Wednesday, September 22, 2010 5-7 p.m. Portland Building, Room C
- Wednesday, October 20, 2010 5-7 p.m. Portland Building, Room C

Tom also stated that work sessions will be held in between public meetings. There is also a session scheduled for August 25, 2010 to gather feedback from TriMet employees.

Presentation of K&J Report – Phase 1:

Mr. Walsh introduced TriMet Operations Communications Manager Josh Collins and Interim Director of Safety & Security Denis Van Dyke to provide an overview of the Phase I Report from James Tucci of K&J Safety and Security Consulting Services, Inc. (K&J). *[Report available at www.trimet.org.]*

TriMet asked K&J to review, analyze and provide a safety system review and evaluation of TriMet policies, procedures and training. Mr. Collins stated that while K&J representatives could not be present today, they are scheduled to attend the upcoming August 11, 2010, public session to review the Phase II report. Mr. Van Dyke and Mr. Collins provided the following summary of the K&J report:

Overall, K&J found TriMet's safety programs are appropriate and are equal to or exceed the typical programs at other agencies of its size and service type. A number of safety related recommendations were noted in the K&J report to further enhance the exceptional programs TriMet currently has in place. K&J believes that TriMet embraces the goal of attaining the highest level of safety achievable for its organization and will continue to improve its programs with this goal in mind. This commitment is exemplified by TriMet undertaking this multi-phased system wide safety assessment.

The K&J Phase I Report indicated that TriMet has numerous "better than industry standard" programs currently in place and that TriMet is fully committed and actively involved in the practice and disciplines which characterize a strong safety program and process, as indicated by several proactive actions taken by TriMet immediate after the April 24, 2010, incident.

Though TriMet has a strong and viable system safety program, K&J identified several areas where improvements could be realized and numerous recommendations, including:

Rail Operations Rule Book and Operating Procedures

1. Develop a written procedure to formalize process of verifying that all transportation employees who are required to have a rule book to acknowledge receipt of individually issued changes and updates to the rules and the procedures that affect the operations of the system.
2. Look for opportunities to consolidate instructions, precautions or tasks that are common throughout the system.

Rail Operator Training/Certification

1. No recommendations. TriMet's training and certification program for rail operators is excellent and is considered an industry benchmark by K&J.

Bus Operator Standard Operating Procedures

1. Like rail operators, bus operators should carry their rules and procedures with them while on duty, and a portable (smaller or pocket-size) version should be made available so that operators can carry it with them for reference.

Bus Operator Training

1. While there is an annual training program, TriMet should develop annual “recertification” training for bus operators, similar to the program it has for rail operators.
2. Review and update the security training indicated in the operator training manual.
3. Provide a list of Over the Counter (OTC) drugs that may potentially cause impairment.

Bus Stops Guidelines

1. Review Bus Stop Guidelines manual on a regular schedule of every two years.
2. Revise Bus Stop Guidelines manual to accurately reflect the strong concerns with passenger security.
3. Emphasize that mid-block placement is the least desirable of all placements, and should be avoided unless there is absolutely no other alternative.
4. Elevate “safety” to the primary position in considerations for customer information tools.

System Safety Program Plan (SSPP)

1. Provide more specific information/language to improve clarity and remove ambiguity.
2. Revise reporting structure to reflect the importance of system safety.
 - a. TriMet is currently recruiting for a director of safety and security who will report directly to the general manager, elevating the importance of safety to the organization, and sending the message that commitment to safety and security starts at the top.
3. Note that the Safety and Security Certification process be the primary mode of hazard identification for new extensions.
4. Indicate that rules and procedures are reviewed annually.
5. Institute a full program of training Quality Assurance and efficiency/proficiency testing, to include one announced and one unannounced test per year, where bus and rail operators are formally evaluated for rule and procedure compliance and overall handling of their vehicles.
6. Clarify “periodic” emergency preparedness drills and ensure it is in line with industry recommendations (TSA recommends one field exerciser per calendar year).
7. Annual review of ALL major system safety and security documentation.
8. Review committees and make recommendations for streamlining committees and developing membership standards.

K&J provided an overview of various innovative technologies or design applications that TriMet and other jurisdictional partners should consider. While more study is needed to determine whether these applications should be considered “industry best practices,” early evidence suggests that such applications could have a significant benefit on safety. Suggestions included:

Turns and Audible/Visual Warning Devices

1. Perform thorough Hazard Analysis at specific locations related to the following:
 - a. Buses carrying passengers should not make right or left turns on red, even if it is legal for motor vehicles at that intersection.
 - b. Limit buses to restrictive left turns only.
 - c. Use embedded lights in pedestrian crossing (flashing) to indicate when it is OK for pedestrians to cross and to alert operators that pedestrians are in the crosswalk.
 - d. Pedestrian-only cycle during peak pedestrian times at particular intersections.

Task force member Roger Pringle asked about whether K&J would examine the TriMet business culture or just SOPs, Training and Policies. Mr. Collins provided clarification that K&J’s scope was to review, analyze and provide a safety system review and evaluation of TriMet policies, procedures and training. The Safety & Service Excellence Task Force would review, analyze and evaluate—and make recommendations for improving—TriMet’s business culture.

Bus operator and task force member Shirley Carter asked about the resources available to operators who may need a safe, secure environment or outlet to deal with on-the-job stress or other issues in their lives. Mr. Collins explained the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a confidential program for employees which provides a multitude of services/benefits to employees. Mr. Collins also talked about the “Employee Support” management model where proactive efforts are made to identify employee challenges earlier. For example, an operator’s customer feedback profile can be a leading indicator of challenges that an employee may be facing, and efforts are made to reach out and assist in resolving issues before they end up becoming disciplinary issues.

Task force member Stephanie Routh indicated that she is looking forward to discussing concurrent signals in an upcoming work session. She also advocated for a change in terminology— from “accident” to “crash” or “collision”—to demonstrate solution-oriented-thinking rather than focus on preventability.

Mr. Pringle expressed his appreciation for the job of the bus operator as gained by July 23, 2010, task force meeting where each individual got behind the wheel of a bus and drove around the Center Street bus yard. Mr. Pringle emphasized the tough job that operators face every day, and was determined to focus on the process of operator selection, assistance, training, management, discipline, etc., throughout his work on the task force.

Mr. Walsh talked about his experience with two very different management philosophies—"If you do it wrong, I will catch you" vs. "I expect you to do it right and I will help you to do it right." Mr. Walsh also shared an example of a successful management approach to safety—you can control the incident, you can't control the consequences [utility knife example].

Mr. Walsh asked General Manager Neil McFarlane about the status of the recruitment for a new director of safety and security. Mr. McFarlane answered that they hoped to identify a candidate by the end of August, and reiterated that the position would report directly to him (a recommendation noted in K&J's Phase I Report). While the new director of safety and security will spearhead the efforts following the work of the task force, it was acknowledged that TriMet has already taken steps to identify issues, review programs and follow-up with safety staff in the interim.

Mr. Pringle asked about ways in which TriMet monitors or measures results of safety programs. Mr. Van Dyke provided an explanation about the Accident/Incident Database (ACID) used to track information reported to Dispatch and Control. When asked about how TriMet compares with other agencies, Executive Director of Operations Shelly Lomax said that the National Transit Database, part of the Federal Transit Administration, has data, but they do not always tell the whole story. More information on data will be provided at upcoming task force meetings.

General comments from members of the public followed regarding the safety culture at transportation properties. David Sale, a parent of a young woman who was one of two pedestrians fatally injured in a crash with a TriMet bus in April 2010, wanted the task force to focus attention to all customers in and around the transit system—pedestrians, bicyclists, other motorists, as well as transit riders. General discussion followed regarding the need to examine operator training and certification programs, as well as examining ways to foster a customer-focused attitude.

Mr. Walsh predicted that TriMet will be acknowledged as the indisputable safety leader in the transit industry, an agency from whom others will seek advice. When TriMet arrives at that place—through hard work, dedication and commitment—the agency will need to figure out how to measure their safety record when they are at the top of the heap and there are no comparables.

Mr. Pringle stated that the task force would look for best practices and strive to learn from the experiences of other companies. Nordstrom, Starbucks, Indy 500 pit crews, Ritz Carlton, Les Schwab are all companies that have a reputation for finding ways to motivate employees to exceed expectations. For example, Les Schwab has small work units, a profit-sharing concept, an expectation of excellence beyond solving the challenges of the day—all of which point to the importance of the employee.

Ms. Routh reiterated that the operator—recognizing the human element in a very demanding role—should be central to the task force's charge.

Public Comment:

Darla Sturdy, a parent of a youth who was killed in a collision with a MAX train in 2003, read a speech that she had previously delivered to a local Rotary Club about her son, her perceptions of TriMet culture, her desire to make a difference in her community and the need for continuing education within the community. Mr. Pringle asked Ms. Sturdy to submit a short (one-page) list of education needs from her perspective, both within TriMet and within the community (kids and general public). Darla acknowledged the request and said she would be happy to provide the requested information.

John Putman, former chair of the Committee on Accessible Transportation (CAT), urged the task force to consider the importance of not just writing a plan, but also understanding how to implement the recommendations to make the plan work. John also commented that a culture that discourages an employee from admitting a small error for fear of discipline does not promote safety. Mr. Walsh invited Mr. Putman to help the task force throughout this process as his experience and knowledge would be valuable.

Chair's Close:

General Manager Neil McFarlane thanked the members of the task force and emphasized his support of their upcoming work on operator support, examining compliance vs. support philosophies and suggestions on how to deal with safety topics organizationally.

On behalf of the task force, Ms. Routh thanked everyone who showed up to participate in the process. She emphasized that it will take the creativity of everyone in the room to produce a good product.

Mr. Walsh adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting:

Wednesday, August 11, 2010, from 5-7pm @ Portland Building – Room C [Public Meeting]