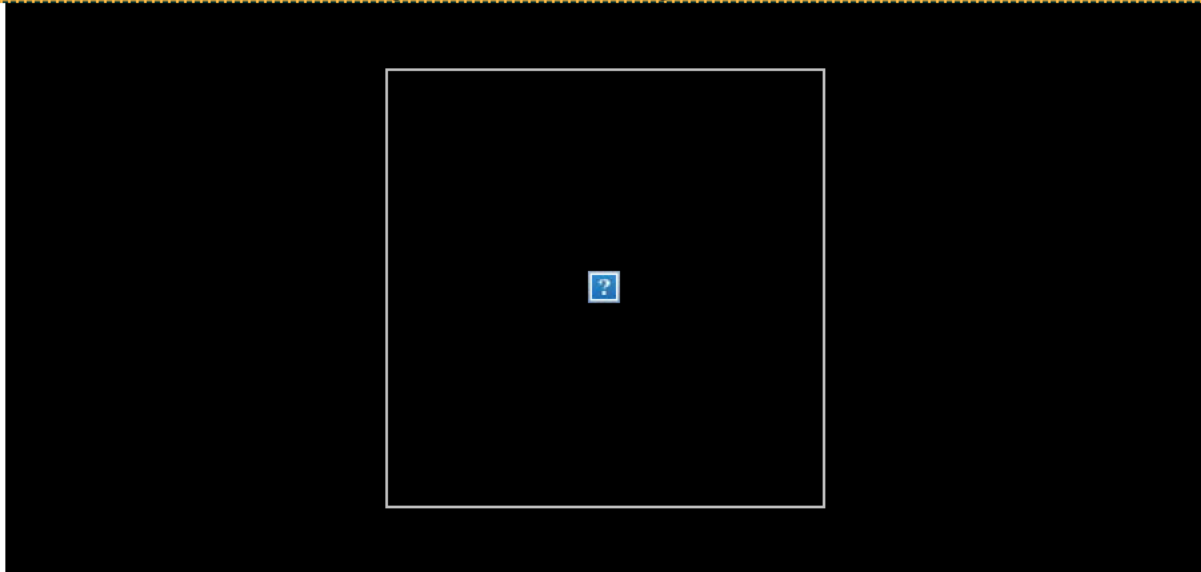


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Subject: Fw: NTSB calls for more federal transit oversight after WMATA derailment
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NTSB calls for more federal transit oversight after WMATA derailment

BY ALEX DAUGHERTY | 01/04/2024 02:04 PM EST

NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy said Thursday that the Federal Transit Administration needs to exercise its safety authority over transit agencies to prevent future incidents such as a 2021 WMATA derailment.

Homendy's remarks came during a board meeting on the [probable cause of the 2021 derailment](#) in Northern Virginia.

Homendy, speaking to reporters, said the 2015 surface transportation law gave

FTA the authority to impose safety rules and regulations on transit systems that accept federal money. But to date, FTA hasn't used that authority beyond recommending best practices, Homendy said, adding that buses have more federal oversight than rail transit systems.

"Here we are today with unenforceable safety standards, no enforceable safety standards to hold WMATA accountable," Homendy said. She said the NTSB first recommended a federal oversight capability of rail rapid transit systems in 1978, though Congress didn't grant FTA the authority until 2015.

"If you're FTA you don't need to encourage it, you need to mandate it," Homendy said. "Aviation, marine, pipeline, freight and intercity passenger rail — they're all regulated and those regulations are enforceable."

Homendy's remarks on the specifics of a 2021 derailment that led to WMATA's 7000 Series railcars going out of service for months laid blame on WMATA's safety culture and senior management at the time, who pled ignorance to issues with wheel sets that expanded to the point where they were able to jump the tracks. No one was seriously injured in the 2021 derailment.

Homendy did say that FTA issued guidance to transit agencies across the country after the 2021 derailment and a requested information on their wheel sets and that "no other transit agencies reported seeing anything." She said FTA recommended an increase of the press force on wheel sets as a result of the derailment, though the recommendation only affects WMATA and the Los Angeles Metro because they are the only transit agencies operating rail cars that weigh more than 20,000 pounds.

FTA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Background: WMATA has replaced 199 of 2992 wheel sets for 7000 Series cars across the system as of Wednesday, Homendy said. The agency has increased the frequency of railcar inspections to every 30 days for railcars with the old wheel sets and 60 days for railcars with the new wheel sets. WMATA began replacing the wheel sets in July of last year.

Homendy said that the NTSB's investigation found that WMATA knew about the wheel set issue and identified 31 wheel sets before the derailment that exceeded

the maximum width. She said the NTSB found that WMATA found an additional 50 wheel sets that exceeded the maximum width after the 2021 derailment.

"Had WMATA conducted a trend analysis...this incident may have been prevented," Homendy said. "This incident was 100 percent preventable."

Homendy also praised WMATA's current leadership installed after the derailment for being responsive and "taking this seriously." She said that the FTA, the railcar manufacturer Kawasaki, wheel set manufacturer ORX and the Amalgamated Transit Union were helpful in the NTSB's investigation. In a statement, Kawasaki said "the NTSB's conclusions align with our own findings and confirm that Kawasaki met the design and mounting specifications established by WMATA for the 7000 series wheelsets."

What's next: As WMATA continues to replace wheel sets, Homendy said the impacts of a potential government shutdown would be disastrous for the transit agency — particularly as it relies on fare revenue from commuting federal workers who could be forced to stay home starting later this month.

"A government shutdown would vastly reduce ridership on WMATA's system," Homendy said.

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