

TWU LOCAL 234 OPERATOR AND PUBLIC SAFETY REPORT

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on Task Force discussions, the Operator Survey, and meetings with SEPTA

SEPTA ITEMS

INCREASE POLICE PRESENCE

In the past, SEPTA and the Philadelphia Police Department maintained a “police check” routine for officers to document their surveillance of public transit. Operators requested that foot patrols and transit police ride SEPTA vehicles to maintain a presence.

Operators provided a list of locations at loops that have been designated as trouble areas. An increase of SEPTA and Philadelphia police presence could deter perpetrators from assaulting operators and riders. SEPTA agreed to increase the Transit Police presence on buses. SEPTA will provide a monthly update.

SEPTA and TWU Operators, Transit Police, and Law Enforcement agencies need to coordinate more effectively to improve emergency communication.

- Police check cards are available in the districts, but police do not check buses on a consistent basis or walk through. SEPTA offered to support this effort in the districts.
- Improve communication to police re: urgency for reaction.
- Provide direct communication for operators to police e.g. 911.

RESPONSE TO AN OPERATOR WHO WAS A VICTIM OF AN ASSAULT

SEPTA recognizes that when an operator has been the victim of an assault, he/she has understandably undergone a stressful experience. SEPTA and TWU agree to review the procedures following an assault. It is very important for controllers and supervisors to respond to the operator with sensitivity. In response to the TWU report, SEPTA senior management in Surface Transportation and Control Center responded that they are very committed to such sensitivity and will reinforce it with all controllers and supervisors. Any operator assault case where there are allegations of insensitivity by managers will be addressed promptly and thoroughly.

- TWU requested that SEPTA maintain victim confidentiality

TWU requested that SEPTA provide legal support for an Operator who pursues charges against the assailant. SEPTA will review this with their legal department.

- SEPTA to provide support for operators in court against assailants and assistance for operators to qualify for benefits after assault.

INCREASE LIGHTING AT LOOPS AND OTHER TROUBLE LOCATIONS

SEPTA responded to the TWU Report and offered to provide Local 234 a list of projects that are underway and a schedule for future work to improve security at loops and other locations.

SEPTA and TWU will form a subcommittee of the Joint Health and Safety Committee to coordinate with the Location Safety Committees to provide a list of trouble locations to improve security measures as well as increase lighting. Perpetrators may not be able to assault victims if these areas are less hidden.

- SEPTA will provide a status report and plans for improvements for the LSCs.

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PASSENGER ETIQUETTE AND RULES FOR RIDERS

There is a need to address non-cooperative, aggressive, and agitated types of passengers. Local 234 requests that SEPTA enhance the promotion of etiquette and Rules for Riders through Public Service Announcements on a level equal to the anti-fraudulent claims campaign. SEPTA responded and offered to work with TWU to explore implementing announcements and displays.

- Promote procedures for riders; Publicize rules and regulations to riders e.g. enunciator. SEPTA offered to provide TWU information about their passenger campaign.

In the summer of 2010 SEPTA began enrolling all new hire operators in a five day class in "Customer Service Social Skills" with a focus on conflict de-escalation. In September of 2011 SEPTA began a three day class for veteran operators in "Advanced Communication and Conflict De-escalation Skills". In the summer of 2012 the veteran operator class will be expanded to four days

- Conflict resolution to address fare or pass disputes

VEHICLE DESIGN

Partitions: SEPTA System Safety Director will provide an update on industry standards and experiences.

Emergency Exit: Operator side windows should provide an emergency exit. This will be critical if the Authority installed safety shields to protect operators from passenger assaults.

Secure Area for Operators' possessions: Many operators expressed the need to protect their belongings. The Task Force has reports of theft of possessions by passengers. SEPTA is responding to the TWU requests will provide recommendations.

- Provide secure areas for operator possessions on vehicles.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

There is a need for conflict resolution at various points of contact. Many operators expressed the need for team building with supervisors and the Control Center. Operators related their experiences that there was not enough support for their predicament as an assault victim. Supervisor and Control Center responses have humiliated some operators. The operators are concerned about SEPTA managers and investigators that exhibit a lack of sensitivity toward the operator after the assault. SEPTA responded that those managers are also attending the Red Kite course for conflict resolution with operators.

- TWU requested conflict resolution training for all operators, supervisors, and Control Center to address case sensitive situations and to promote teamwork for joint problem solving in reacting to assaults.
- Control Center should be more considerate to operators when they are victims of assaults. Address humiliation of operators when conflict occurs

OPERATOR SELF DEFENSE TRAINING

There is a need for proactive safety measures to train operators on how to cope with passenger situations that threaten to escalate into violence or have the potential to do so. This includes how to protect themselves in the event of an assault. Transit agencies such as Omnitrans in San Bernardino, California and Pierce Transit in Washington provide their bus

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operators with role playing situations to practice defusing and downplaying a situation, looking at situations on video to assess what situations were handled correctly and which incorrectly.

Agencies, such as Pierce Transit, have recognized that not all situations can be successfully defused and an attack on the operator may occur. They have joined other agencies in providing self-defense courses such as "Defense from a Seated Position." The emphasis is to teach the operator how to use their legs and feet to avoid the attack. Also, the course trains operators to open vehicle doors to eject the attacker.

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA ITEMS

INCREASE POLICE PRESENCE

Operators provided a list of locations at loops that have been designated as trouble areas. An increase of Philadelphia police presence could deter perpetrators from assaulting operators and riders. SEPTA agreed to increase the Transit Police presence on buses. It is requested that the City of Philadelphia foot patrols increase their presence on SEPTA vehicles and end of the routes further away from the subway interchanges.

The City of Philadelphia can review the list of trouble locations to improve security measures as well as increase lighting. Perpetrators may not be able to assault victims if these areas are less hidden.

SEPTA and TWU Operators, Transit Police, and Law Enforcement agencies need to coordinate more effectively to improve emergency communication.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

LEGISLATION

TWU Local 234 is supporting Pennsylvania Senate Bill 236 which would provide for additional protection against aggravated assault of transit workers. Passage of this legislation would provide transit workers the same protections presently afforded to many officers and employees specified under section 2702C of Title 18. Currently, aggravated assaults of transit workers are limited to felonies of the first degree. S.B. 236 would increase that penalty to the second degree against transit workers. Transit Workers perform an essential service throughout the state of Pennsylvania. A more serious penalty could deter assaults on transit workers. This campaign has been successful in more than 20 states.

FINAL STATEMENT

The TWU Local 234 Operator and Public Safety Task Force will continue its work, research, coalition building, lobbying, and recommendations until assaults on operators and the riding public have been drastically reduced. TWU will provide leadership to the campaign to improve safety on public transportation.

TWU and SEPTA will work in collaboration to address the following:

- Evaluate communication protocols between operators, SEPTA Control Center, SEPTA Police and Philadelphia police departments.
- SEPTA will provide TWU the Operator Assault report on a monthly basis and meet to review
- To develop training for defense from a seated position and passive resistance to be delivered at TWU Local 234

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NEXT STEPS

This report serves as the starting point to take action.

- TWU and SEPTA will address Operator and Public Safety in the Joint Health and Safety Committee. It is agreed to form a sub-committee to evaluate and implement a plan to improve safety for operators and the riding public.
- The joint TWU /SEPTA Operator and Public Safety initiative will solicit practical ideas from SEPTA management and the City of Philadelphia as well as the surrounding counties served by the transit system, along with law enforcement, and legislators at the municipal and state levels.
- TWU Local 234 is inviting community organizations along with other transit unions to participate.