

Communications and Safety

As with most transit operators, the MTA is aggressive in its management of operating safety. The overall responsibility for administering the safety program is assigned to the Director of Safety and Training, who reports to the Director of Operations. The Director of Safety and Training is supported by a variety of other personnel at the MTA, including part time contract “watchers”, trainers, and supervisors who assist in training drivers, retraining programs, and monitoring the performance of the driving work force.

The watchers observe the in-service practices of drivers, and their observance of correct operating procedures. Part of the road supervisors' job is to observe the drivers for various performance issues, including safety and operating rules. Training of new drivers includes a safety module. Any driver who exhibits unsound practices is provided with specialized retraining aimed at remedying such problems. Training facilities at the MTA are modest but adequate to the task, and include videotapes on a range of training and safety issues.

Bus Communications

The MTA has a fairly standard, but somewhat dated, two-way communications system in which the dispatchers who are housed in MTA's headquarters are able to communicate with the drivers and supervisors on the road. This can be used when, for example, there is a need to inform drivers of street detours that may arise out of notifications from Public Works. They are able to communicate with emergency service and public service agencies in case of an emergency.

Public and Passenger Safety

The passengers and drivers of MTA services are protected on buses through a combination of traditional transit security methods common in the industry. Among these are:

- Pre-employment background checks of motor vehicle, arrest, and prior employment records for new drivers
- Training for drivers in dealing with difficult people
- Radio communications between drives and dispatchers
- “Call the Police” destination signs that can be deployed by the driver
- An “Open mike” button that drivers can activate is being installed on all buses so dispatchers can hear what is going on in buses and take actions accordingly

The MTA has also tried on-board video cameras, and is in the process of installing a new type of video camera on a number of buses. The new articulated buses are equipped with a new video system with

two cameras that play into a 24-hour circular tape. The MTA is considering installing this system on all buses.

The MTA also has a program that rewards witnesses who come forward and provide information that relates to incidents on the system. This program is advertised on cards on the buses.

The MTA also has security guards posted at the landports from 6 PM to the early morning at the end of service hours. There are also security cameras in the rest rooms at the landports, and security people can gain access to the rest rooms from the outside. Security guards also ride the magnet school runs to monitor activity and deter incidents. They have no powers of arrest.

Conclusions

The Communication system between the dispatchers and the operating personnel is functional and adequate for the foreseeable future.

There is a reasonable arrangement for handling emergency situations that occur on buses from time to time.

Magnet buses are the only services on which there are on-board monitors to maintain order and deal with special problems.

Organizationally the Director of Safety should report to the Executive Director in order to comply with Federal guidelines. Federal inspectors will commonly check to see where the Safety Director is placed organizationally. A direct reporting relationship to the Executive Director provides some degree of independence from the operational management of most transit systems.

While there are no guarantees of personal safety, the MTA's current protections are typical of most transit systems of its type and size.

Recommendations

Reassign the Director of Safety and Training to report directly to the Executive Director, in accordance with Federal guidelines for the administration of safety programs.

The Director should develop a system safety plan that lays out the overall strategy for public, employee, and passenger safety with the appropriate tactics to achieve a high level of safety, and with specific tactics and a budget to support the program.

Cost Estimate

None.