

Date: December 13, 2016
To: TriMet Board of Directors
From: Neil McFarlane
Subject: Rail Safety Audit

Our MAX light rail system is regarded as a national model, carrying 40 million trips a year and doing it safely. We design and engineer checks and balances into the system to prevent collisions, close calls, and for much of the system, override human error to keep it safe for our riders and the public. At TriMet, safety is a value and we are always looking for ways to do better.

A year ago when our Chief Operating Officer Doug Kelsey came on board, he focused on our on-time performance (OTP). He took a deep dive into the data and has put changes in place moving us to achieve 90 percent OTP in the years ahead. But the data also revealed a growing trend of a high number of rule violations, or recordable safety events, that clearly demonstrate that we need to take immediate action to improve how we manage our rail system.

A recordable safety event includes going above the posted speed limit, even by one mph; departing a station platform before the signal fully turns “green”; or entering a rail segment while another train is in the same trackway (rest assured, the train automatically stops and the vehicles do not even come close to the other vehicle). Any of these infractions are significant and we called for an outside review to understand the underlying causes.

We hired a former National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator to conduct an independent audit to review 10 years of data and provide recommendations for potential solutions. Generally speaking, I would say that our high number of recordable safety events stems from:

- Years of being too comfortable and reliant on the redundant safety features built into the MAX system.
- Accepting these incidents as the norm and not following through on investigations, oversight and adequately managing performance.
- Infrastructure issues, such as design and placement of sensors along the rail line, a warranty issue with defective equipment now being replaced, and extending the recording time of the “black box” on the train to preserve data.

We welcome the audit from the NTSB expert, agree with all of the findings, and commit to implementing all 41 recommendations in a short, mid-term and long-term timeline. We have already begun implementation to improve our management, training and oversight, including making personnel and structural changes, and assigning project leads with specific deliverables.

We will report monthly to the TriMet Board of Directors for the next six months, and then report quarterly. We will post our performance data on our website for the public to track our progress.

Let me reiterate that we have a safe system, and by taking this proactive approach to improve management and oversight of our rail system, it will make us even safer going forward. I've attached a copy of the audit and recommendations, and am available to answer any questions you may have.