Online publication Articles on Metrolink and Metrolink PTC

[1] Metrolink management to blame in allowing known derelict train conductor, but refuse blame.

[2] Metrolink management then plans a $200 million PTC system, but has insufficient passenger-use revenues and profits (has too great budget shortfall) to even maintain some current trains.

[3] More on Metrolink financial and other problems in relation to PTC. Metrolink expects in the range of $100 million in Federal funds for to be what is calls itself, the guinea pig of PTC.

PTC does not exist yet, but world class TETRA does and is used for many of worlds largest rail metro systems and long-haul trains for PTC and other radio communications.. But Metrolink chooses the former.

220 MHz, selected for PTC by US freight rails, is available (Petitioners have much of it, and Metrolink did not even approach, and rejected communications), but Metrolink chooses AMTS from related parties.

Metrolink suggests due diligence but relies on obvious self- interested parties: all in same interest circles—all taking public money.

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[1]

89.3 KPCC | Southern California Public Radio

NTSB places Metrolink Chatsworth crash blame on texting engineer

Kitty Felde/KPCC
The "Control Point Topanga" signal indicating a red light, which the engineer missed

Jan. 21, 2010

Kitty Felde & Molly Peterson | KPCC

The National Transportation Safety Board's final report on the Metrolink train crash in Chatsworth blames an engineer sending text messages for the deadliest crash in the commuter rail line's 18-year history. KPCC's Kitty Felde covered the

hearing in Washington, D.C. KPCC's Molly Peterson spoke with Metrolink officials in Los Angeles.

NTSB investigators determined the weather in the San Fernando Valley was clear on September 12, 2008. Equipment on the Metrolink locomotive and on the tracks was working properly.

Kitty Felde/KPCC
The National Transportation Safety Board meeting in Washington on the Metrolink crash

But they also concluded that veteran engineer Robert Sanchez was distracted by texting and failed to see a red signal after his locomotive pulled away from Chatsworth Station. His northbound train smashed into a southbound Union Pacific freight train minutes later. Sanchez died in the crash.

In all, 25 people were killed, including one passenger who'd been in Metrolink's Glendale crash in 2005. Another 135 people were injured.

NTSB chair Deborah Hersman says Sanchez texted constantly while on the job.

"There was a violation of company policy and it was flagrant, it was consistent and it was longstanding," said Hersman. "It was not a 'one-off' event. This operator sent and received upwards of 95 text messages that day."

Metrolink officials have reviewed the tape: they say security cameras trained on train engineers have deterred them from texting while on the job in the year since the Chatsworth crash.

Hersman said the passengers on the train entrusted their lives to Metrolink.

"Many people were riding a train on that Friday night," said Hersman. "They were riding home from work, and they counted on that railroad engineer to get them where they were going and get them there safely. Tragically, an instant message turned an ordinary commute into a catastrophe."

The NTSB crash report says phone records show Sanchez sent more texts on the job than on weekends. That wasn't his only violation of company policy. Sanchez invited friends into the cab, and even told them where to hide in case inspectors came on board.

He'd been reprimanded for various problems nearly half a dozen times.

Sanchez operated trains for **Metrolink**, but his employer was Connex, hired by Metrolink to manage trains crews. Connex has since been taken over by the transportation company Veolia.

Hersman said Metrolink management shares some blame for failing to do more about Sanchez and his texting habits.

"**Management** cannot turn a blind eye to the behavior of 'bad actors' that are not doing their job," said Hersman. "They **are accountable** for the performance of their employees."

Metrolink chairman Keith Millhouse, who spoke with reporters in Los Angeles after the NTSB hearing concluded, said the commuter rail didn't know Sanchez was breaking the rules over and over again or that Connex kept him on the job.

"We were just shocked," said Millhouse. "There's a certain amount of professionalism you expect from a company that touts itself as a transportation leader such as Connex. So we've found that you can't trust your contractor to do what they're doing."

That lack of trust led Metrolink to bring in its old contractor – Amtrak - to replace Connex-Veolia as the company in charge of hiring and managing trains crews. Amtrak takes over in June. The NTSB also recommended installing video and audio recorders inside of train cabs to keep an eye on engineers, something Metrolink has already done.

The NTSB dismissed accounts of four eyewitnesses who said the red signal light at Chatsworth was actually green. Dr. Loren Groff conducted a visual study of the signals and where the witnesses said they were standing. He told the NTSB that witnesses could not have reliably seen a green signal from the Chatsworth station. They were too far from the signal to discern the color in the evening light.

Three of the witnesses who saw green lights were friends of the engineer; the fourth was a conductor who said the light was green on that stretch of track 99 percent of the time. NTSB Managing Director David Mayer says it's not unusual for eyewitnesses to think they saw something that wasn't there.

"The experiences of eyewitnesses being inconsistent with other more objective physical evidence is something we have a long history with here," said Mayer.

In its final report, the NTSB also repeated a call to adopt the automated crash prevention system known as "positive train control." Hersman says the NTSB has been pushing railroads to install "positive train control" systems for nearly 30 years.

"Sadly, it took this accident and 25 more lives and an act of Congress to move this technology from testing to reality on passenger rail lines," said Hersman.

Metrolink managers say they've set a goal of installing "**positive train control**" throughout its system by 2013.

The cost is $200 million.

But only half the money is in place, and Metrolink hasn't yet hired a vendor to manage the project.

[2]
http://www.rtands.com/newsflash/los-angeles-metrolink-struggles-with-reforms.html

Railway Track & Structures

Los Angeles Metrolink struggles with reforms

Wednesday, September 09, 2009

As the anniversary of the Sept. 12 Chatsworth train disaster approaches, officials with Southern California's sprawling commuter rail service are facing a vexing array of technical, financial and potential legal challenges as they struggle to deliver on pledges of trailblazing safety reforms, *The Los Angeles Times* reports.

A burst of energy to remake the region's Metrolink train operation was unleashed by the deadliest rail collision in modern California history, a watershed event that killed 25, injured 130 and prompted landmark federal mandates to modernize the nation's rail safety systems.

Today, the rush to reform Metrolink -- a thinly staffed hybrid transportation agency once derided as the political stepchild of the five counties that created it -- is becoming increasingly costly, time-consuming and complicated.

Labor leaders are digging in to fight an unprecedented push by agency officials to place locomotive train crews under continuous video surveillance.

Technical and financial challenges loom over an ambitious schedule to deploy a $200-million collision-avoidance network for all commuter, freight and intercity trains moving across hundreds of miles of track.

Meanwhile, Metrolink officials have reversed course on an effort to assume direct control over hiring, training and supervising rail crews, a move prompted partly by disclosures that in Chatsworth, an engineer employed by a contractor apparently ran a red light while sending a text message on his cell phone just before colliding head-on with a freight train. Fearing that trying to manage on-board train crews could overtax

staff and trigger thorny labor issues, Metrolink's board of directors opted to farm out the critical function again, this time to Amtrak.

Compounding financial strains, ridership has been sliding since the crash, largely because of lower gas prices and the recession. Fare revenues dropped $1.4 million below estimates in the last quarter alone. And operating insurance premiums recently surged $1 million above estimates because of Metrolink's accident history over the last decade, averaging one potentially catastrophic liability payout every two years, records show.

Although no major wrecks have occurred since Chatsworth, smaller accidents involving cars and pedestrians are running about the same this year as last -- 3.25 and 3.4 per month, respectively, the agency says. But a rash of incidents leading up to this week's memorial observances has served as a reminder of the risks Metrolink confronts in its heavily urban mixed-rail environment.

In one potentially horrific crash last month, rescuers in Oxnard were aiding an auto accident victim at a crossing on track owned by Union Pacific. Police and firefighters tried to alert the freight railroad. But word failed to reach a Metrolink train in time and it slammed into the injured man's disabled pickup seconds after rescuers pulled him free.

Some Metrolink officials stressed that the agency was not at fault. But several board members say the incident shows that communication and safety oversight problems persist.

The dimensions of the issues confronting Metrolink are indeed daunting for an agency staff that has remained small because of outsourcing as ridership has grown. Just fielding the new so-called positive train control system -- years ahead of the rest of the country -- will be "a big lift" for Metrolink, said Kitty Higgins, a former National Transportation Safety Board member who oversaw investigative hearings this year on the Chatsworth crash.

Such a system, which can use satellite positioning, on-board automatic braking computers and trackside telemetry, is supposed to cover more than 500 miles of Metrolink routes at a cost of $201.6 million to the agency alone.

"I think [Metrolink has] the right goals," Higgins said, adding that the agency's aggressive safety agenda appears to have helped reassure the public. "The question is what's the realistic target for getting from here to there."

Agency leaders insist they are on course to position Metrolink at the forefront of rail safety in the country. They cite a number of changes already being made. Among them: placing a second crew member as a lookout in control cabs, fast-tracking less sophisticated automatic train stopping equipment for dozens of potentially hazardous track junctions, strengthening safety rules and increasing the number of personnel hunting for violations.

And despite months of slippage on its delivery schedule, Metrolink is first in line for a new generation of passenger cars that are supposed to reduce damage in a collision and better protect riders.

"I'm very pleased with the significant amount of progress the agency has made on a number of fronts," said Metrolink Chairman Keith Millhouse. "Yes, there are some lead times on these [reforms]. But the journey begins with a first step."

Cameras are a critical safety measure until positive train control is up and running, officials say. That is supposed to happen in Southern California in 2012, three years earlier than the federal deadline for the nation as a whole.

Some experts are questioning whether the 2015 national timeline is realistic. Nonetheless, Metrolink, Union Pacific and other key parties say they remain committed to getting Southern California's system in place early. Thus far only $75 million has been secured, though officials are optimistic more federal money will arrive.

Demonstration projects have shown the complex systems do prevent train-on-train collisions. But they are not necessarily foolproof.

"The good news about getting it first is we're getting it first. The bad news about getting it first is, we're also getting it first," Katz said. "Hopefully they'll work out all the kinks. But to a large extent, we're the guinea pigs, in that sense."

Union Pacific spokesman Tom Lange stressed that for positive train control to succeed, numerous sophisticated systems must "operate seamlessly and with virtually fail-safe standards under all conditions."

But making it work -- and work quickly -- is essential, Metrolink officials say.

[3] – a

http://www.keyt.com/news/local/89640272.html

Metrolink Could Reduce Ventura County Service

KEYT Assignment Desk

Story Created: **Mar 31, 2010** at 3:24 PM PDT

Story Updated: Mar 31, 2010 at 6:26 PM PDT

Metrolink's Board of Directors will meet on Friday, to determine if it will cut service to west Ventura County.

Earlier this month, the commuter train announced it could save money by eliminating mid-day and weekend lines with declining ridership.

Metrolink faces a $17-million-dollar budget deficit. Board members are also considering fare hikes of up to six percent.

The proposed cuts would eliminate service to Oxnard and the Montalvo Station in Ventura.

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Los Angeles Daily News

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Metrolink proposing cutbacks

By Troy Anderson, Staff Writer
Posted: 03/10/2010 09:09:34 PM PST
Updated: 03/10/2010 09:11:40 PM PST

Trying to close an $11 million to $20 million budget shortfall, Metrolink is considering a plan to raise fares by 3 to 6 percent and discontinue dozens of low-ridership weekend and weekday commuter train lines.

The cuts would come on most of the Southern California rail agency's lines, including those serving the San Fernando Valley, Antelope Valley and Ventura County.

The need for cuts is partly fueled by an 11 percent drop in average weekday ridership over the past year, which officials attribute to more commuters losing their jobs and the stabilized cost of gasoline.

"What we are trying to do, like everyone else, is avoid laying off people and cutting services, but we had an (11 percent) reduction in passengers," Metrolink board member Richard Katz said.

"We've lost revenue from the state and we are trying to figure out the best way to provide the best services so we can take care of our customers during the middle of a recession."

On the Ventura County Line, which runs through the San Fernando Valley with stops in Glendale, Van Nuys and Chatsworth among others, Metrolink has proposed to discontinue eight weekday trains, and curtail service west of Moorpark station for six trains.

On the Antelope Valley line, which runs between Union Station downtown and Lancaster, with stops including Glendale, Sun Valley and Santa Clarita, the agency is considering cutting 11 trains on weekdays, four on Saturdays and two on Sundays.

Daniel Fresquez, 62, an environmental science worker from Green Valley who takes the train from Lancaster to downtown, said losing some of those trains will make it far more difficult to commute.

"It's going to be a real hardship on anyone who has to work late because if we don't take the 6:30 p.m., how do we get home?" Fresquez said. "And they are particularly targeting this line, when it's for the people who have to travel the longest distance."

Metrolink board chairman Ara Najarian, a Glendale city councilman, said he's concerned about the proposed cuts on the Antelope Valley line. He has proposed shifting about $5 million in Measure R funds - the half-percent sales tax voters approved in 2008 for transportation improvements - to Metrolink.

"Essentially, what this means is the MTA would be increasing its funding to Metrolink with an earmark on those funds to keep certain Antelope Valley lines running and to try and ease the fare increases that would hit the lines," Najarian said.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority spokesman Marc Littman said he wasn't aware of Najarian's proposal, but he said Metrolink is entitled to 3 percent of the Measure R funds.

"They may not get everything they need to forestall a fare increase, but it sounds like they will take what they can to temper their shortfall," Littman said.

Kymberleigh Richards, the public and legislative affairs director at Southern California Transit Advocates, is also concerned about the proposed revisions on the Antelope Valley Line.

"That line has had expansion over the years because there is ridership on it," Richards said. "I get concerned when weekday service gets cut on a line that I know to be productive."

Metrolink has scheduled a hearing on the proposed cuts for April 2. Katz said Metrolink board members at the hearing, will consider data on ridership, whether the lines pay for themselves and if the lines provide the only access to public transit.

"In some areas of the Antelope Valley, it's Metrolink or nothing," Katz said. "I'd be reluctant to cut lines that deny people their only mass transit in and out, especially if there is no alternative bus service or Amtrak.

Although the majority of the proposed fare increases would be between 3 to 6 percent, a small number of stations could see increases of up to 10 percent.

Metrolink has also proposed a variety of changes in fares, including 10-trip tickets, round trip tickets, senior and student discounts, military tickets, weekend fare discounts and off-peak fares.

Metrolink has already saved tens of millions of dollars by reducing overhead, freezing hiring and through administrative efficiencies, Katz said. He said some layoffs may be necessary too.

"It will probably wind up being some combination of service reductions and fare increases," Katz said. "The level of service reductions will depend on what the appetite is for increasing fares."

So far, hundreds of people have posted comments about the proposed service reductions and fare increases at www.metrolinktrains.com/about/agenda. Najarian said many riders don't care if Metrolink raises its fares as long as it continues its reliable service, but others oppose fare increases and don't mind waiting longer for the next train to come.

"If we increase fares, we are going to end up with less ridership and that's not what we want," Najarian said. "We want to build ridership as best we can. The problem is we have to balance our books the best we can at the end of the day."