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MTA NYC Transit Releases Final Report Of Joint Track Safety Task Force

After an extensive six-month effort during which MTA New York City Transit worked closely with Transport Workers Union Local 100 to come up with ways of helping to ensure the safety of employees who labor along the system's more than 800 miles of subway track, the Joint Track Safety Task Force has released its final report. The report identifies several areas where safety can be improved and makes recommendations to reduce the hazards of working along the right of way.

"Working closely and cooperatively with the men and women of our workforce and their union leadership has been one of the most important priorities of my first months in office and will continue to be as we move forward," said Elliot G. Sander, Executive Director and CEO of the MTA. "Our collaboration together on this report will help to ensure that the tragedies that the MTA suffered earlier this year will not be repeated."

Spurred by the tragic deaths of track workers Daniel Boggs and Marvin Franklin last Spring, the Joint Track Safety Task Force was created to examine the issue of employee track safety from the roadbed up, taking a hard look at the culture of these jobs and how they are performed. Employee input, both from those who work along the tracks and operate trains, was solicited and all impacts on track safety were closely examined.

Task Force Recommendations focused on:

- Operational issues in track safety, including flagging communication and the safety environment
- Improvements to training
- Communication of safety rules and initiatives
- Specific flagging rule changes
- Response to accidents, including safety stand downs and Board of Inquiry investigations
- Job planning and safety inspection process, schedule and participation

The task force made 63 recommendations aimed at boosting the level of employee safety. These recommendations range from the establishment of an inspection and maintenance regimen to ensure that all Emergency Alarm Boxes and Emergency Telephones are operational to the provision requiring towers to notify trains of the presence of employees along the right of way during overnight and weekend construction, rehabilitation and system upgrade jobs. Recommendations also focused heavily on flagging along the right of way, requiring the standardization of flagging across all divisions. Improved communications will also require that all work crews be provided with radios for monitoring train traffic and for use in emergencies.

"The findings in this report are the result of a groundbreaking collaborative effort between NYC Transit and TWU Local 100 to identify and correct the types of problems and behavior that can lead to accidents when our employees are working along the subway tracks," said NYC Transit President Howard H. Roberts, Jr. "It is our goal to maintain the safest work place possible, even as our employees go about the job of maintaining a railroad that moves more than 5.2 million customers daily."

Importantly, through focus groups and a comprehensive survey, input was sought from a population of employees comprised of Maintenance of Way hourly employees, supervisors and managers: Train Operators, Conductors, Construction Flaggers, and Train Service Supervisors.

"This report represents a substantive change in the approach to safety at the TA. It offers concrete measures for making safety an integral part of our work, said Roger Toussaint, President of Transport Workers Union Local 100. "It shows that when management and labor decide to work together toward the same goal, real progress can be made, progress that just a few years earlier might have been regarded as unattainable."

As a result of employee input, several recommendations were made to enhance employee safety on the tracks, including a requirement that the Department of Subways reinforce communications to employees via written bulletins and with verbal communication when they report for duty each day to ensure that employees receive important information.

Also, during supervisor training, supervisors must be instructed to acknowledge employees who are working safely. In addition, the Department of Subways and the Division of Human Resources must develop a safety stand down that addresses rule changes and communications that result from the task force. "This instruction is meant to provide employees with positive reinforcement from their supervisors that they are performing their duties in a safe manner," said Department of Subways Senior Vice President Steven Feil. "A lot of what we want to do to keep our employees safe is acknowledge what they are doing right, not beat them over the head with what they might be doing wrong. We are also paying particular attention to flagging, requiring standardized flagger refresher training."

Another issue that was addressed in the report is the requirement that the Department of Subways develop noise suppression requirements for equipment that is used along the right of way while discouraging the use of generators along the right of way, due to noise that could interfere with workers' ability to hear approaching trains.

The implementation of the initiatives and recommendations outlined in this report is expected to lead to a safer work environment along New York City Transit's subway right of way.