



**Metro**

Los Angeles County  
Metropolitan Transportation Authority

One Gateway Plaza  
Los Angeles, CA 90012-2952

213.922.2000 Tel  
metro.net

**December 23, 2015**

**TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**THROUGH: PHILLIP WASHINGTON** *POW for*  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

**FROM: JAMES GALLAGHER** *JTG.*  
**CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER**

**SUBJECT: BOSTON RUNAWAY TRAIN INCIDENT**

**ISSUE**

On Friday, December 11, 2015, a Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) train operated in revenue service for over five miles without an operator onboard. This was a result of a train departing while its train operator was outside the train making an authorized fix to resolve a signaling glitch. Onboard customers were not informed during the incident nor given explanation of the actions to stop the train. In light of the incident, staff received a Board inquiry as to whether a similar incident could occur on Metro Rail, and, if so, whether there is a method by which to communicate with customers.

**DISCUSSION**

Metro staff reviewed the incident, as reported by major news sources, such as *The Boston Globe* ("A call, then a scramble to stop runaway train," December 12, 2015). There were multiple circumstances that resulted in the driverless train. First, the train operator had been stopped at a station on MBTA's Red Line, when he observed a signal system issue. The train operator followed the agency's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to exit the operator cab and activate the signal bypass switch underneath the train to be able to move the train. As a result, there was no train operator aboard the train, which was consistent with the MBTA SOP's **for this situation**.

Investigators found that the throttle control inside the train operator cab had "been held in place with a cord and rotated in a direction that caused the train to accelerate after the employee flipped the signal-bypass switch." This was the ultimate cause of the train moving without the operator onboard. Preliminary reports indicate that the throttle control had been compromised by the train

operator for convenience. Customers aboard the train were not alerted to the situation because there was no means to directly communicate with them.

### **Application to Metro Operations**

While a signal malfunction could occur at Metro that would require the authorization for signal bypass, a Metro train operator does not need to leave the cab to activate this bypass. First, this is a relatively rare event at Metro. Second, authorization for this to occur must be given by the Rail Operations Control Center. Vandalizing the control throttle or any other lever or button within a rail vehicle is considered a Major Rule Violation, which would result in discipline up to termination. While anyone can vandalize Metro property, Metro SOPs, training, and supervision reduce the likelihood of such an event.

Currently, onboard customer communication is provided via pre-programmed, automated station announcements and train operator announcements. Announcements can also be made at each station by control center personnel. Staff issues service announcements on Metro.net and social media channels as well.

### **CONCLUSION**

As previously noted, there are no circumstances by which an operator should leave the train to troubleshoot a similar issue at Metro. Although it is feasible for vandalism to occur on Metro Rail, it is a major violation that could lead to discipline up to termination. Metro Rail operators, as well as all Metro Rail personnel, are governed by strict SOPs and trained that tampering with safety systems and apparatus is a major violation leading to discipline including termination.