



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Transit
Administration**

The Administrator

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

JUN 26 2009

Dear Colleague:

As the new Administrator of the Federal Transit Administration, I want to take this opportunity to reiterate the Department's position, as voiced by Secretary LaHood, that transportation safety "has always been and must continue to be the central focus of the Department."

In line with this priority, I am urging each of you to closely review your policies, procedures, and enforcement mechanisms targeting the inappropriate use of cell phones and other personal electronic devices by safety critical personnel. I am asking that you perform this evaluation, making improvements as necessary, and satisfy yourselves that your systems effectively address the hazards that inappropriate use of these devices can create.

Cell phone use or "texting" has played a role in a number of public transportation accidents. In just two recent accidents¹, 25 people died, hundreds were injured, and millions of dollars worth of property was damaged.

Numerous studies have shown that the use of cell phones by vehicle operators is a dangerous distraction that can result in accidents. A number of studies and other resources on this subject can be found on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration web page (<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>).

While public transportation remains a statistically safe mode of travel, these high profile accidents have raised public concerns about the adequacy of safety controls over cell phone use in the transit industry.

There are a number of related policy models in our industry:

- Virtually all agencies prohibit the use of cell phones and personal electronic devices while operating a vehicle.
- Some agencies have established a policy requiring that personal cell phones and electronic devices be turned off and stowed off the person while operating a vehicle or performing a safety critical function.

¹ Metrolink commuter train collision in Chatsworth, California on September 12, 2008, and most recently a MBTA Green Line LRT train collision in Boston, Massachusetts on May 8, 2009.

- Others have prohibited personal cell phones or electronic devices in operating cabs altogether.
- If personal cell phones are prohibited, your policy review should address a method employees' loved ones can use to contact an on-duty employee with urgent messages (through a dispatch center for example).
- If personal cell phones are prohibited, your policy review should also ensure that reliable methods are in place to report emergencies.

You should carefully evaluate the options and look at policies that best fit with your operations while effectively addressing the risk that improper use of personal cell phones and electronic devices can create.

In the end, policies and procedures are only effective if they are clearly communicated, understood, and enforced. I urge you to take a systems view of this issue and look not only at the cell phone policies that are in place, but also at the systems that support training, communication, hazard recognition, and enforcement. Our industry needs to continue building a culture of safety where unsafe acts are not permitted by management or by peers.

I know that you join me in a strong desire to keep public transit as one of the safest transportation choices for the American people. I look forward to working with you on this effort now and in the years to come.

Sincerely yours,



Peter M. Rogoff
Administrator