



Memorandum

**U.S. Department of
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation

Office of Inspector General

Subject: **INFORMATION:** Audit Announcement –
Oversight Challenges Associated with Transit
Safety Programs
Federal Transit Administration
Project No. 10M3002M000

Date: January 7, 2010

From: Ann Calvaresi Barr
Deputy Inspector General

Reply to
Attn. of: JA-40

To: The Secretary
Federal Transit Administrator

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) plans to review the challenges associated with enhancing federal oversight authority for transit safety programs. Public transit systems are generally safe relative to other modes of transportation, especially highways. However, recent high-profile transit crashes have demonstrated how devastating they can be in terms of fatalities and injuries, medical and emergency services costs, and loss of productivity and quality of life. In the wake of these incidents, the Department has proposed legislation to give the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) enhanced authority to regulate the safety and operations of local transit systems.

The Department's operating administrations have different safety oversight authorities. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) oversees intercity and suburban rail transit operations, such as commuter and high speed rail systems. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) oversees interstate passenger bus safety and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) establishes motor coach design standards. Under the legislative proposal, FTA would implement enhanced federal oversight authority over transit safety programs for heavy rail, light rail, transit buses, and other public transit systems. As FTA implements this authority, significant oversight challenges are likely, making it critical that FTA prepares for the potential risks involved and ensures that actions are taken to mitigate the risks.

Our audit objective will be to highlight challenges and risks related to increasing federal oversight of transit safety and actions the Department can take to enhance its effectiveness. During the course of our work, we plan to review prior OIG audit reports and testimonies, and other agencies' relevant audit work on transportation safety programs. We will focus on areas such as development of safety standards, program goals, and performance measures; data quality and reporting; and oversight and enforcement, as they relate to four components of transit safety—human factors, physical infrastructure, operations and control systems, and rolling stock. We will also review information that we obtained from FMCSA on motorcoach safety that could impact transit bus safety. To provide timely assistance to Department officials as they consider alternative implementation strategies, we plan to issue intermittent briefings or reports as we complete our review of individual focus areas.

Our audit will begin immediately. We will contact your liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct the audit at FTA's Headquarters and regional offices, selected state safety offices and transit agencies, and other stakeholders. If you have questions or require further assistance, please contact me at (202) 366-6767 or Kerry R. Barras, Program Director, at (817) 978-3318.

cc: Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy, P-1
Audit Liaison, OST, M-1
Audit Liaison, FTA, TBP-60
Audit Liaison, FMCSA, MC-PRS
Audit Liaison, NHTSA, NPO-310
Audit Liaison, FAA, ABU-100
Audit Liaison, FHWA, HAIM-13
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