



Transport Canada rejects safety recommendation after train derailment: TSB

Erika Tucker, Global News : Monday, February 25, 2013 5:53 PM



Site of train derailment in Burlington;ON;February 26;2012.

Photo Credit: David Ritchie , Global News

TORONTO – One year after a Via train derailed in Burlington, Ont., killing three crew members and injuring more than 40 on board, the final report into the investigation has yet to be released. But the Transportation Safety Board of Canada says it made a safety recommendation while its investigation was in progress that was rejected by Transport Canada.

Tom Griffith is leading the Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) [investigation](#). He says while investigative work has been finished for about a

month, he can't specify when the report will be published.

Griffith explains that if safety deficiencies are found while an investigation is in progress, the TSB will issue an advisory to [Transport Canada](#).

He says the TSB did issue an advisory to Transport Canada approximately six months ago, which had to do with the type of crossover involved in the derailment in Burlington.

"There's very few high-speed passenger trains that travel through this type of crossover," said Griffith in a phone interview with [Global News](#). "We suggested to Transport Canada that they issue orders to forbid trains to crossover at any of those locations... they said no."

Global News contacted Transport Canada to find out why, but has yet to receive a response.

The type of crossover in question was a slow speed crossover, one with a maximum authorized speed of 15 mph (24 km/h). These crossovers are typically used for freight trains, and require speeds slower than the usual 45 mph (72 km/h).

Via Rail passenger train 92, en route from Niagara Falls to Toronto on Feb. 26, 2012, was travelling at approximately 67 mph (108 km/h), more than [four times the maximum speed](#).

In an email to Global News, Transport Canada said it received a rail safety advisory letter from the TSB on April 18, 2012, suggesting it "review the operating procedures and situations when higher speed passenger trains are routed through slower speed crossovers."

Transport Canada said it contacted Via Rail management, which issued a notice to employees reminding them to follow operating rules at slow speed crossovers.

Griffith says the TSB suggested forbidding high-speed passenger trains from using 15 mph crossovers as an interim fix.

"The real fix would be to have something in the cab, like cab controls that automatically would bring the engine to a stop," he said.

These controls are called positive train controls (PTC), a system that can control the train remotely if it's travelling at unauthorized speeds or the crew misses a signal.

Rob Smith is the national legislative director with [Teamsters Canada Rail Conference](#), the union that represents locomotive engineers and conductors in Canada. While he notes there are some problems with PTC, he calls

himself a proponent of anything that will enhance safety in rail operations.

"PTC is implemented in the U.S. right now, but there are various versions of it," Smith told Global News in a phone interview. "At this point, in this country, I think Transport Canada is looking to kind of wait and see what happens in the U.S., to see if they can get all the wrinkles ironed out."

As to why the train in Burlington was travelling at quadruple the recommended speed in the first place, Griffith isn't sure we'll ever know.

"The problem is with these gentlemen that were in that cab, we have no idea what was happening in that cab," he said. "There's just no way...and we need to have that information to better investigate."

Minister of Transport, Communities and Infrastructure Denis Lebel announced the installation of voice recorders on Via trains (like those that are used in aircraft) on Monday; something the [TSB first recommended in 2003](#).

Lebel confirmed that Via will install locomotive voice recorders in its entire fleet, and said he is awaiting the TSB's final report into the Burlington Via accident.

[Via Rail](#) spokesperson Jacques C. Gagnon says audio devices are currently being tested, aiming for an installation completion date of 2014. He wasn't sure if the device would be part of the black box or separate, and said whether the recordings would be available to rail carriers or solely to the TSB in the event of an investigation was a "subject of ongoing discussion."

Federal NDP transport and infrastructure critic MP Olivia Chow hopes PTC will be implemented in Canada faster than audio recorders have been.

"Voice recorders only allow you to find out what went wrong--it doesn't actually stop the accident," Chow said. "For people that suffered because of the derailment, the safety board will still have difficulty finding out precisely what happened."

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