Measure Name   Improving the safety of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness

Definition   Coordinate to improve the safety of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness living near railroad tracks.

Tags

Incident Type	Trespass only
Location	Both station and right-of-way
Intervention Strategy	Enforcement: policy development and implementation
Measure Group	Policy enforcement

Description

This measure encourages coordination between railroads and community stakeholders to create policies that seek to improve the safety of unsheltered homeless individuals who are living near railroad tracks. These policies may seek to identify alternative locations for these individuals to live that are a safe distance from active railroad tracks. Additionally, policies should address larger issues that lead to encampments being rebuilt in new locations near the ROW, and provide safe, sustainable alternatives for this population.

Although many cities have guidance for managing homeless encampments [1], it is important to note that encampments next to active railroad tracks can be especially unsafe. For example, in California's Santa Barbara County, a 2019 investigation found that a surge in rail-related deaths was tied to individuals living in encampments near the ROW. Twelve of 20 people killed over four years had been living in encampments, and more than half of these deaths were suicides [2]. Encampments close to the tracks can also cause undue stress for train crew members who witnessed a previous train strike.

Coordination between railroads and state or local governments is important to expedite contact with homeless individuals living in encampments near railroad tracks to provide resources that may connect these individuals with more stable housing opportunities. For some railroads, the community police force may dismantle encampments and lead individuals away from railroad property, especially if the individuals are resistant to requests to relocate to safer locations. Local community services may assist in placing the homeless in residences elsewhere or provide other resources. Expanding the access of homeless individuals to services such as free transportation to and from homeless shelters, is a direct way to aid those experiencing unsheltered homelessness and diminish encampments [3]. This can help rail carriers to create trust with homeless individuals to not only go to a shelter, but remain there, instead of returning to rail property [3].

Some railroads have installed cameras in locations where encampments reappear as a deterrent and to better understand reasons for recurrence. Reasons may include a convenient pass-through near the track, such as broken fence, dense shrubbery, or rundown buildings neighboring the tracks. Addressing these vulnerabilities may help to deter people from rebuilding in the future. Enhanced police or public health presence may also deter the rebuilding of encampments.

In 2022, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) released the 7 Principles for Addressing Encampments which provides guidance to communities looking to address increases in encampments [4]. While not specific to encampments on railroad property, which pose specific safety

risks, this resource provides guidance about how communities can balance a need for swift action with the reality that more sustainable solutions can take time. The 7 principles outlined in this guidance are:

1.) Establish a cross-agency, multi-sector response
2.) Engage encampment residents to develop solutions
3.) Conduct comprehensive and coordinated outreach
4.) Address basic needs and provide storage
5.) Ensure access to shelter or housing options
6.) Develop pathways to permanent housing and supports
7.) Create a plan for what will happen to encampment sites after closure.

Additional search terms: camp, *coordination, encampment, homelessness, relocate, tent, unhoused, unsheltered,*

Advantages

- Existing staff can be recruited for actions associated with this measure.

- Managing the removal of encampments can be delegated to specific members of the railroad or transit police so that the process is coordinated with the community.

- Removing encampments helps both the homeless individuals (if they can be effectively connected with services to provide assistance) and train crews that must watch for trespassers in these areas.

Drawbacks

- Policy planning with multiple stakeholders can take a long time.

- In many cases, encampments come back after removal, and the plan or policy for removal may need to be modified over time.

- Lack of existing community guidance for the removal of homeless encampments may make it more challenging for railroads to develop a plan.

- Railroads may lack the resources to adequately manage encampments if community stakeholders are not engaged in the process.

Notable Practices

- Avoid leading with aggressive law enforcement as these strategies often result in adverse health outcomes, including a disconnection from much-needed services, which can lead to encampments returning more quickly [4].

- When choosing to close an encampment, provide ample, visible public notice. A decision to close an encampment should occur only after outreach teams have engaged with residents to help find alternative shelter, housing, and service options [4].

- Take care not to destroy personal belongings and, when possible, provide storage for these items if an encampment is closed. Fear of losing personal belongings can influence a person's decision to move into a shelter or not [4].

- Identify stakeholders early on to help support the effort, such as local law enforcement, local community services for the homeless, and community volunteers [5].

- Be aware of different perspectives and sensitivities among collaborators [5].

- When possible, join existing efforts that are already addressing safety issues, including homelessness, in the community [5].

- If law enforcement or other parties will be entering the track area to intervene, consider procedures to ensure their safety [6].

- Consider ways to address the potential for encampments returning to locations near the rail system.

References

[1] Tars, E. S., Stanley, D., & Loo, M. (2017). *Tent City, USA: The growth of America's homeless encampments and how communities are responding*. National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty.

> Document Excerpt: This report by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty ("the Law Center") documents the apparent rapid growth of encampments of people experiencing homelessness or "tent cities" across the United States and the legal and policy responses to that growth. (This report uses the term "encampments" but recognizes that there are multiple ways to refer to the living situation of self-sheltering homeless persons).

[2] Scheier, R. (2020, January 27). As California's homeless people camp out along railroad tracks, train-related deaths are rising. *Los Angeles Times*.

> Description: Article describes the homeless situation in California and how encampments on railroad property are contributing to increased fatality rates.

[3] Loukaitou-Sideris, A., Wasserman, J., Ding, H., & Caro, R. (2022). "It Is Our Problem!": Strategies for Responding to Homelessness on Transit. *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board*

> Abstract: Buses, bus stops, trains, and train platforms represent sites of shelter for many of the over 500,000 Americans who are unhoused every night. This study seeks to understand how transit agencies are responding to them. Based on interviews with staff members and partners at 10 different transit agencies and on program performance data, where available, we provide detailed case studies of four sets of strategies taken in response to homelessness on transit systems: hub of services, mobile outreach, discounted fares, and transportation to shelters. We analyze each strategy's scope, implementation, impact, challenges, and lessons learned. Reviewing these strategies, we note that they may differ depending on the context, need, and available resources. We find value in transit agencies fostering

external partnerships with social service organizations and other municipal departments and keeping law enforcement distinct from routine homeless outreach. We also underline the key need for funding from other levels of government to allow transit operators to adopt, expand, and refine homelessness response programs.

[4] United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2022). 7 Principles for Addressing Encampments.

Description: There is no one-size-fits-all solution to encampments, but the following principles—developed by USICH in coordination with the departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Justice (DOJ), and Veterans Affairs (VA); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); and several national partners—can help communities more effectively address encampments:

- Principle 1: Establish a Cross-Agency, Multi-Sector Response
- Principle 2: Engage Encampment Residents to Develop Solutions
- Principle 3: Conduct Comprehensive and Coordinated Outreach
- Principle 4: Address Basic Needs and Provide Storage
- Principle 5: Ensure Access to Shelter or Housing Options
- Principle 6: Develop Pathways to Permanent Housing and Supports
- Principle 7: Create a Plan for What Will Happen to Encampment Sites After Closure

[5] DaSilva, M., & Ngamdung, T. (2014). *Trespass Prevention Research Study-West Palm Beach, FL* (No. DOT-VNTSC-FRA-14-02). Washington, DC: Federal Railroad Administration.

Abstract: The United States Department of Transportation's (U.S. DOT) Research and Innovative Technology Administration's John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (Volpe Center), under the direction of the U.S. DOT Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) Office of Research and Development (R&D), conducted a Trespass Prevention Research Study (TPRS) in the city of West Palm Beach, FL. The main objective of this research was to demonstrate potential benefits, including best practices and lessons learned, of implementation and evaluation of trespass prevention strategies following FRA's and Transport Canada's existing trespassing prevention guidance on the rail network in West Palm Beach, FL, and all of its rights-of-way.

This report documents the results of the implementation of the guidance discussed in this study. The results of the trespass prevention strategies will be analyzed to help determine areas of potential risk, develop solutions to prevent and minimize risk exposure, and implement successful countermeasures in the future. The ultimate objective of the research is to aid in the development of national recommendations or guidelines to reduce trespass-related incidents and fatalities.

[6] RESTRAIL. (2015, January 20). *4.1 Societal collaboration to prevent railway suicide*. Restrail Toolbox.

Description: Website describes societal collaboration to prevent rail suicide in Europe, including recommendations, considerations for implementation, and relevant research results.

Related Measures
- CCTV and other detection systems
- Collaboration with local government and communities
- Identify funding opportunities
- Incident cost estimation
- Risk assessment using forward facing CCTV

- Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) for detection

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