

**Measure Name** Public announcements after a train-person collision

**Definition** Develop procedures for making responsible public announcements to passengers about delays due to a rail trespass or suicide incident.

**Tags**

<b>Incident Type</b>	Suicide only
<b>Location</b>	Both station and right-of-way
<b>Intervention Strategy</b>	Education: outreach and messaging
<b>Measure Category</b>	Public communication

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## Description

This measure refers to the development of policies and procedures for making responsible announcements to passengers about delays due to a trespass or suicide incident. When an individual is struck, the train could be delayed for an extended period as police, emergency, and railroad personnel respond to the scene and try to restore service while caring for the victim and train crew members. The aim of this measure is to provide enough information to passengers so they can make informed decisions about alternative plans or necessary communication, without providing excessive details that could inadvertently increase the risk for suicide.

Two research studies produced contrasting results when evaluating the impact of different announcement types on passengers. One study, conducted in the Netherlands, showed that “emergency services” announcements had less emotional impact on passengers than “collision with a person” announcements, but passengers were more appreciative of the “collision with a person” announcement [1]. A second study in the United Kingdom showed that most passengers preferred a less specific announcement than one that mentioned death or injury such as “person hit by train.” However, they still expected the announcement to be honest, for example, “emergency service dealing with an accident.” The differences in the survey results from these two studies shows the importance of understanding ridership expectations of the local rail system when choosing an announcement.

It is also relevant to consider anecdotal examples of how various rail systems handle public announcements to passengers about delays due to trespass or suicide incidents. Suicides are announced as an “emergency service response” in the Montreal Metro and as “injured person on the rails” in the Toronto subway [2]. Sweden Federal Railways announces these incidents as an “external event” [3].

Additional key terms: *language, media, messages, notification, passengers, statement*

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## Advantages

- A consistent way to inform passengers about a train-person strike may reduce the potential for conflict with train crews.
- The communication of clear information about delays will allow passengers to make decisions about alternatives plans and potentially reduce anxiety onboard the train.

- This measure is relatively low cost, requiring only time to draft policy and procedures regarding public announcements after a strike, and disseminating information to employees.
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## Drawbacks

- Announcements regarding trespass or suicide incidents may make passengers feel sadness for the person involved or anger toward the person or organization that they hold responsible for the delay [1].
  - If a message is too detailed, it may have the potential to motivate an individual at risk of suicide to consider rail as a means for suicide, especially after repeated exposure to such a message.
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## Notable Practices

- Clearly define roles and responsibilities so that railroad employees can act quickly and ensure that the information is communicated to passengers in a clear and concise manner.
  - Announcements about delays due to an incident should be communicated to passengers waiting at stations and to other commuters through the railroad’s website or social media.
  - If possible, turn down the volume on portable radios when in the vicinity of passengers so that radio conversations about the strike will not be overheard [4].
  - Ensure that train crews are familiar with the locations and procedures for utilizing emergency exits and fire extinguishers on the train [4].
  - Ensure that announcements are made in any secondary languages that are common to the area.
  - In the event of a trespass or suicide incident, avoid mentioning “suicide” or “fatality” in the announcement; instead, use another less specific phrase [2].
  - The announcement should [5]:
    - Be honest and transparent.
    - Provide information necessary to make alternative plans.
    - Communicate that the incident is not within the train operator’s control.
    - Avoid language that implies suicide or implies that a train strike is always fatal.
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## References

[1] Leeuwen, L., Bommelé, T., and Hoogcarspel, B. (2019). [Responsibly Communicating Delays After Suicides on Railways: The Impact of Delay Announcements on Suicide-Related Associations and Emotions, and Announcement Appreciation](#). *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 41(4), 280-287.

Abstract: Background: By communicating collision with a person as a reason for post-suicide railway delays, railway companies may involuntarily communicate to the public that colliding with a train is a

suicide method. Aims: To compare the impact of the collision with a person delay announcement with an announcement about emergency services and one about collision with an animal (control announcement), we measured suicide-related emotions, associations with suicide, and announcement appreciation. Method: A randomized controlled online experiment (N = 664). Results: After exposure to the collision with a person announcement, participants were 9.1 times more likely to indicate suicide as the most probable reason for the delay than after the emergency services announcement. The emotional impact of both announcements was low. Still, participants reported more anger toward the victim after exposure to the collision with a person announcement than after exposure to the emergency services announcement. Announcement appreciation was significantly higher after exposure to collision with a person. Limitation: This online experiment may have reflected real-life situations concerning train delays to only a limited extent. Conclusion: From the perspective of suicide prevention, the emergency services announcement is a more appropriate delay announcement than the collision with a person announcement.

- [2] RESTRAIL. (July 18, 2019). [19.3 Announcements made to passengers after an incident.](#)

Description: This webpage provides information making announcements to passengers after an individual is struck by a train in Europe, including recommendations, considerations for implementation, and relevant research results.

- [3] Bitesize News. (2024, May 24). [SBB to change announcement for suicide deaths.](#)

Document Excerpt: "The company says it will now use the phrase 'external event.' But that phrase could also be used for any reason a train is delayed if it's outside the control of the SBB."

- [4] Amtrak. (2020). [Service Standards – Train Service & Onboard Service Employees.](#)

Document Excerpt: The Service Standards Manual for Train Service and On-Board Service Employees is provided as a tool to help ensure the delivery of consistent, high quality service to our passengers by both frontline and supervisory employees. [Various guidelines for announcements are included throughout the document.]

- [5] Majava, E., & McNaughton Nicholls, C. (2015). [Communicating delays caused by suicides on the railway.](#) London, UK.

Document Excerpt: This research was funded by Network Rail on behalf of the rail industry and managed by Transport Focus. This research focused on understanding passengers' perceptions of the issue of suicides on the railway and how incidents are communicated. It had three overarching objectives:

1. Understanding passengers' experiences of disruption caused by suicides and their attitudes and reactions to it
2. Understanding how passengers react to and interpret current and alternative announcements regarding 'a person hit by a train' or other descriptions of a fatality, and whether passengers would accept messages that do not include any overt or implied reference to a death and which might be less likely to encourage imitative ('copycat') behaviour
3. Exploring passengers' awareness of measures taken by the industry to address and prevent suicides on the railway, and their attitudes towards them.

To address these research questions, we held six focus groups with passengers in two locations (London and Manchester) from across five stations - King's Cross, Waterloo, and Paddington in London, and Piccadilly and Victoria in Manchester. Five groups were with regular commuters and one with less frequent travelers who used the rail network a couple of times a month for leisure or business travel. We wanted to include a diverse range of passengers, and included 23 women, 23 men, people across the age spectrum of 18-67, and 24 White British and 22 Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) passengers in the research. At the outset of the research we also completed seven interviews with industry stakeholders, conducted a desk based review of the terminology used to communicate suicides on the railway

internationally, and analysed real-time social media responses to delays caused by suicide on the railway, focusing on eight specific suicide incidents.

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## Related Measures

- Identify funding opportunities
- Incident cost estimation
- Plan for expedited incident response
- Responsible media reporting