



Feds seek to boost oversight of US transit systems



file photo

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The Department of Transportation (DOT) is moving to increase oversight of the nation's public transportation systems after a spate of issues on the Washington, D.C., Metrorail system and other subways have raised questions about U.S. transit safety.

The agency's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on Friday said it is proposing a rule that would establish a Public Transportation Safety Program to allow federal regulators "to monitor, oversee and enforce safety in the public transit industry."

"Every day, millions of Americans take public transportation to get to work, school, medical appointments, and other important destinations," Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said in a statement about the proposal. "This new program will help us ensure that transit continues to be a safe way to get around, and a safe place to work."

The FTA's role in public transportation has traditionally been focused more on issuing funding grants to transit systems rather than cracking down on them.

Under the proposed new rules, the agency would have the power to "conduct inspections, audits, and examinations" and also test "equipment, facilities, rolling stock, and the operations of a public transit systems," according to transportation department officials.

Regulators would also be able to "appropriate enforcement actions, including directing the use or withholding of federal funds and issuing directives and advisories," according to the transit administration.

FTA Acting Administrator Therese McMillan said it is necessary for the federal government to step up its oversight of the nation's transit systems, which are typically managed by local agencies that report primarily to municipal and state governments.

"With transit ridership at its highest levels in generations, and our nation's transit agencies facing increased pressure to meet the demand for service, we must continue to ensure that safety remains the top priority," McMillan said in a statement. "This rulemaking is a major step forward in establishing FTA's safety regulatory framework, as all future safety-related rules, regulations and guidance will be informed by the Public Transportation Safety Program."

Questions regarding the role of federal regulators in overseeing public transportation systems have been raised after a series of incidents on Washington's Metrorail subway system this year.

A train on Metro's Orange, Blue and Silver Line tracks derailed in downtown Washington last week as it was preparing to begin accepting passengers.

Additionally, **a passenger was killed in January** when a train on the capital area transit agency's Yellow Line filled with smoke after experiencing an electrical problem.

The January smoke incident resulted in Metro's first passenger fatality since a high-profile crash on the Red Line in 2009 that killed nine people and led to widespread changes at the capital-area transit agency.

Lawmakers have sharply criticized Metro, pressing for greater oversight from federal regulators and calling the recent incidents "**unacceptable.**"

TAGS: Anthony Foxx, Therese McMillan, Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, Transit oversight, Washington Metro

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