



Reduce harmful work stressors.  
Improve job quality and health.

# Healthy Work **Strategies**

## Preventing threats and violence against bus drivers

(bus driver case study #3)

### Laws designed to discourage assaults

One important source of stress at work for bus drivers is the threat of being assaulted by passengers.<sup>1,2,3</sup> As of 2019, 30 states have passed laws to deal with violence against transit operators.<sup>1,4</sup> These laws include measures such as, “enhanced penalties,” as in the District of Columbia code §22-3751 et seq, which states that people that commit crimes against transit workers, “...may be punished by a fine of up to one and 1/2 times the maximum fine otherwise authorized for the offense and may be imprisoned for a term of up to one and 1/2 times the maximum term of imprisonment otherwise authorized by the offense, or both.”<sup>4,5</sup> Other laws have increased penalties, for example, crimes that may have been considered misdemeanors previously, are now felonies.<sup>4,5</sup> Pennsylvania’s statute 18 Pa.C.S. § 2702 states “...intentionally, knowingly or recklessly causing serious bodily injury to an employee of an agency, company or other entity engaged in public transportation, while in the performance of duty,” can result in a 1<sup>st</sup> degree felony.<sup>4</sup> There are also laws at both the state and city level, which suspend people that have a history of criminal or otherwise disruptive behavior against transit operators or other riders.<sup>5</sup> The Madison, Wisconsin Metro Transit System adopted a code of conduct; in the event that the code of conduct is violated, a person can be suspended for a maximum of 6-months and/or be removed from the use of services immediately.<sup>5</sup>

### Other strategies to prevent assaults

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) also recommends structural changes to buses that would reduce the chances of injury to bus drivers by creating physical barriers. Also, as many physical assaults are related to disputes around fare payment, the ATU suggests that transit systems be permitted to use federal funds to “...keep service levels up and fares down”.<sup>1</sup> Finally, reauthorization of the transportation bill in Congress, *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21)*, could potentially provide funding for structural and legislative measures to protect bus operators.<sup>1</sup>

## Programs designed to reduce assaults and protective transit workers

The International Association of Public Transport (UITP) and the International Transport Forum (ITF) released a joint statement in 2015 that outlines recommendations at an international level designed to improve urban public transport safety and combat violence. An important recommendation is to engage stakeholders and encourage their participation in protecting basic rights of transit workers. Key stakeholders include public authorities in transportation and security as well as the transit trade unions, and the transport users themselves.<sup>6</sup>

The U.S. Transit Advisory Committee for Safety (TRACS) put out a report in 2015 on “preventing and mitigating transit worker assaults” in which they outline strategies designed to address assaults and potential violence geared towards transit workers:

- **Policies and procedures:** Develop guidelines for transit agencies in order to prevent workplace assaults and encourage these authorities to create programs to prevent all forms of violence.
- **Risk management:** Establishing a formal risk management process, which should include a mechanism for employees to routinely assist in identification of key hazards and safety issues.
- **Safety promotion:** Training, public education and other forms of support for transit employees
- **Safety assurance:** Enforcement of all guidelines contained within a program that are designed to reduce violence.<sup>6</sup>

## Sécuribus Program in Montréal<sup>7</sup>

The innovative Sécuribus program implemented by the Societe De Transport De Montréal (STM) included a variety of actions to promote the safety of drivers. The main 4 measures were:

1. **Ongoing training:** This training consisted of two 7-hour phases, and was taught by four former bus drivers who became certified as “Sécuribus instructors” (along with videos featuring other transit workers from the STM). Phase 1 focused on giving drivers strategies to diffuse tension and prevent potentially violent behavior. Phase 2 focused on stress management tools.
2. **Two campaigns promoting respect:** one to promote customer awareness on respecting STM bus drivers, and the other highlighting behaviors that can potentially irritate bus drivers and those around them, potentially leading to tension in the bus.
3. **Table of indicators:** A data table was created on frequency of assaults to track trends in order to better carry out preventive measures.
4. **Installation of deterrents:** For example, surveillance cameras, emergency call buttons, safety inspectors, and support for employees that had reported episodes of assault.

This also included legal support to all drivers that wanted to take legal action against those who had been involved in the episode.

The Sécuribus program, implemented in 2007, has seen positive results:

- The number of assaults (that led to reports) decreased by 44.36% from the beginning of the program in 2007 (133 assaults), to 95 in 2010, to 74 in 2012.
- Assault-related sick days decreased by 52.1%, with 4,657 in 2007, but only 2,232 in 2012.
- Physical assaults decreased by 53.4%, with 58 in 2007, to 30 in 2010, and 27 in 2012.
- Increases in customer satisfaction (through surveys) related to security on buses, increasing from 89% in 2007 to 94% in 2012
- The STM was able to lower its costs related to assaults by 43.7%. From 2007 to 2012, the Sécuribus program saved the STM over \$1.9 M.

### **Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) Service Safety Task Force<sup>7</sup>**

In 2014, the MTA established the Service Safety Task Force (SSTF) in an effort to decrease incidents of violence and assaults on operators. This included examining the current policies and security features on buses to and determine what can be improved. As a result:

- All buses were equipped with panic buttons, cameras, and a voice radio in order to effectively communicate if an assault would occur.
- The SSTF recommended that shatterproof compartment shields be put in every bus, and the recommendation was accepted.
- The SSTF improved communication to increase public awareness of bus operator safety measures. This included signs indicating the penalty for assaulting a driver, and a letter issued to parents and students to indicate “rules of conduct” on the bus.
- The SSTF also improved communication between bus drivers, operators, and police.
- The SSTF was also responsible for improving the MTA bus driver training which now include topics such as “De-escalation, Conflict Resolution, and Maintaining a Peaceful Bus Environment”. There are now safety and security pamphlets including a 17-page guide on improving the personal safety of a bus operator, that was geared towards reducing assaults.

Since the program was implemented in 2011, aggravated assaults on bus drivers decreased by 40% by 2014, and a reduction was seen in assault-related workers’ compensation costs as well.

## Other strategies to reduce stressors faced by bus drivers

Please see the other four case studies posted on <https://healthywork.org/resources/healthy-work-strategies/> on strategies to reduce work stressors faced by bus drivers.

### References:

1. Amalgamated Transit Union. *Bus Drivers Under Attack*. Silver Spring, MD, 2019.
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3. Zhou B, Boyer R, Guay S. Dangers on the road: A longitudinal examination of passenger-initiated violence against bus drivers. *Stress and Health* 2018;34:253–265
4. Amalgamated Transit Unit Government Affairs Department. *State laws providing for specific penalties in connection with harming transit and school bus employees*. Updated October 26, 2012. Accessed January 31, 2020.
5. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2011. *Practices to Protect Bus Operators from Passenger Assault*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/14609>. Accessed February 1, 2020.
6. UITF-ITF Joint Statement: *Recommendations for Combating Violence and Insecurity on Urban Public Transport*. International Association of Public Transport (UITP) and International Transport Forum (ITF), 2015. <https://www.uitp.org/>. Accessed July 10, 2020.
7. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. *Tools and Strategies for Eliminating Assaults Against Transit Operators, Volume 2: User Guide*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25114>.