WMATA Confidential Close Call Reporting Program

WMATA/ATU L-689/IBT L-922/Local-2/BTS
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eSubmit Reporting Process Manual

U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary of Transportation

Bureau of Transportation Statistics

About the Bureau of Transportation Statistics

About This Report

Abstract

The *WMATA Confidential Close Call Reporting Program eSubmit Reporting Process Manual* describes the step-by-step process on reporting a close call event, providing context of the program itself, an explanation of the process and the roles each entity plays, and examples of specific events that may or may not qualify for a close call report.

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1. Introduction

The WMATA Close Call Reporting System is a collaboration between the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) that collects close call data for rail and bus transit operations. This manual describes the process for submitting a voluntary report to the WMATA Close Call Reporting System, and how the system collects and processes close call reports for rail and bus transit operations.

A close call, or near miss, is an unsafe situation or circumstance that has the potential for safety consequences but has not yet resulted in an adverse safety event, such as a crash or injury. Therefore, close calls are warnings of unsafe conditions. Data and information collected from close call reports can be used to identify potential hazards, understand the root causes of unsafe events or conditions, and develop corrective actions or countermeasures. BTS established the Precursor Safety Data Program to collect, analyze, and disseminate data and information about close calls in various industries with the guarantee of confidentiality for the individuals and organizations that report these close calls. Close call data collected by BTS is analyzed by subject matter experts in a Peer Review Team (PRT), who find the root causes that led to each near-miss event and develop preventive safety actions (PrSAs) that can address those root causes.

2. WMATA Close Call Reporting eSubmit Tool

WMATA sponsors the Close Call Reporting Program in partnership with the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689 (ATU L-689), the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 922 (IBT L-922), the Office of Professional Employees International Union Local 2 (OPEIU Local 2), and BTS. Close call reporting is intended to improve rail and bus safety while giving WMATA employees a confidential platform where they can voluntarily report close call events without the fear of disciplinary action. By sharing information on trends in reported close call events, BTS supports WMATA's effort to continuously improve safety.

2.1. ROLES AND THE OVERALL PROCESS OF WMATA CLOSE CALL REPORTING

The close call reporting process occurs across five areas of activity. Figure 1 illustrates how the reporting process moves across these areas and describes the decision points made within each category.

Figure 1. Close Call Reporting Process
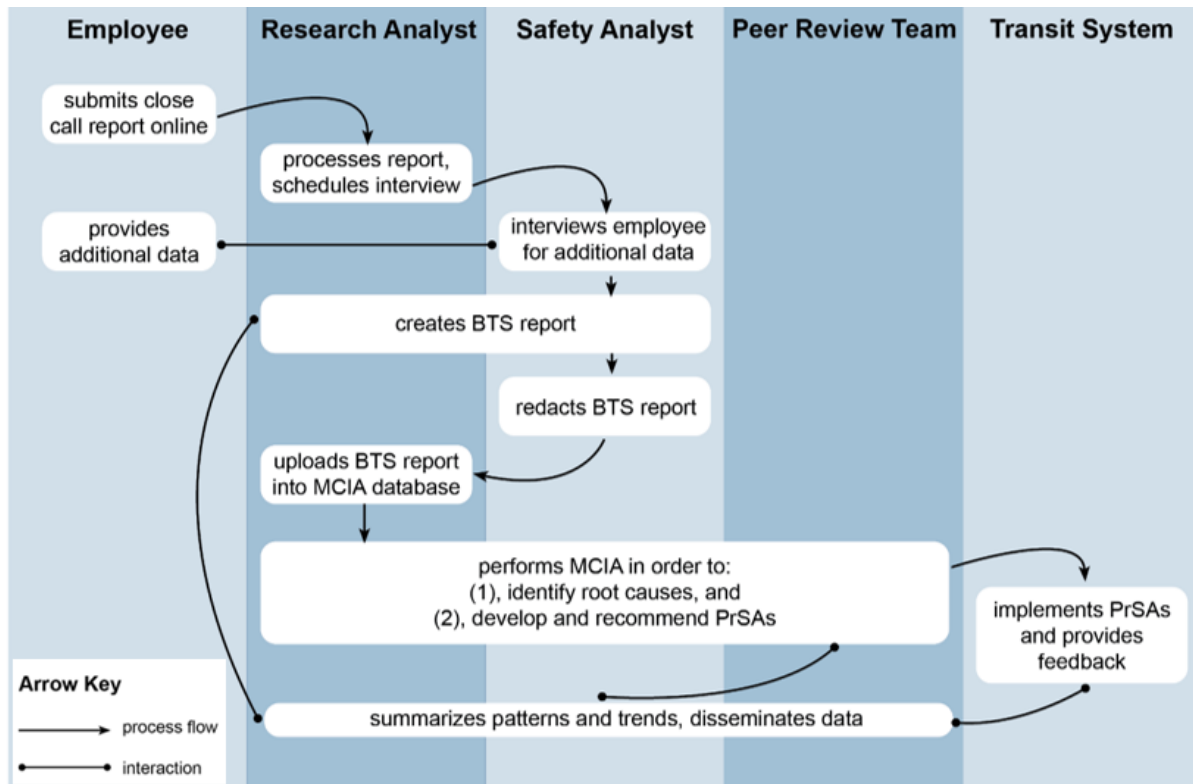
BTS = Bureau of Transportation Statistics; MCIA = Multiple Cause Incident Analysis; PrSA = Preventative Safety Action.
Source: BTS.

2.2. EVENT ELIGIBILITY FOR CLOSE CALL REPORTING PROTECTIONS

Employees included in the Precursor Safety Data Program can report any safety concern. Reports are accepted for any condition or event that is perceived as potentially endangering the employees, the public, the equipment, or the environment. Any concern about one's own safety or someone else's safety at work can be reported. Each close call report must contain sufficiently detailed information about a safety event so that BTS can evaluate it.

Reports are rejected if they are:

- Reports unrelated to the safety of WMATA's rail/transit infrastructure or bus operations.
- Urgent real-time issues (e.g., a runaway train).
- Grievances related to a safety event, which have been or should be filed pursuant to the parties' Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Events are not eligible for protection from discipline if:

- The employee's action or lack of action was intended to damage WMATA's operations or equipment, injure other employees, or purposely placed others in danger (i.e., sabotage).

- The employee's action or lack of action involved a criminal offense. The employee's action or lack of action violated a traffic safety law leading to a citation (e.g., red light cameras, speed cameras or observed by law enforcement).
- The employee's behavior involved substance abuse or inappropriate use of controlled substances.
- The close call report contains falsified information.
- The event resulted in a transit agency accident/incident and/or has caused or alleged to have caused any injury, illness, or medical treatment of any kind to any person involved in the event.
- The event resulted in an identifiable release of hazardous material.

Specific events that do not qualify for close call reporting include:

- Rail
  - Station Stop Misalignment.
  - Exceeding the limits of an absolute or permissive block.
  - Red Signal Violations by train or work equipment.
  - Wrong side door opening.
  - An employee is not exempt from discipline for a violation that WMATA identifies contemporaneously (e.g., a vehicle (maintenance/revenue) passes a red signal without proper authorization and the control point (ROCC/Interlocking Operator) notices it before the vehicle completely clears the associated switch) before the employee files a close call report. In such situations, WMATA may use event recorder information to support discipline. For example, a WMATA official who observes a revenue or maintenance vehicle operate past a signal that requires a stop may use any relevant data recorded by the train's event recorder in pursuing disciplinary action against the employee(s), regardless of whether a close call report is filed in a timely manner.
- Rail Operations Control Center
  - Third Rail Power restoration violations to include restoring third rail power when personnel have not cleared and giving personnel permission to restore a Red Tag Outage when personnel has not cleared the work location.
- Bus
  - Rollaway buses involving the operator's failure to follow procedures for proper vehicle securement.

2.3. STARTING A CLOSE CALL REPORT

To begin the close call reporting process, follow these simple steps:

1. Navigate to http://www.closecall.bts.gov.
2. On the home page (Figure 2), select "Submit Report Online" or "Reporting" to navigate to the submission page (Figure 3).
3. Select either "Bus Close Call" or "Rail Close Call" (Figure 3).
4. Complete the CAPTCHA (Figure 4).
5. Read the Warning, Pledge of Confidentiality, and Burden Statement. These statements inform you of the estimated time it takes to complete the report and the confidentiality procedures that protect the data you share with BTS. Check the box to confirm that you have read and understood both passages, then select "Continue" (Figure 5).

Figure 2. Close Call Program Homepage

Source: BTS.

Figure 3. Close Call Report Submission Page

Source: BTS.

Figure 4. CAPTCHA Checkpoints

A. I'm Not a Robot Checkbox

Source: BTS.

B. Select Images Puzzle

Source: BTS.

Figure 5. Pledge of Confidentiality and Burden Statement Screen

WARNING WARNING WARNING   Close

You have accessed a U.S. Government information system, which includes (1) this computer, (2) this network, (3) all computers connected to this network, and (4) all devices and storage media attached to this network or to a computer on this network. U.S. Government information systems are provided for the processing of official U.S. Government information only. Unauthorized or improper use of this information system is prohibited and may subject you to disciplinary action, as well as civil and criminal penalties. All data contained on U.S. Government information systems is owned by the U.S. Government and may, for the purpose of protecting the rights and property of the U.S. Government, be monitored, intercepted, recorded, read, searched, copied, or captured in any manner and disclosed or used for any lawful government purpose at any time. THERE IS NO RIGHT TO PRIVACY IN THIS SYSTEM. System personnel may give to law enforcement officials any potential evidence of crime found on U.S. Government information systems. USE OF THIS SYSTEM BY ANY USER, AUTHORIZED OR UNAUTHORIZED, CONSTITUTES YOUR UNDERSTANDING AND CONSENT TO THIS MONITORING, INTERCEPTION, RECORDING, READING, COPYING, OR CAPTURING AND DISCLOSURE.

PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be used for statistical purposes only. In accordance with the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) of 2018, (Pub. L: 115-435 Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, Title III), the information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed in any identifiable form to anyone other than BTS employees or BTS agents. In accordance with this confidentiality statute, only statistical and non-identifying data will be made publicly available through de-identifying aggregate reports. By law, every BTS employee and agent is subject to a jail term of up to 5 years, a fine of up to $250,000, or both (a Class E felony), if he or she discloses any identifiable information about the respondent.

BURDEN STATEMENT

A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, nor shall a person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) unless that collection of information displays a current valid OMB Control Number. The OMB Control Number for this information collection is 2138-0044. Public reporting of a close call is estimated to take approximately 30 minutes, including the time for reviewing instructions, completing, and reviewing the report. Reporting any information to the Close Calls Reporting System is voluntary. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to: Close Call Data Collection Officer, Demetra Collia, US DOT/ BTS, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, Room E36-302, Washington, D.C. 20590 or email: Demetra.collia@dot.gov.

☐ I have read and understand the Burden Statement and Pledge of Confidentiality

Continue

Source: BTS.

2.4. COMPLETING A CLOSE CALL REPORT

Once you arrive at the "Reporting Employee" page, follow the instructions provided:

1. Complete the "Reporting Employee Information" section, where you are asked to provide: your full name, WMATA Employee ID, primary phone number, the best time to call, and whether BTS can further contact you regarding this report (Figure 6). If your 6-digit WMATA Employee ID is not recognized, call BTS at 1-888-568-2377 and leave a message with your name, phone number, and Employee ID.
2. Complete the "Incident Details" section with as much information as possible (Figure 7). Providing details helps the PRT analyze the close call and develop PrSAs that can prevent similar events from happening. In this section, you are asked to provide the incident date and time, and, depending on the selection of where the incident occurred, you are also asked to: provide short answer responses, check boxes, or select from drop-down tabs to accurately depict the close call (Figure 8). If applicable, multiple boxes can be checked within the "Weather Conditions" field. *Note:* Not all fields are applicable for all incidents.
3. Describe what happened during the close call event in the "Incident Description" section (Figure 9). Talking about the close call in your own words helps the PRT create a "chain of events" that led to the near miss. Additional information to tell a full story about the incident is also encouraged. There are also prompt questions available for your use.
4. To upload supporting documents and images, select the "Attach a file" button (Figure 10). Multiple attachments must be uploaded one-by-one individually. To remove an attachment, select the "Remove" button that appears next to an uploaded item's title.
5. Review all the provided information in your report for accuracy and detail. If you are finished editing, select "Submit Report" (Figure 10).
6. After a successful submission, the "Report Sent" page is displayed (Figure 11).

Figure 6. Reporting Employee Information Section

Source: BTS.

Figure 7. Incident Details Section

Source: BTS.

Figure 8. Incident Occurrence Expanded Section

Where did this incident occur? (Select One)

[In/Around a Shop] [On Road] [Facility]

In/Around the Shop

Shop ⌄   Location of Incident [ ]

Shop Condition - Please Describe
[ ]

Incident Environment

Weather Conditions (Check all that apply.)

☐ Clear   ☐ Slight rain   ☐ High winds   ☐ Snowing   ☐ Cloudy   ☐ Intense rain   ☐ Lightning

☐ Cold (Below 32 F)   ☐ Fog   ☐ Snow(on ground)   ☐ Hail Storm   ☐ Hot (Above 90 F)

Select All   Clear All

Lighting ⌄   Light Condition ⌄   Grade ⌄   Road Condition ⌄

What was happening at the time of the incident?

WMATA Equipment
Involved ⌄   Equipment Condition ⌄   Did the Equipment Fail?   ○ Yes   ● No

Bus Activity ⌄   Employee Activity ⌄

Damage

Damage to WMATA vehicle?
○ Yes   ○ No

Damage to other vehicle or property?
○ Yes   ○ No

Report History

Reported this Close Call to WMATA before?
○ Yes   ○ No

Source: BTS.

Figure 9. Incident Description Section
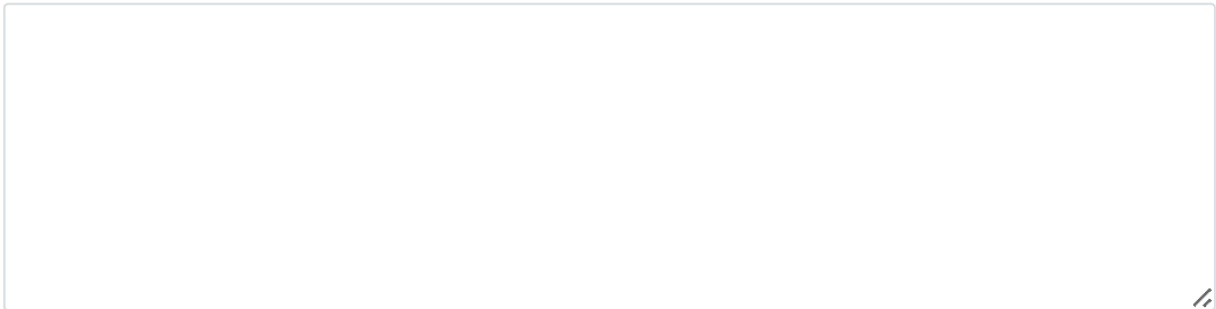
INCIDENT DESCRIPTION

Please use the space below to complete your description of the incident or condition you wish to report.

You may find the following questions useful as you think through what information to provide.

- What were you and your crew doing immediately prior to the close call incident?
- What did you notice that made you think a problem was developing?
- What factors (weather, light, terrain, equipment, human error, etc.) may have contributed to the incident?
- What, if anything, was unusual or unfamiliar to you or your crew with respect to this job assignment?
- If anything or anybody interfered with your ability to perform the assigned task safely, describe how.
- What prevented this incident from becoming a more serious accident?
- Has this happened before? If so, what were the prevailing conditions?

Incident Description

Source: BTS.

Figure 10. Attachments and Submit Report Buttons

Attachments

Upload Pictures / Diagrams / Other Supporting Documents

Attach a file

SUBMIT REPORT

Source: BTS.

Figure 11. Successful Submission Page

REPORT SENT

Your report (Incident date: 05/20/2025 , time: 1037) has been successfully sent to BTS. You will be contacted by BTS staff for a follow-up phone interview.

Thank you for participating in this program.

eSubmit Home Page

Source: BTS.

3. Glossary

This glossary defines key terms and provides examples of events that qualify for reporting.

3.1. KEY TERMS

Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS): BTS is a federal statistical agency within the US Department of Transportation that serves as an independent third party that collects, analyzes, and maintains the confidential close call data collected for WMATA. BTS also identifies safety trends and emerging risks and writes and distributes publications to share this information with WMATA participants and the transit industry.

Close Call: A situation or circumstance that had the potential for safety consequences but did not result in an adverse safety event. It can be any safety concern that could lead to an unsafe event or condition, or any event that is perceived as potentially endangering one's own safety or someone else's safety at work, including employees, contractors, or the public. It can also relate to equipment or the environment. Knowledge about a close call presents an opportunity to improve safety practices and culture.

Precursor Safety Data Program: A program that supports the U.S. Department of Transportation's goal of eliminating transportation-related fatalities and injuries by analyzing close calls to reduce risk before an accident happens; a voluntary, confidential system that provides the reporting employee with protection from discipline and decertification.

Close Call Data System (CCDS): the IT system that supports the Precursor Safety Data Program.

Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA): A statute which governs BTS confidentiality is the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA). This statute prohibits disclosure or release, for non-statistical purposes, of information collected under a pledge of confidentiality. Under CIPSEA, data may not be released to unauthorized persons. Willful and knowing disclosure of protected data to unauthorized persons is a felony punishable by up to five years imprisonment and up to a $250,000 fine.

Department of Transportation (DOT): The federal cabinet department that ensures a fast, safe, efficient, accessible, and convenient transportation system in the United States.

Multiple Cause Incident Analysis (MCIA): A method that examines a close call's contributing factors to identify a root cause that can be addressed.

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology (OST-R): The department within DOT that implements research programs, advancing technology to improve the safety and efficiency of transportation systems.

Peer Review Team (PRT): The PRT consists of representatives from WMATA rail and transit, union officers and members, WMATA Safety, and BTS. It promotes the Close Call Program at WMATA, identifies why close calls occur, recommends preventive safety actions, and evaluates the effectiveness of any such action that was implemented.

Preventive Safety Actions (PrSA): Actions taken by WMATA in response to the PRT's reports of emerging trends and new types of safety-critical events.

Root Cause: The identified cause(s) of the close call incident or the chain of events that led to the close call incident.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA): Transit agency participating in the Close Call Program. WMATA works with the other stakeholders to implement the Close Call Program, review PRT reports, and take preventive actions in response to close call events.

3.2. EXAMPLES OF UNSAFE EVENTS THAT COULD QUALIFY FOR CONFIDENTIAL, NON-PUNITIVE, CLOSE CALL SAFETY REPORTING AT WMATA

While any safety event may be reported, it is essential to understand which types of events specifically qualify for a close call report. This section provides examples of unsafe events or situations that could qualify for the WMATA Confidential Close Call Reporting Program.

3.2.1. Rail Operations

Unsafe rail operation events that could qualify for reporting include:

1. Split switch incidents.
2. Speeding events.
3. Improper flagging.
4. Failing to blow the horn when required.
5. Operating on the wrong track.
6. Failure to protect adjacent track when necessary for safety.
7. Non-compliance with roadway worker protection rules.
8. Third rail or power-related incidents.
   A. With exception, not to be considered a reportable event:
      i. Third Rail Power restoration violations to include restoring third rail power when personnel have not cleared and giving personnel permission to restore a Red Tag Outage when personnel has not cleared the work location.
9. Entering onto Roadway without following proper procedures.

3.2.2. Bus Operations

Unsafe bus operation events that could qualify for reporting include:

1. Unsafe bus turnaround areas.
2. Near miss accident or incident with a bus due to blind spots or equipment issues.
3. Speeding events, on the street or in the yard.
4. Failing to blow the horn when required.
5. Operating on the wrong side of the road.
6. Not stopping at railroad crossing.
7. Not using/improper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available.
8. Improper use of tools/use of incorrect tool to get the job done.
9. Facilities, housekeeping, infrastructure or equipment issues that may lead to an accident or incident.

10. Other instances of non-compliance with safety rules, processes or procedures or taking shortcuts to stay on time or get the job done.

4. List of Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Initialisms

ATU L-689   Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689

BTS   Bureau of Transportation Statistics

CCDS   Close Call Data System

CIPSEA   Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act

DOT   Department of Transportation

IBT L-922   International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 922

MCIA   Multiple Cause Incident Analysis

OPEIU Local 2   Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 2

PrSA   Preventive Safety Action

PRT   Peer Review Team

ROCC   Rail Operations Control Center

WMATA   Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority