

# Guard our safety

## The importance of having guards on our trains

**The NSW Government has purchased new trains to run its InterCity services. The new fleet has the capability to be run as driver-only operations, meaning that the role of the train guard could be removed. This would put the safety of commuters and workers at serious risk.**

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) NSW has long opposed the removal of guards from our train services on the solid

grounds that it would pose an unnecessary and unacceptable risk to the safety of commuters and train crew.

Along with train drivers, guards play a vital role in ensuring the safety of passengers and each other on our trains, as well as in ensuring the on-time running of our train network. Removing them is a risk that we can't afford to take.



# Why are guards so important?

The role of the guard is diverse and critical. The following provides an overview of the key tasks our guards undertake – tasks that would either be lost entirely or are intended to be undertaken by other railway workers who are already stretched to capacity with their current workload.

## Passenger safety before and when departing station

We've all seen the safety warnings and heard the horror stories about people, including children, falling in between the gap between the train and the station platform. According to the NSW Government's own safety campaign, in excess of 300 people have fallen through the gap in the past year and over 1,700 people fell catching the train last year (Transport for NSW statistics).

*The guard's current role enables them to visually and audibly assess the entire platform to ensure safety at all times. When a person falls catching a train, the guard is the only person who can stop the train or get the driver to stop the train.*

It is the role of the guard to keep an eye out for this and alert the driver if something occurs and passengers are in danger. In the critical seconds as the train departs, the guard continues to monitor the platform ensuring no one falls between the train and the platform and no one trips near the departing train and is the only person who has the capacity to stop the train in this situation as the driver will be unaware of the incident.

Placing the onus on the driver to monitor this via CCTV cameras while also concentrating on the job of driving the train is a disaster waiting to happen.

The population of NSW continues to rapidly grow and so will passenger numbers travelling on the rail network. Therefore, the retention of the guard becomes even more vital for the safety of the travelling public, especially at train stations across the network.

## On-board passenger safety

We know that many people, particularly women, report that they do not feel safe on our public transport as is. Removing guards will make that an even worse. Guards are the first port of call in the event of an emergency on our trains, and the mere presence of a guard can act as a deterrent to inappropriate or worse behavior.

Many parents of children who are travelling alone make sure the child sits in the carriage nearest to the guard so that they know they're safe and guards are often approached by commuters who are feeling unsafe. Without a guard, there won't be that watchful eye.

Under the NSW Government proposal, onboard monitoring of internal CCTV will be the only method to replace the guard. This will be done from a remote location as it will be impossible for the driver to drive the train and monitor CCTV at the same time.

*There are serious concerns about the prevalence of anti-social behavior on trains once passengers realise there is no one physically on the train to intervene and deter this type of behavior.*

## **Assisting those who need it most**

People with a disability often request the assistance of the guards on our trains, whether it be to put a ramp out to enable them to physically get on and off the train or to provide other forms of personal advice and information.

Guards help a range of people who may require greater assistance, including older commuters and parents of children who may need more time to board or alight the train, need assistance moving around the train etc.

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*CCTV from a driver's cab could never replace a set of eyes to watch your child safely board, travel and alight from a train. It will also restrict the driver's vision of the track and peripheral vision from the driver's seat, risking potentially missing unknown people and/or workers on the track.*

*We should be making train travel safer and more accessible to everyone, not making it more difficult for people to commute.*

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## **First aiders and first responders**

Train guards are trained in emergency first aid, and are more often than not the first people on the scene in the event of an emergency. Removing the guard from the train will mean the train driver will be the only worker on the train to assist in emergency situations. This is not only impractical, but callous. Currently, in instances of this nature, the driver and guard work as a team to coordinate the best possible response while ensuring the safety and security of passengers at all times. The number of incidents, including fatal incidents, on our tracks is unfortunately high and continues to rise. The impact that has on a train driver's mental

well-being cannot be underestimated. Forcing a train driver to not only inform a central base of an incident, coordinate appropriate response activities and then to manage passengers' safety on the train all in a highly traumatized state is beyond reckoning. It begs the question - what would happen if the driver was so traumatised they were unable to perform these safety critical tasks?

As the removal of the guard (who is first aid qualified) would mean the driver would potentially apply first aid to any victims - or at least assess the need to provide first aid - all while dealing with the personal impact such an event has on the driver themselves is unworkable, irresponsible and callous in the extreme. Such a task cannot be undertaken by anyone other than someone physically on the train. If there's no guard, then it will fall to the driver or the victim will have to wait to be attended to by a first responder whenever they arrive - which could be significantly delayed, depending on where on the network the incident occurs.

The first few minutes of receiving first aid in an emergency are often the most critical for the survival of a victim. The control of bleeding, the clearing of airways and the delivery of CPR can prevent permanent injury or death.

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*In the NSW Trains guard-less trains model, there is no one to ascertain (except the driver) the location of the victim - who could be still under the train, laying in full view of the passengers, or thrown onto an adjacent running line - let alone assess their medical status and requirements.*

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The driver cannot and must not be expected to leave the controls of a train and perform first aid on a victim, or to check if the victim is alive, and also ensure the safety of the passengers on the train while being in an emotional, stressed state after such a traumatic incident.

## On-time running

Guards are essential to the on-time running of trains on our network. Not only do they assist passengers to board and alight our trains as quickly as practical, but they are also on hand to deal swiftly with anything that prevents the train meeting its timetable.

*For example, if a person or an object is deliberately blocking the doors of a train, the train's safety system should kick in and render the train unable to move. The guard is currently on hand to deal with the obstruction.*

*Without a guard, the driver will be forced to leave the driver's seat and deal with the incident themselves, without doubt causing further delays, and placing the driver at risk without anybody else on the train to assist.*

## Coordinating evacuations

In the event of an emergency situation (which is not uncommon), train guards are responsible for assisting passengers to safety.

*Having someone with a clear understanding of evacuation protocol, train safety protocols etc, is vital in ensuring commuters remain calm and safe. In times of emergency, passengers look for someone to take charge - that's the type of leadership that can only be provided in person by a guard.*

In the not uncommon event of a fire occurring on a train, the guard is the only person who has the capability to assess the situation, deal with the fire and move passengers away from danger. If evacuation is required, the guard and driver work as a team to ensure the safest outcome. As is the situation today, the new train will operate in multiple consists (i.e. 4 cars attached to 4 cars) with the guard in the optimal position to ensure the safety of passengers within the portion they are working from. With only the driver on the train there will be nobody physically on each portion of the train and passengers will not be able to exit the unattended portion.

# The dangers of driver-only operations

## Panic button chaos

The NSW Government's proposal is to have passenger 'information' buttons throughout the carriages that are designed to allow passengers to ask general questions about the train services. These calls will then be sent through to a central location, off the train, where they will be answered and responded to as needed. These buttons would also be the only means of passengers raising emergency issues. That means that an emergency call from a passenger will have to wait in a queue while other passenger queries are responded to. In practical terms, that means an urgent passenger request for the train driver to stop will have to wait in a queue while less-urgent calls about which station to alight from etc are dealt with.

*Currently, the guards play a crucial role in providing passengers with the relevant information they are seeking, as well as in managing emergency situations as and when they arise from the best position to do so - on the train.*

## Inner city station rush

Stations like Sydney's Town Hall and Wynyard are jammed to capacity at peak hour. There is simply no way a train driver will be able to see all of the platform clearly through a CCTV system, let alone be able to judge when it is safe to depart the platform.

## CASE STUDY • NSW

### Two bangs, then smoke starts filling the cabin

In early 2018, a train travelling from Sydney's Central station bound for Newcastle stops suddenly around 500 metres outside of Epping station. Passengers hear two large bangs and the carriage starts filling with smoke. It's peak hour and the train is packed with commuters, but the train guard makes an announcement, keeps passengers calm and manages to swiftly evacuate commuters to a smoke-free area of the train. The guard then assists the driver to find and fix the fault, all the while reassuring passengers that they are not in danger. It takes 30 minutes for the Rail Commander to arrive on the scene.

## CASE STUDY • NSW

### Assault and a citizens arrest

In February 2017, a young girl was assaulted by a male passenger on a train heading towards Tahmoor, NSW. The guard was quickly notified by passengers about the assault and was also advised that the perpetrator was still on the train. The guard immediately checked on the victim who was being comforted by fellow passengers, and then found the perpetrator who was under a citizen's arrest by passengers who witnessed the attack. The guard rang security and was told that police would meet them shortly. Another train guard who was assisting the guard to patrol the train back to the depot had already called police. It was 53 minutes between the initial call to police and when the police arrived. In these 53 minutes, the guard was critical in managing the crisis and providing directions and assurances to passengers.

### CASE STUDY • NSW

## Safety on and off the platform

In 2017, an elderly customer with a walking frame fell between the platforms while boarding a train at Macquarie Park. The guard on this train was able to notify the driver immediately to ensure the train didn't take off; meanwhile the guard was able to help the passenger. Thankfully the passenger was okay. Several stops later, the same guard was notified of a school kid fainting on board. The guard immediately offered her first aid assistance, but her teacher happened to be travelling with her and had the condition under control. The guard was able to request station assistance at her destination to ensure the passenger made it through the station safely.

### CASE STUDY • UK

## Mother and baby separated

In the UK, there is currently a big push to have guards returned to the London Underground following numerous safety incidents since guards were removed. In one example, a mother was left screaming from a station platform to stop after a train left with her baby on board. The woman placed the child in its pram on the train before returning to the platform to collect her luggage at the busy South Kensington station in central London. As she turned back to the train, the doors shut. Without a guard to hear her cries, and despite passengers pulling an emergency handle, the train drove onto the next station where, thankfully, a passenger looked after the child who was later reunited with its mother.

### CASE STUDY • UK

## Woman dragged along

At West Wickham in the UK in April 2015, a passenger had the straps of her bag trapped in the power-operated train doors of a driver-only train. The driver could not see via the CCTV screen that the bag straps were trapped, started the train, and dragged the woman along the platform until eventually freeing herself.

# What can we do about it?

**The good news is that we can stop this. The NSW Transport Minister, Andrew Constance can easily make a decision to keep guards on our trains. Our safety depends on it.**

**Go to [www.ourtransport.org.au/guarding-our-safety](http://www.ourtransport.org.au/guarding-our-safety) to find out more and to take action.**

