

Questions for the Record

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

MAJORITY

*“Nominations of Joel Matthew Szabat to be a Director of the Amtrak Board of Directors,
Anthony Rosario Coscia to be a Director of the Amtrak Board of Directors
Christopher Koos to be a Director of the Amtrak Board of Directors,
Alvin Brown to be a Member of the National Transportation Safety Board”*

10:00 AM, June 21, 2023

SENATOR TAMMY DUCKWORTH (D-IL)

Topic: NTSB's Open Recommendation on Carry-on Bags: Mayor Brown

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has repeatedly cited carry-on baggage as a potential hazard in aircraft evacuation. Following a dangerous aircraft evacuation at O'Hare back in 2016 after an aborted takeoff due to an uncontained engine fire, NTSB recommended FAA conduct further research on the effects of carry-on baggage on aircraft evacuation procedures. One person was seriously injured in that evacuation and 20 others received minor injuries. At all three usable exits passengers were seen taking carry-on bags with them, against explicit crew instruction to leave them behind.

Frustratingly, the NTSB's recommendation remains open. Additionally, when FAA conducted its own most recent evacuation simulation, there were no carry-on bags involved – despite NTSB's very specific recommendation for FAA to study the impact of carry-on bags.

1. Can you explain why further study on the impact of carry-on bags on aircraft evacuations is so critical for passenger safety?

Response:

It is important for the FAA to understand the impact of passengers retrieving carry-on bags during evacuations and what the risks are and how flight attendants should address this behavior.

If confirmed, I would be happy to work with you on this issue.

SENATOR BEN RAY LUJÁN (D-NM)

The National Transportation Safety Board does vital work by investigating accidents in pursuit of answers for victims and their families, and by making recommendations to other agencies on how we can improve safety.

Over the past five decades, the NTSB has issued more than 150 safety recommendations to prevent alcohol- and other drug-impaired driving.

This includes NTSB's recommendation to require that new cars be equipped with alcohol impairment prevention technology. NTSB's recommendation is a big reason why my bill, the HALT/RIDE Act was enacted in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

I urge NHTSA to urgently publish the advanced notice of proposed rulemaking for the HALT/RIDE Act. Every day that we wait means another 30 people in America lost to drunk and impaired driving. NHTSA and the Department of Transportation need to act to enforce the law.

1. Mr. Brown, is impaired driving an urgent traffic safety problem?

Response:

Yes, impaired driving causes more than 30% of motor vehicle fatalities annually.

2. Mr. Brown, would implementing the NTSB's alcohol- and drug-impaired driving recommendations have a demonstrable impact on safety outcomes?

Response:

Yes, these NTSB recommendations would save lives. When all new cars are equipped with alcohol impairment detection technology, over 9,000 of lives could be saved annually. Other NTSB recommendations to prevent alcohol- and other drug-impaired driving would also save lives. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you on this issue.

SENATOR RAPHAEL WARNOCK (D-GA)

Topic: Blocked Rail Crossings

According to blocked crossing data from the Federal Railroad Administration, there have been over 25,000 reported blocked rail crossings in the past year.¹ Nearly 1,200 of these crossings are in Georgia, which puts the state in the top ten for blocked crossings in the United States.⁷ I am particularly appalled by reports of children having to climb over and under stalled trains at rail crossings to get to school. These stopped trains also prevent emergency services from getting to people in need. I was pleased to see two of my amendments concerning additional assistance for blocked crossing elimination and mitigation, especially around schools, be incorporated into the *Railway Safety Act*, but there is still more to do to protect our communities from the safety issues of blocked rail crossings.

1. What actions does the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommend, for both Congress and railroad companies, that would help reduce or eliminate blocked crossing incidents?

Response:

The NTSB does not have any recommendations specifically addressing blocked crossing incidents, but the safest grade crossing is no grade crossing.

2. What more can Congress do to work with private railroad companies to address the concerns of communities regarding the high frequency of blocked rail crossings?

Response:

Senator Warnock, if confirmed I would look forward to working with you on this issue. The NTSB does not have any recommendations specific to blocked rail crossings, but the highway and rail investigative teams work closely together when rail crossing accidents occur as both modes are part of the same system. The issue needs a holistic, system wide approach to safety.
