



TO: City Council Members
FROM: Melanie Harding, Chief Policy Analyst to the Mayor, on behalf of Mayor Woodards
COPY: City Manager and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Resolution Supporting the Implementation of All Safety Recommendations Approved by the National Transportation Safety Board as a Result of the Derailment of Amtrak Passenger Train 501 – July 16, 2019
DATE: June 21, 2019

SUMMARY:

Authorizing a resolution in support of the safety recommendations approved by the National Transportation Safety Board on May 21, 2019, as a result of the investigation of the Amtrak Passenger Train 501 Derailment near DuPont, Washington.

COUNCIL SPONSORS:

Mayor Woodards

STRATEGIC POLICY PRIORITY:

This resolution best aligns with the City Council’s strategic policy priority of:

- Strengthen and support a safe city with healthy residents.

BACKGROUND:

On the morning of December 18, 2017, a southbound Amtrak passenger train (501), on its first revenue service run on the Amtrak Cascades line using the Point Defiance Bypass, derailed from a bridge near DuPont, Washington while traveling at a speed of 78 miles per hour around a 30-mile per hour curve. The derailment resulted in several rail cars falling into Interstate 5 below. The derailment caused the death of three passengers, injuries to 57 passengers and crewmembers, and injuries to eight motorists on Interstate 5. In addition, the Amtrak passenger train derailment caused the two-day closure of Interstate 5, which is the main north-south arterial in the area and negatively impacted the economy of the greater Pacific Northwest by obstructing interstate commerce, significantly delaying the delivery of commercial goods as well as motor commuter traffic. The damage caused by Amtrak passenger train 501 's derailment is estimated to total \$25,800,000 dollars.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating significant transportation accidents in United States, including railroad and highway accidents. NTSB investigated the Amtrak passenger train derailment and approved findings, a statement of probable cause and safety recommendations at its May 21, 2019 board meeting. The NTSB’s 53 findings included the finding that had positive train control systems been fully installed and operational at the time of the accident, it would have stopped the train prior to the curve preventing the accident from occurring.

In addition to the findings, NTSB approved 26 safety recommendations and 3 re-approved safety recommendations for parties essential to the safety of passenger rail travel in Washington state, including the Secretary of Transportation, the Federal Railroad Administration, the United States Department of Defense Fire and Emergency Services Working Group, the Washington State Department of



Transportation, Amtrak, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority.

Due to the derailment accident, use of the new Amtrak Cascades station in Tacoma's Freighthouse Square has been put on hold. This station is a great addition to the Dome District and designed in consultation with an active Citizens Advisory Committee and City officials. The station is part of the \$89.1 million Point Defiance Bypass high-speed rail project, which will reroute passenger train traffic through DuPont, Lakewood and Tacoma, creating a faster and more reliable travel route. Due to the City's heavy involvement in the station project, Tacoma has in interest in the safety recommendations being enacted so the Point Defiance bypass route can be restarted for the financial viability of that property.

ISSUE:

There have been a number of preventable North American passenger train derailments that have resulted in significant loss of life and irreparable damages. Public Safety is a primary goal and strategic priority of the City of Tacoma.

ALTERNATIVES:

The City Council could choose to modify or reject the resolution.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City of Tacoma show its support for the safety recommendations approved on May 21, 2019 by the NTSB to improve passengers trail travel and prevent future tragedies of this type from occurring and encourage the resumption of service as soon as enactment of safety recommendations allows.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact with this proposed legislation