

More than 100 injured in Brooklyn train derailment

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On Wednesday, at the height of the morning rush, a Long Island Railroad (LIRR) commuter train slammed into the bumper block at the end of the line at the Atlantic Avenue Terminal in downtown Brooklyn, New York. The two front cars derailed and crashed into a room beyond the end of the track. Reports indicate that at least 103 people suffered injuries, mostly minor. Eleven people were hospitalized. Luckily, there were no fatalities.

The LIRR train was carrying over 400 passengers, most bound for work in New York City. Commuters can connect with nine subway lines at Atlantic Terminal, next to the Barclays Center, making it one of the city's busiest transit hubs.

This accident is similar to one that occurred last September at NJ Transit's Hoboken terminal in New Jersey, across the Hudson River from Manhattan. In that incident, one person was killed and 114 people were injured, many seriously.

The relatively low level of injuries in Brooklyn is likely due to the slow speed of the train, which was reportedly traveling at only between 10 and 15 miles (16 and 24 kilometers) per hour. This is in contrast to the Hoboken train, which approached the terminal at twice the speed limit.

An investigation of the Hoboken incident concluded that the train engineer suffered from undiagnosed sleep apnea, which causes drowsiness, possibly resulting in a loss of control.

However, safety technology known as Positive Train Control (PTC) would have automatically slowed the train's approach, had it been in operation. In 2008, the federal government mandated that PTC be installed throughout the rail system by 2015, but many railroads, including both NJ Transit and the LIRR, have delayed, claiming a lack of funds.

Before a National Transportation Safety Board investigative team even reached the site of the Brooklyn accident, Metropolitan Transportation Authority Chairman Tom Prendergast and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo both immediately blamed "human error" as the likely cause.

The reason why the train did not stop before the bumper is, as yet, unknown. One passenger, Aaron Neufeld, told ABC News, "It didn't seem like we were going unusually fast... I don't think it was anything out of the norm."

The train crew is being interviewed and the train's event recorder, the so-called black box, is being examined. There are many possible reasons for the accident, including equipment malfunction. No firm conclusions can be drawn as to the cause of the accident until the investigation has been completed.

The Atlantic and Hoboken terminal incidents are by no means isolated events. These are only a few of the many rail transportation incidents that are occurring with remarkable frequency in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area in recent years.

Just last October a LIRR train derailed near New Hyde Park, on Long Island, injuring 33 people, including four seriously.

A Metro North passenger train headed for Manhattan derailed in December 2013 while taking a sharp curve at high speed, killing four and injuring 67, 11 critically. If PTC had been in place, this accident would likely not have happened.

While each incident has specific characteristics, the pattern points to a criminal lack of investment in safety and maintenance. In recent years, audits of both NJ Transit and Metro North found numerous safety violations and a prioritization of on-time performance over safety. In other words, speedup and cost cutting

were putting both passengers and workers at risk.



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