

Family of man killed on Boston transit demands answers: "The MBTA slaughtered my uncle"

Kate Randall

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More than six weeks after the tragic death of his uncle on a Boston train, Kelvin Lalin and his family still have been provided with no explanation of how the tragic accident took place or received personal condolences from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA).

Robinson Lalin, 39, was killed in the early morning hours of Sunday, April 10, when his arm was trapped in the door of an inbound Red Line train at Broadway station in South Boston. He was subsequently dragged to his death when his body ended up under the tracks.

Lalin's death is one of a series of accidents on the MBTA in the recent period exposing the unsafe and potentially deadly conditions riders confront on the transit system, which includes rapid transit, buses, commuter rail and ferry service. Daily ridership is still sharply down from pre-pandemic levels of an estimated 1 million daily, to about 568,000, according to the "T," resulting in a decline in revenue from fares.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Kelvin Lalin at his family's home in Dorchester earlier this month.

"We are left with no answers from the MBTA as of now," he said. "All we know is what the MBTA has released in the preliminary report. I have tried to contact the MBTA personally, but it's gone unacknowledged. I do not know if they are ignoring me or ducking me, but I would like to hear from them."

Kelvin said that the MBTA had a safety meeting via Zoom a few weeks after the accident. "All they said was we are sorry for the Lalin family and then they moved on to the next thing that they had on their agenda and that was it," he said.

In particular, Kelvin has requested videos from the station showing the accident. "We have requested the videos; I hope to see them soon. I am the spokesman for the family. My mother, she is obviously not going to be able to see them. She has been going through a lot of trauma since the first day. Robinson was her youngest brother. She is not going to be able to see her brother die the way he did.

"But I want to see it. We have requested it. I have called the MBTA's office. I have left messages. There is no call-back. Nothing. We are just grieving right now and waiting to see

what we do next."

Earlier this month, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said that Lalin was dragged more than 100 feet along the platform and "onto the surface below, near the tracks."

According to an MBTA Transit Police report obtained by the *Boston Globe* and reported in its May 17 edition, Robinson stepped off the train and onto the platform, then went back onto the train before exiting a second time.

When his arm became stuck in the door, he ran 105 feet down the platform before he lost his balance and was dragged to his death. What was left of his mangled body was found about 75 feet inside the tunnel.

The transit police report reveals that after the accident, the train stopped for a short time in the tunnel outside Broadway station for an "unspecified mechanical issue" before proceeding. It was not until the train had traveled ten additional stops, to the end of the line at Alewife Station, and eight stops back to the Downtown Crossing station, that the train was finally stopped after the MBTA determined it had been involved in the fatal accident.

The train continued to travel and take on passengers despite a witness reporting the tragic scene to Transit Police at about 12:31 a.m., about three minutes after the train arrived at Broadway.

Kelvin said that his uncle's death had exposed the lack of safety on the transit system. "My uncle's situation, it basically put a spotlight on a lot of negligence on the MBTA. They have been consistently continuing to have these issues, and they are not addressing them. And unfortunately, my uncle's death was I hope the last straw. I hope another family does not have to go through what we are going through."

After the accident, the NTSB said that there was "a fault in a local door control system that enabled the train to move with the door obstructed." The trains are designed to prevent them from moving when the passenger doors are obstructed. Passengers repeatedly witness train doors opening and closing before the cars proceed, especially during rush hour, when they try to enter or exit an overcrowded train.

"They have said it seems as though the sensors on the door

were not working. Now these trains are from 1969 or '70. There are still not any answers from the MBTA, or a phone call from the governor or anyone in charge. We are having a tough time actually dealing with it. It is irresponsible, it is criminal. I am here trying to hold my mother up. She is very emotional and devastated.”

There are MBTA personnel on the platforms only at the busiest of stations during rush hour, waving a flashlight to indicate to the driver that the train is safe to proceed. In almost all cases, the one driver on a train is tasked with looking out the window of the lead car to see if all the doors are closed. The door sensors are supposed to act as a fail-safe backup for the driver, but on the early morning of April 10 at Broadway station, when the sensor failed, the driver somehow was not aware that someone was stuck in the door.

Kelvin said of the driver, “We just know that they were placed on leave. They have been on the job since 2018. I am sure they know their job pretty well. I do not know what happened at that moment when my uncle’s life was taken.”

To date, the Boston Carmen’s Union has reported nothing on its web site about the accident, either to offer condolences to the Lalin family, or to raise issues about safety on the trains for both drivers and passengers.

Kelvin described the horrific condition of his uncle’s body and the fact that authorities were only able to identify him from a print from one of his fingers. “According to the NTSB report, he ended up basically under the train,” he said.

“At first, they told us he was unrecognizable, so you cannot have an open casket for him. They said when you are arranging a funeral they said, listen, all you can do is cremate him. He is not in one piece. They were not up front with us about his condition. It took about two weeks to get his body out of the Medical Examiner’s Office. The very last day I was told the truth about his condition.

“We had the funeral last Saturday, right up the street at the church. We said our final goodbyes. Unfortunately, it was not a normal goodbye that loved ones say to their fellow loved ones that pass—to never see them. There are no words to explain how deep this situation is.”

Other recent accidents on the MBTA include the following:

- In July 2021, a collision on the Green Line train sent 27 people to the hospital, including three MBTA crew members. The MBTA faces a criminal investigation by the Suffolk District Attorney’s Office in connection with the accident. The T has yet to implement technology meant to prevent such crashes 13 years after federal officials first recommended it be installed.

- In September 2021, an ascending escalator malfunctioned at Back Bay station, suddenly reversing, causing a bloody pileup of people at the bottom. Nine people were sent to the hospital.

- Also last September, a Red Line train derailed, hitting the platform at Broadway station with 47 passengers on board. No injuries were reported.

- In January, a commuter rail train struck a woman’s car in Wilmington, killing her, when the crossing gates and flashing lights designed to keep cars off the tracks did not activate in time.

- On May 22, a man died after he was struck by an MBTA commuter rail train while crossing the tracks on foot in Hanson.

According to letter obtained by the *Boston Globe* in April, the Federal Transit Administration said it is “extremely concerned with the ongoing safety issues” at the MBTA and will take on an “increased safety oversight role” of the transit system.

The business-friendly Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation says the MBTA could face a shortfall as large as \$400 million in its yearly budget that begins in 2023 and a \$13 billion shortfall for core infrastructure improvements it plans to make over the next decade. The system owes in excess of \$5 billion to its creditors, which takes precedence as the system is starved for funds.

Kelvin offered advice to others riding the trains in Boston. “This was very unexpected for my family,” he said. “Just be careful, just be careful. It is obvious that the MBTA, at least the trains, are not safe. Trains are not being serviced. There are faulty sensors, faulty doors, negligence.

“So really, do not depend on anyone for your life and your safety. That is up to you. Take care of yourself as much as possible. Love your family and your peers as much as possible because you never know when it could be the last day you see them.”

Following Robinson Lalin’s death, the MBTA stated that it has been “acting aggressively to improve safety at all levels,” and has spent \$8 billion on system vehicles and infrastructure over the past five years. Such statements are cold comfort to the Lalins and other families who have suffered the devastating consequences of a dilapidated transit system.



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