

New York City transit worker killed on the subway tracks

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A New York City transit worker was killed by a train late Thursday night, the latest victim in a series of workplace deaths across the United States. Moet McCullum, 41, a conductor with only 11 months on the job and a mother of three, was setting up flagging protection near River Avenue and East 161st Street in the Bronx when a southbound D train struck her just after 11:30 p.m. She was pronounced dead at Lincoln Hospital at 12:42 a.m. Friday. The operator reported seeing no warning lights before the collision.

McCullum normally worked from a conductor's cab, making announcements, opening and closing the doors and watching the platform. Conductors can also be assigned as construction flaggers. Before a track crew begins work, flaggers walk onto the tracks to place colored warning lights that tell train operator workers are ahead and require them to slow down or stop. While they establish that protection, their safety depends on the control center and dispatchers telling approaching operators where they are.

An internal report by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), the state agency that runs New York City's subways and buses, said McCullum's supervisor felt wind and heard a train approaching around a curve. A lookout blew a whistle for the workers to clear. The operator said he had been warned that flaggers were on the track but, seeing no warning lights, proceeded at normal speed.

In the center of world finance, subway workers still enter active tracks with hand-placed lamps, whistles and radios. Wall Street's 2025 bonus pool was \$49.2 billion. The MTA's \$21.3 billion 2026 operating budget will send roughly \$2.9 billion—13.5 percent of its revenues—to principal and interest on debt. The share is projected to reach 15.8 percent by 2029 as the authority takes on another \$18 billion in operating-budget-backed debt.

McCullum's brother-in-law told the *New York Daily News*, "We just want justice and the truth. ... There's just no way a person can go to work and just [get] killed at work." Her twin sister, also an MTA conductor, wrote on Facebook, "I'm sooo hurt, angry and confused. My heart is literally shattered into pieces." The collision also undoubtedly

traumatized the D train crew.

The Democratic Party, which controls New York's state and city governments, is responsible for enforcing this massive inequality. Governor Kathy Hochul, whose appointees control the MTA, called Transit Workers Union Local 100 President John Chiarello to offer condolences but announced no action on safety.

Mayor Zohran Mamdani has made no public statement on McCullum's death as of this writing. Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, won office by appealing to widespread anger over inequality, exploitation and the cost of living. Since taking office, he has courted Wall Street executives and met twice with President Donald Trump, retained Jessica Tisch—an heir to the billionaire Tisch family—as police commissioner, fired Haitian city employees after the Trump administration stripped them of work authorization, and has sued to block \$10,000 bonuses for public school paraprofessionals, among the city's lowest-paid education workers.

The death on the subway is part of an ongoing industrial slaughterhouse in America. Within roughly 40 hours spanning September 2 and 3, at least five workers were reported killed on the job: Bradley Clouse died in a machine incident at a Kentucky auto parts plant; Ramiro Aaron Sanchez died while maintaining machinery in El Paso; Army Corps employee Robert Scott Pannell was killed beneath a falling tree in Mississippi; and sanitation worker Carl Williams III died beneath an overturned garbage truck in Texas.

On Sunday, at least five were killed and five injured when an Amazon cargo plane overshot the runway and crashed into traffic in Miami.

The Labor Department counted 5,070 fatal workplace injuries in 2024. The AFL-CIO estimates that occupational diseases kill another 135,000 workers each year.

Nearly 240 New York City transit workers have been killed in accidents on the job since 1946, most of them struck by trains. During the pandemic, more than 170 transit workers died from COVID-19.

In November 2023, Hilarion Joseph, 57, also in his first year on the job, was killed by a northbound D train at 34th Street–Herald Square while flagging for a track-cleaning crew. In June 2024, another flagger was critically injured by a train near the Hoyt–Schermerhorn Streets station in Brooklyn.

In 2024, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) found a growing pattern of safety incidents that created a “substantial risk of death or personal injury.” It recorded 38 near misses involving track workers in 2023, up 58 percent from 2022 and 65 percent from 2021. Its investigators found improper flagging and communications, inadequate track protection, lack of supervision, failures in territory using computerized train control and train-operator inattention.

Failures in flagging and communication have already led to the death of construction flagger Louis Gray Jr. on November 3, 2016 and serious injuries for Jeffrey Fleming. The two men were placing yellow lights on a Brooklyn curve, and the G train operator had not been told they were ahead.

National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigators blamed the Rail Control Center’s failure to inform dispatchers that flaggers were on the track. They also cited the MTA’s failure to assess the risks and its decision to permit trains into unprotected work zones. The NTSB recommended that trains be limited to restricted speed while flagging protection was established.

Communication-Based Train Control, installed on only part of the subway, can enforce a speed restriction after it is entered into the system; it does not detect workers. After Gray’s death, the MTA tested holding trains before flaggers entered, posting another flagger at the preceding station and carrying flaggers by train to the warning points. It never adopted those measures systemwide.

The MTA has relied on the Transport Workers Union bureaucracy to suppress opposition among transit workers and prevent a common struggle across the authority’s workforce.

Transport Workers Union Local 100’s contract with the MTA expired at midnight on May 16, the same time 3,500 Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) workers began a strike against the agency. Local 100 professed support for the strikers but kept 40,000 subway and bus workers on the job, isolating the railroad workers. The strike ended three days later after the MTA agreed to annual raises of 3 percent, 3 percent, 3.5 percent and 4.5 percent, plus a \$3,000 payment.

MTA CEO Janno Lieber then boasted that the settlement remained “within the MTA’s financial plan” and would not take the authority “backward financially.” Having been handed the initiative by the union bureaucracy, the MTA then offered subway and bus workers only 2 percent annual

raises while demanding that they more than double their health insurance contributions and accept tighter sick leave and overtime rules.

Local 100 enforces New York’s Taylor Law, which bars public employees from striking, against its own members. In 2008, following the 60-hour transit strike three years earlier, then-President Roger Toussaint and the Executive Board pledged under oath that the union had “no intention, now or in the future” of conducting or assisting another strike.

New York City Transit President Demetrius Crichlow appeared Friday beside Local 100 President John Chiarello at the union’s headquarters. Chiarello deferred to investigations by the NTSB, New York City Transit’s Joint Safety Task Force and Local 100’s Safety Team. Crichlow declared, “We stand together with the union and the investigating agencies to ensure that the cause is found.” Local 100 announced no independent inquiry, no demand to halt flagging until workers knew what happened and no demand to enforce the protections it claimed to have won after Gray’s death in 2016.

Transit workers cannot leave either the investigation into McCullum’s death or their contract fight in the hands of Local 100 officials. They should form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatus and the Democratic Party, to conduct their own investigation with full access to the MTA’s internal report, control-center communications, train-speed data and the 2016 flagging agreement. These committees must control safety and staffing, enforce restricted speed before flaggers enter the tracks and stop work whenever conditions are unsafe without fear of retaliation.

They must also unite subway, bus and commuter-rail workers in a common contract struggle for inflation-busting wage increases with automatic cost-of-living adjustments, an end to healthcare concessions and the inferior Tier 6 pension plan imposed on workers hired since 2012 and the repeal of the Taylor Law. These demands must be paid for not through fare hikes but by canceling the MTA’s Wall Street debt and redirecting those billions to rebuilding the system and protecting its workers.



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