

RIPPED FROM THE HEADLINES:

Bus Drivers Under Attack

AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION



MOVING AMERICANS SAFELY SINCE 1892

INTRODUCTION

Here they come again: it's the neighborhood tax collector. No, not an IRS agent with an audit in hand. They work in a safe environment in little cubicles in Washington, D.C. Someone from the State Department of Taxation? Nope. Again, comfortably tucked behind a computer screen in some State Capitol.

The only people who come through our neighborhoods -- every few minutes -- and collect hard earned money from working families are doing so while trying to safely steer 40,000 pound vehicles through traffic. They are our communities' transit bus operators, and the taxes that they collect are bus fares. Since 2008, those fares have been going through the roof. Combine that with massive service cuts on 85% of our transit systems, and you have the ingredients for very angry passengers. Unfortunately, when some people are asked to pay more for inferior service, they take it out on the face of the system -- the bus driver.

In the past five years, we have seen a dramatic increase in the level and intensity of senseless attacks on defenseless operators. Drivers have been punched, slapped, stabbed, shot, and have had bodily fluids thrown upon them. And they are confronting all of this while trying to safely steer their vehicles through traffic, protecting the lives of passengers, pedestrians, and other drivers who are seriously distracted by today's hand-held gadgets.

The impact on these individuals is clear. Broken eye sockets. Deep puncture wounds. The loss of certain bodily functions. And while broken bones heal with time, the emotional scars linger indefinitely. Ironically, many operators who got into this line of work in the first place due to their friendly nature now find themselves unable to interact well with people, especially strangers. Constantly looking over their shoulder in paranoia, many cannot come back to work. For women who are victims of unspeakable sexual assaults on the vehicles, life is of course never the same again.

For the transit systems, the impact on the budget is serious. The number of lost work hours is immeasurable. Absenteeism becomes a real factor. Ridership suffers when word gets out that buses are unsafe, and customer satisfaction plummets, resulting in farebox loss.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, there is an increased risk of workplace violence for workers who have direct contact with the public, have mobile workplaces or deliver services, work in community settings, deliver passengers, handle money, and work in small numbers. Transit workers are just as much at risk as process servers and those who repossess cars.

Unfortunately, we don't need charts and graphs prepared by some government agency to know that bus operator assault is a real problem. Details about these brutal, senseless incidents, which take place in big cities and small towns, fill our newspapers each day:

Los Angeles Times

"Man arrested for allegedly hitting female Metro bus driver in face"

— June 19, 2014

Authorities say a 51-year-old man was getting off a Metro bus in Hollywood when he struck the driver in the face. There have been 12 reported assaults on Metro bus drivers from 2012 to March 18 of this year.

The New York Times

"For Drivers on Some City Bus Routes, Requesting the \$2.50 Fare Can Be Dangerous"

— February 27, 2014

Every day along the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's 311 city bus routes, drivers who demand that fares be paid frequently face vicious abuse. Defiant fare beaters curse drivers, spit on them and sometimes attack them, officials say.

The Washington Post

“Police: Metro bus driver stabbed during fight with passenger”

— September 11, 2011

A Metro bus driver was stabbed near the Wheaton Metro station after what police are describing as an altercation with a passenger.

THE PLAIN DEALER

“Bus driver assaults are on the rise in Cleveland and elsewhere”

— November 25, 2012

Assaults on RTA bus drivers in Cleveland follow a national trend: a growing number of stressed-out riders are attacking with words and fists. **A bus driver had hot coffee thrown in his face** after he stepped off a bus by a passenger who didn't pay a fare. Another driver was punched several times while he was behind the wheel.

abc NEWS

“Detroit Bus Driver Attacked With Bleach, 'Vicious' Attacks Spiking Nationally”

— November 5, 2013

A Detroit bus driver pulled up to one of his usual pick-up locations. As he opened the door, the person waiting at the bus stop threw bleach on his face and then ran away. The driver was rushed to the hospital and the suspect has not been caught. The bus was not equipped with a camera. This brutal attack was the latest in a slew of attacks on bus drivers in Detroit that have, in recent weeks, included beatings, stabbings and even urine thrown at a driver.

mlive.com

“Flint police believe assault on MTA bus driver part of so-called 'knockout game'”

— January 29, 2014

A Mass Transportation Authority bus driver was punched in the face while driving as a part of the so-called “knockout game.” The “knockout game” has been blamed for attacks in several cities and involves suspects punching strangers for no reason.

Newsday

“NICE bus driver attack spurs call for more safety”

— March 11, 2014

“Drivers have become increasingly concerned about their safety even before the assault since Veolia Transportation took over the bus system from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in 2012 and made changes to schedules and routes that upset some riders.”

KOMOnews.com

“Brutal Olympia bus attack caught on camera”

— February 25, 2014

A passenger on an Intercity Transit bus drew attention of the driver after he was swearing and harassing other passengers. The driver warned the man that he needed to tone down his language or else he would be thrown off the bus. Shortly afterward, the driver pulled the bus over and went to the back of the bus to get the man to leave. The man then **hit the bus driver more than two dozen times** before he was stopped by another passenger. The driver went to the hospital and was treated for **broken bones in his face**.

THE BLAZE

“Surveillance Video Captures Chilling Moment Man Pulls Gun on Bus Driver, Demands Her Purse: 'Whoever Did This, They Should Be Ashamed of Themselves'”

— July 2, 2014

A driver was mugged at gunpoint and pled for her life. “This is something that is going on— the assaults on our operators, it's opened up a can of worms, but this is a blatant attack by robbing our member.”



THE SUN
San Bernardino County's Newspaper
 "Bus driver slain in Rialto was devoted family man"
 — May 9, 2010

An Omnitrans bus operator was stabbed while operating a bus. **After he was attacked, the bus veered off the road and crashed into a tree.** The operator had driven for San Bernardino County's public transit company for 15 years. His wife never worried about the dangers of his job until Omnitrans began installing cameras in the 40-foot coaches. Then when they installed blockades meant to keep passengers from reaching the driver, **she realized that her husband risked his life every day** he slipped out the front door at 2:40 a.m. to report for duty.

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS
 "Rapid bus driver describes assault"
 — July 24, 2013

A Rapid bus passenger disputed with a driver over his fare after he had ridden a complete circuit on a bus. The passenger **came up to the driver threatening to spit on her and bite off her nose.** His verbal assaults were followed by him punching the driver in the face and grabbing her wrists while she was trying defended herself with a seat belt. After the assault the driver was treated at a hospital for a bloody nose, and as she was driving home from the hospital her nose continued to bleed making her nauseated. **As a result of her condition she crashed into a pole suffering a concussion and other injuries** and totaling her truck.

CONTRA COSTA
TIMES

“Passenger stabs bus driver in leg on San Francisco Muni”

— September 5, 2013

A Muni bus driver pulled over his bus after a passenger said that someone on board had a knife. As the driver was waiting for the police officers to arrive he was stabbed in the leg.

ajc **The Atlanta
Journal-Constitution**

“MARTA bus driver stabbed on route”

— February 1, 2013

A MARTA bus driver was stabbed as he drove along his route in Clarkston east of Atlanta.

THE DENVER POST

“Man bothers woman, then assaults bus driver”

— October 17, 2012

A 55-year-old Greeley-Evans Transit driver was punched and kicked by a passenger after he told him to stop bothering a female passenger on the bus.

The Boston Globe

“Two arrested in attack on MBTA bus driver”

— April 14, 2011

Police arrested two teenagers in connection with an attack on an MBTA bus driver in Roxbury, which **caused the bus to slam into a building, injuring five people.**

SunSentinel

“Man arrested after videotaped beating of Broward bus driver”

— February 28, 2012

A passenger approached the driver’s area on a Broward County Transit bus, he stepped on the brake pedal, **lunging passengers forward as the bus came to an abrupt halt.** Afterwards, the passenger punched the driver in the face while trying to take his cellphone.

FOX 4
WDAF-TV • KANSAS CITY

“Video captures graphic bus assault, stabbing”

— July 17, 2013

An ATA bus driver was stabbed multiple times and assaulted by some unruly riders after they were asked to vacate the bus for cursing and refusing to pay their fare.

Marietta Daily Journal

“Another CCT driver assaulted on duty”

— April 24, 2012

A passenger threatened a CCT bus driver with a steak knife. The incident occurred outside a bus at the transfer station. Two months earlier, another CCT driver **was stabbed in the face with a ballpoint pen.**

The Oregonian

“Beaten TriMet bus driver in frantic North Portland emergency call: 'He hit me in the head 15 times ... I can't see myself'”

— October 18, 2013

A female Tri-Met bus driver was hit in the head multiple times after she told the passenger that he had not paid the correct fare.



ASBURY PARK PRESS
"Bus shields to protect drivers"
— October 16, 2012

"We concluded in the end ... it was about protecting the men and women who operate buses." With assaults and harassment against NJ Transit bus drivers on the rise, the transit agency has agreed to buy shields to protect its drivers while on the job. From 2010 to June of 2012, a total of 133 assaults were reported against NJ Transit bus drivers. On Oct. 22, 2011, an NJ Transit bus driver was stabbed seven times by a man as passengers were getting off the bus in Newark.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®
"Man who stabbed bus driver sentenced; Victim doubts he'll ever drive bus again"
— March 30, 2012

A man stabbed a Port Authority driver after being ordered off a 67 Monroeville bus at Fifth Avenue and Market Street. First he spat on the driver and then turned to leave before reversing direction and attacking him with a knife. The driver has returned to light duty but said he doubts he will be able to resume driving. "I'm happy to be alive," he said.



“Bus Driver Attacked”

— May 31, 2013

A Milwaukee man became a bus driver because he wanted a change from his previous job as an insurance executive. He had no idea picking up a day shift driving route 19 would change his life forever. Out of nowhere he was struck with two powerful blows to the face. **“All I remember...stars, I saw stars,”** he recounts.



“It's a lonely, scary job;' Stricter penalties for bus driver attacks in House bill”

— February 25, 2013

TARC estimates it handles a couple of assaults on bus drivers each month. “Some of it is a driver gets spit on - all the way to they get punched in the jaw,” said Barry Barker, TARC Executive Director. A TARC driver for over 15 years, Christa Law says she will never forget her scariest day behind the wheel, Oct 21, 2000. “At 18th and Oak, and one of the passengers boarded and didn't have enough money to ride and beat me up,” Law told WHAS11, **“and I was six months pregnant.”**



“Homeless man accused of assaulting bus driver, police”

— May 22, 2014

A homeless man attacked the driver of an MBTA bus after she asked him to step behind the yellow line for the purpose of safety rules. The man threw his alcoholic drink in the driver's face, **resulting in temporary blindness.**



“COLTS Bus Driver Assaulted After Road-Rage Incident in Scranton”

— June 3, 2014

A woman driving a COLTS bus was assaulted by another woman in a road-rage incident. The bus driver told police she beeped at the car that had cut off the bus in downtown Scranton. When the driver got out of the bus to write down the car's license plate number the woman driving the car punched her in the head several times and then took off.



“Man Runs to Catch Bus, Punches Driver in the Face When He Gets On”

— June 10, 2014

A man who ran down a Chicago street to catch a moving CTA bus is charged with punching the driver in the face once he got aboard.



“Two Suspects Sought After Attack on City Bus Driver”

— June 19, 2014

A Municipal bus driver was left with cuts on his face and head and a large amount of bleeding after he was attacked by multiple individuals. The dispute began when the suspects did not have exact change and the bus driver informed them they could not ride without the exact \$3 fare per passenger.

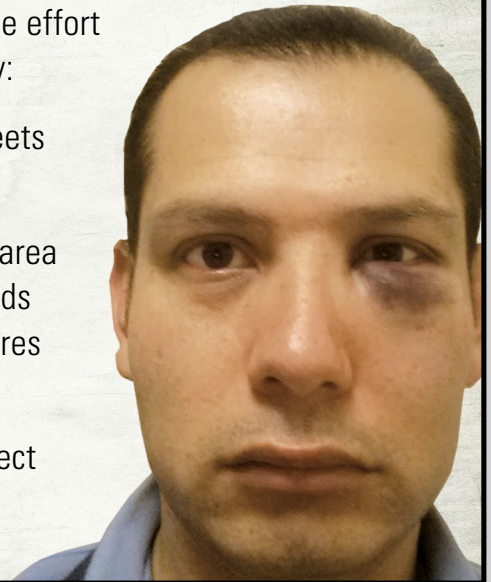
CONCLUSION

While some 30 states have enacted legislation enhancing assault penalties when the victim is a bus operator, much more needs to be done. The reauthorization of the federal surface transportation bill, *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century* (MAP-21), offers an opportunity to put protections in place for the hundreds of thousands of bus operators who go to work every day hoping to come home alive as well as the people who board U.S. transit vehicles 35 million times daily, relying on safe and reliable public transportation.

Intercity and commuter train operators work in enclosed cabs. Since September 11, 2001, secure cockpits guard people who fly commercial airplanes. **Yet, public transit “pilots” continue to be left vulnerable to vicious attacks.** Transit buses do not sell tickets requiring identification, so most violators are able to flee the scene of the crime and escape justice.

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), representing nearly 200,000 members in 254 local unions spread across 45 states and nine provinces, calls on the U.S. Congress to lead the effort to address the national bus operator assault epidemic by:

- Passing a robust surface transportation bill that meets the needs of transit dependent individuals; and
- Providing all transit systems – regardless of urban area population – with flexibility to use their federal funds for operating costs to keep service levels up and fares down; and
- Requiring new transit buses to be designed to protect operators from assault.



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