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WMSC Inspection Report 20261016B

ISSUED 10/20/2026

Inspection Details

Title: Interlocking Operations Inspection

Location: West Falls Church Yard (K99) and Alexandria Yard (C99)

Date of Inspection: 10/15/2026 and 10/16/2026

Time of Inspection: 11:00pm to 03:00am

Unannounced

Risk-Based (Data Review)

Functional Area: Operations

Hazard Rating: 3C

Overview

Starting at 11:00pm on October 15, 2026, and concluding at 3:00am on October 16, 2026, WMSC Inspectors observed interlocking operators perform radio communications, route setting, and vehicle movements at two locations: West Falls Church Yard (K99) and Alexandria Yard (C99). The goal of the inspection was to observe interlocking operator compliance with the Metrorail Operating Rulebook. The interlocking operator is the control point for all vehicle movement and protection within the signal-controlled yard tracks.

The WMSC's inspection focused on interlocking operator proficiency with the interlocking control system, communications with rail vehicle operators/equipment operators, setting routes for rail vehicle operators (RVO) returning from mainline operations, and dispatching roadway maintenance machines (RMM) for overnight maintenance activities. The interlocking operator is the individual responsible for coordinating movements into and out of rail yards, establishing routes for storage, inspection, maintenance, and revenue service trains, and ensuring track occupancy is known and protected. These duties are directly related to preventing red signal violations, route conflicts, derailments, and other hazards associated with interlocking operations.

This is a risk-based inspection based on a data review of all red signal overruns (safety event code O-8)[1] Through October 20, there have been 18 red signal overruns in 2026,[2] up 58% so far, this year. There were 11 red signal overruns in all of 2025. Metrorail is averaging roughly 1.9 red signal overruns per month, significantly higher than the 2025 average of 0.91 red signal overruns per month. The WMSC's data review looked at the 17 red signal overruns that occurred January 1, 2026, through September 30, 2026. Of the 17, four red signal overruns occurred in a tight timeframe (September 11, 13, 15, and 18). Additionally, the data shows that nearly 50% of red signal overruns occur in yards or interlockings near yards. West Falls Church Yard made up nearly a quarter of all red signal overruns (24%) through September 2026. The WMSC is focusing on interlocking operations at certain rail yards that stand out in the data, which is why West Falls Church was chosen for the present inspection. Alexandria Yard is the second highest location for red signal overruns. The other aspect to note is roughly 40% of red signal overruns occurred overnight, between midnight and 6:00am.

Red signal overruns present unique hazards including multiple rail practices involving interlockings, work equipment or RMM, communications, territory familiarization, and routing or authorization issues.[3]

After concluding the inspection, WMSC Inspectors conducted a debrief with the Interlocking Operators in accordance with Program Standard Section 6.F.1.

Defects and Corrective Actions

WMSC Inspections identify safety issues that may be classified as defects, findings, or recommendations. Findings and recommendations are defined by Program Standard Section 5.E.2 and 5.E.3, respectively. Ordinarily, issues identified in a WMSC inspection report are classified as defects. Defects are specific safety issues of non-conformance/non-compliance that are identified, and that require remedial action.

This inspection did not identify any findings or recommendations and therefore does not require a WMSC Corrective Action Plan in accordance with Program Standard Section 5.E.4.

Observations and Defect Determinations

The inspectors observed the interlocking operator's compliance with the Metrorail Operating Rulebook (MOR) relevant sections:

> 1.1.13 - Interlocking Operators have full authority and control over all activities on controlled tracks within yards.

[1] In accordance with WMSC Program Standard (Rev. 9) section 7.B Metrorail must "...report all safety events outlined in the Safety Event Notification Matrix in the timeframe and manner specified for each safety event type."
[2] As of October 8, 2026, according to the WMSC Safety Events Dashboard.
[3] All data is from the WMSC Safety Event Dashboard, through October 1, 2026.

1.6.8 - Employees operating or working on or near mainline or yard tracks must immediately comply with all instructions from the Interlocking Operator

7.6.1.4 Reporting Clear of Controlled Track When Rail Vehicles enter a Class 2 Storage Track from controlled track, Rail Vehicle Operator must report clear of the controlled track to the Interlocking Operator.

7.6.1.9 Entering Controlled Track Permission must be obtained from the Interlocking Operator before a Rail Vehicle Operator may enter any portion of controlled track from a Class Two (2) Storage Track.

9.1 The Metro Integrated Command and Communications Center and all Yard Control Towers are designated as Restricted Areas. Employees may not enter these facilities unless performing their duties or specifically authorized by the Rail Traffic Controller or Interlocking Operator on duty.

12.5.3 Before granting authorization for Roadway Maintenance Machines to enter or foul controlled track, Rail Traffic Controllers and Interlocking Operators must ensure:

- No trains or other equipment has been authorized to move in the direction of the point to be occupied
- Signals governing opposing and following movements are in the Stop position
- Blocking is applied to protect opposing and following movements

Two MOR rules govern the requirements for what are known as “safety stops:”

MOR 7.1.8 Safety Stops - Safety stops must be made when approaching another rail vehicle, bumping post, or any obstruction.

MOR 7.1.9 Safety Stop Distances - Safety stops must be made at:

three (3) car lengths,

two (2) car lengths,

50 feet,

10 feet, and then 3mph

Proceed at a speed not to exceed three (3) miles per hour until final stop is made

13.11 Radio Messages: Content & Code Words

13.11.1 Metro personnel must use commonly accepted terms for radio communications.

13.11.2 When communicating location information that is Alpha-numeric (e.g., C-07, B-11), ICAO phonetics must be used for “alpha” character.

13.11.3 ICAO phonetics must be used when communicating about Traction Power Substations or Tiebreaker Stations.

13.11.4 Employees must use phonetic spelling during poor communication conditions.

13.11.5 Communications must be as brief as possible and must use these key words:

"Copy" ..... To signify that the message was received and understood.

"Over" ..... At the close of each transmission to which a response is expected.

"Out" ..... At the close of each transmission to which a response is not necessary. "Out" must be preceded by proper identification.

"Emergency"..... Transmitted three times to obtain use of radio channels for initial report of conditions endangering rail vehicle movements.

12.14 Operations at Night

12.14.1 Roadway Maintenance Machines operating at night must display white lights to the front and red lights to the rear.

Inspection Summary

Interlocking Operator Summary - West Falls Church Rail Yard (K99)				
Vehicle Lead ID	**Movement Authority & Protection Permission received before fouling controlled track (MOR 12.5.1) Yes or No**	**Movement Authority and Protection Absolute block established when required (MOR 12.5.4) Yes or No**	**Radio Communication Compliance Rail Vehicle Operators and Roadway and Radio Messages: Content & Code Words (MOR 13.10.2,13.11 and 13.11.5) Yes or No**	**Safety stops Yes or no**
712 - 7018	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
748 - 7690	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
702 - 7538	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
792 - 7656	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

706 - 6111	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
708 - 3165	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
742 - 7512	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
746 - 7166	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
805 - 7498	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
710 - 7146	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PM42	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not Required

Table 1: Vehicle movement observed at West Falls Church Rail Yard (K99).

Interlocking Operator Summary - Alexanderia Yard (C99)				
Vehicle Lead ID	**Movement Authority & Protection Permission received before fouling controlled track (MOR 12.5.1) Yes or No**	**Movement Authority and Protection Absolute block established when required (MOR 12.5.4) Yes or No**	**Radio Communication Compliance Rail Vehicle Operators and Roadway and Radio Messages: Content & Code Words (MOR 13.10.2,13.11 and 13.11.5) Yes or No**	**Safety stops Yes or no**
748 - 7340	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
722 - 7084	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
718 - 7530	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
702 - 6056	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
722 - 7226	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
733 - 7630	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
708 - 3282	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PM37	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not Required

PM56	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not Required

Table 2: Vehicle movement observed at Alexanderia Rail Yard (C99).

Observation 1

At West Falls Church (K99), the WMSC observed a yellow Post-It note on the Rail Comm screen in the interlocking tower and inquired how electronic protection for workers and equipment are implemented. Although the employee successfully demonstrated the process; however, they showed some uncertainty regarding the implementation and removal of electronic block calls. While the employee was able to demonstrate the procedure, additional familiarity with implementing and removing electronic blocks calls would be beneficial and help improve proficiency, confidence, and consistency.

Defect 1

The Interlocking Control Panel is the main tool of the Interlocking Operator. From there, the interlocking operator is able to control all movements in the yard.

The WMSC observed a yellow Post-it Note on the Rail Comm screen and inquired about its use and purpose. The interlocking operator advised that the Post-It note is a reminder that personnel are on Track 11 moving maintenance equipment. A Post-it note does not establish protection and ensure a class 1 vehicle is not inadvertently routed to Track 11.

Hazard Rating: 2C

Photos

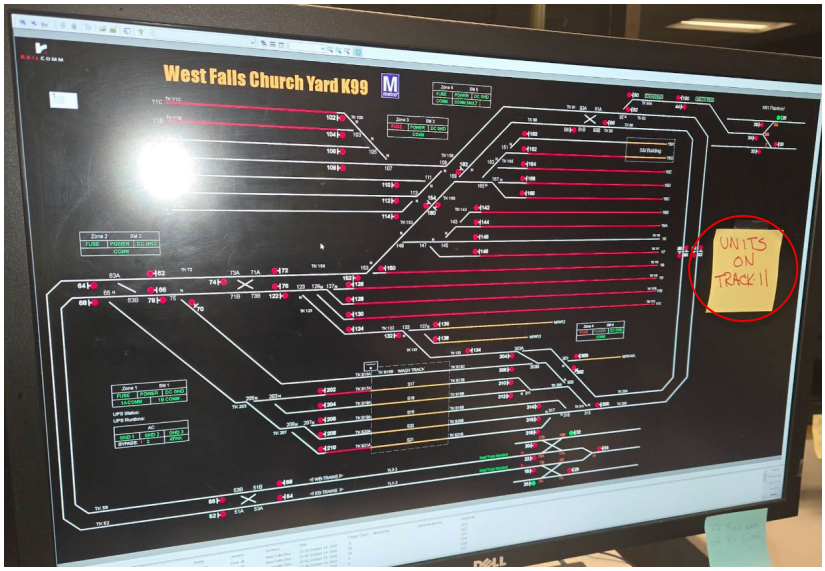


Photo 1: Post-it note used in lieu of electronic protection.

Next Steps

Please respond **by Friday, October 23, 2026,** to acknowledge receipt and to convey responses to the WMSC regarding what, if any, actions will be or have been taken in response.