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WMSC Inspection Report 20261021

ISSUED 10/26/2026

Inspection Details

Title: Red Signal Overrun Safety Standdown

Location: West Falls Church Yard (K99)

Date of Inspection: 10/21/2026

Time of Inspection: 11:00pm

Announced (via Senior Director, Safety Assurance)

Risk-Based (Data Review)

Functional Area: Operations

Hazard Rating: 3C

Overview

On Wednesday, October 21, 2026, WMSC Inspectors attended a Metrorail Safety Standdown at West Falls Church Yard (K99). The safety standdown is one aspect of Metrorail's mitigations to address the higher-level occurrence of red signal overruns in 2026. A safety standdown in rail transit is a tool used to gather relevant individuals to focus on a specific safety issue through discussion and learning. This standdown's topic was red signal overruns. Traditionally, during a standdown, management and operational crews assemble to review safety protocols, analyze recent incidents or close calls, address immediate hazards, and reinforce critical operating rules (such as track protection, roadway worker safety, and signal compliance) to prevent accidents and rebuild a proactive safety culture.

This is a risk-based inspection based on data reviews conducted by the WMSC. Red signal overruns (safety event code O-8) for 2026 are up 63% (through October 20) for a total of 18.[1] As context, there were 11 red signal overruns in all of 2025. Metrorail is averaging roughly 1.8 red signal overruns per month, more than double the 2025 average of 0.91 red signal overruns per month. The WMSC's data review looked at the 18 red signal overruns that occurred January 1, 2026, through October 20,

[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."

2026. Of the 18, four red signal overruns occurred in a tight timeframe (September 11, 13, 15, and 18). Additionally, the data shows that 50% of red signal overruns occur in yards or interlockings near yards. West Falls Church Yard made up more than one in every five red signal overruns (22%) through October 20, 2026. The location for this first safety standdown was West Falls Church Yard. The WMSC has also been informed that other safety standdowns on red signal overruns have occurred at Glenmont Yard and Alexandria Yard with the Rail Transportation Department (RTRA).

Red signal overruns present unique hazards including multiple rail practices involving interlockings, work equipment or RMMs, communications, territory familiarization, and routing or authorization issues.[2]

After concluding the inspection, WMSC Inspectors conducted a debrief with the Director of Mainline Operations 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

WMSC Inspectors attended the one-hour standdown at West Falls Church Yard (K99) with approximately fifteen Metrorail personnel comprised of rail vehicle operators, interlocking operators, rail maintenance machine equipment operators, and flaggers. Track and Structures (TRST) and Rail Transportation (RTRA) presented the standdown content through a PowerPoint presentation. Rail vehicle operators and interlocking operators are part of RTRA and equipment operators and flaggers are part of TRST.

The goal was to create a dialogue and collaboration between departments focused on lessons learned and continued improvement related to red signal overruns, specifically the 14 incidents that occurred during the prior six months (3/28/2026 – 10/8/2026). The standdown was led by a group that included the Director of Track and Structures, the Track and Structures Safety Risk Coordinator, the Rail Transportation Director of Mainline Operations, and the Rail Transportation Assistant Superintendent.

The sections covered red signal overrun trends, contributing factors, and mitigations. Attendees spoke openly about their experience with red signal overruns and concerns about the lack of

[2] All data is from the WMSC Safety Event Dashboard, through October 20, 2026.

territory-familiarization training. The key contributing factors presented in the standdown included a lack of situational awareness, improper repeat backs, and limited physical characteristics familiarity. Joint commitments from Rail Transportation and Track and Structures included, targeted Safety Briefings facilitated by the RTRA leadership team, re-implementation of Interlocking Refresher Training/Update training curriculum, an increase in supervisory field observations, strengthened coaching and mentoring for new Rail Vehicle Operators, and partnering with the Safety Department to conduct compliance checks, enhancements to current TRST Training, and exploring additional refresher programs.

At the standdown, Metrorail detailed the following:

Contextual Information about the Incidents:

- 14 red signal overrun incident locations since March 2026:
  - 8 rail yard incidents
  - 6 mainline incidents
- 14 red signal overrun incident by vehicle type/operator:
  - 9 rail vehicle operators in revenue vehicles (class 1 vehicles)[3]
  - 5 equipment operators in roadway maintenance machine (class 2 vehicle)

Key Contributing Factors:

- Human Factors
  - Situational Awareness
    - Failure to recognize the governing signal.
    - Operating beyond an authorized stopping point.
    - Misunderstanding movement authority limits.
  - Complacency
    - Proceeding based on assumptions rather than positive identification and verification.
    - Passing the designated stopping point
    - Employees proceeding without ensuring a mutual understanding of instruction.
  - Fatigue
- Communication
  - Improper Repeat Backs
    - Incomplete or incorrect repeat-backs.
    - Failure to verify critical instructions.
    - Inadequate job safety briefings / On-Track safety briefings.
  - Bad Radio Frequency.

[3] Three of these incidents were revenue trains in revenue service: 3/28 at Federal Center, 5/18 at Huntington, and 9/18 at Twinbrook.

- Operating Environment
  - Yard Configuration.
  - Signal Visibility.
- Limited Physical-characteristics familiarity and signal visibility:
  - Uncertainty regarding signal locations or governing signals.
  - Difficulty identifying authorized stopping points.
  - Reduced familiarity with yard layouts, crossovers, or interlockings.
  - Delayed recognition of signals, speed restrictions, or other critical visual cues.
  - Increased reliance on memory, assumptions or direction from others.

Track and Structures (TRST) Safeguards and Expectations

- Confirm movement authority and its limits.
- Require positive acknowledgement and challenge any ambiguity.
- Verify operator and flag-person roles, visibility, radio functionality, and stop-work triggers.
- Validate local route knowledge and special conditions during job safety briefing
- Complete and document equipment pre-trip checks; escalate observed damage.

Rail Transportation (RTRA) Safeguards and Expectations

- Interlocking Operators will verify the complete intended route is properly lined before issuing an Absolute Block[4] and will continuously monitor rail vehicle movements on the interlocking control board.
- Interlocking operators will ensure 100% repeat back compliance and confirm all transmissions are clearly understood before rail vehicle movements occur. No rail vehicle movement shall be authorized until the Interlocking Operator has received complete repeat-back and confirmed the accuracy of all transmitted instructions.
- All operators are to utilize 'Point & Call' method in railyards by physically pointing to the signal being observed, clearly stating the signal indication and the action required. This is a deliberate verification technique that requires employees to physically point to a signal and verbally state its indication before proceeding. It is intended to improve situational awareness, reduce errors, and reinforce safe operating practices.
- Interlocking operators will require RMM Operators and Flagmen to contact, notify and verify all lunar signals passed while operating under issued Absolute Block

Metrorail Commitments

- Targeted Safety Briefings facilitated by RTRA leadership team
- Re-implementation of Interlocking Refresher Training/Update training curriculum

[4] An Absolute Block is "A section of track that must not be occupied by more than one (1) train or piece of equipment." (Metrorail Operating Rulebook, Glossary of Terms)

- Increase in RTRA supervisory field observations
- Strengthen coaching and mentoring for new rail vehicle operators
- Partnering with Safety Department to conduct compliance checks
- Enhancements to current TRST training
- Exploring additional refresher programs

Next Steps

Please respond **by Friday, October 30, 2026,** to acknowledge receipt.