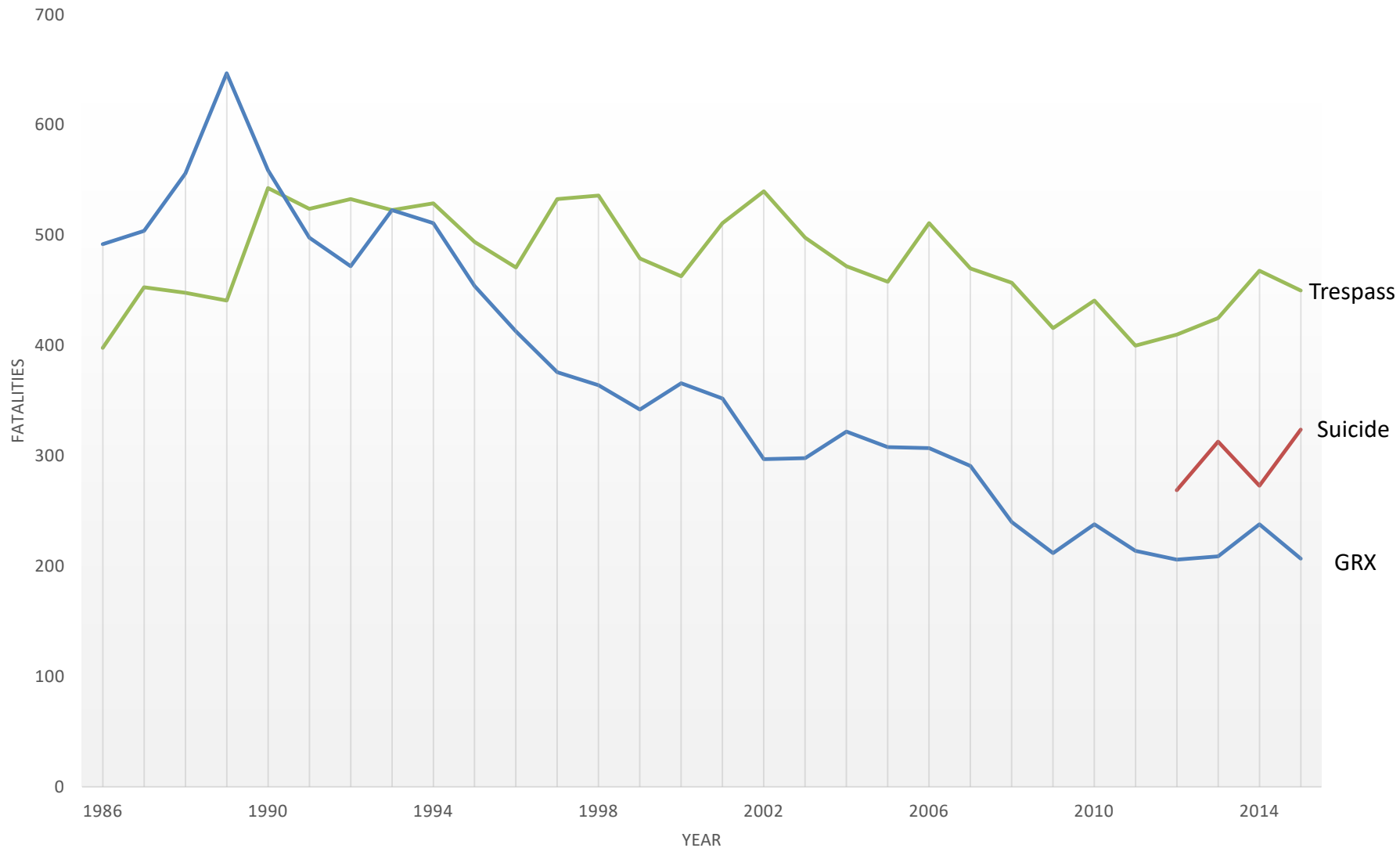
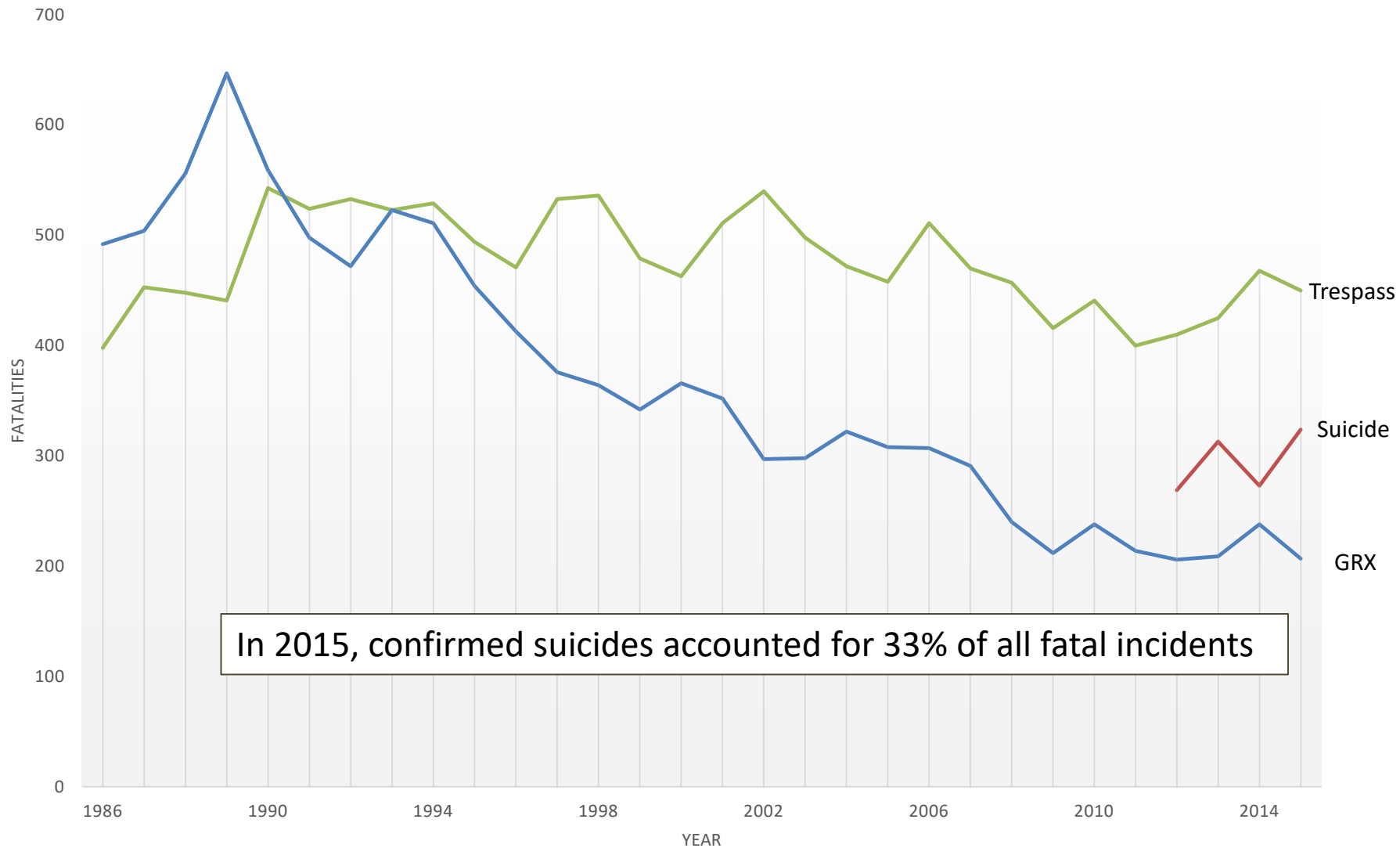


Rail GRX, Trespass, and Suicide Fatalities



Rail GRX, Trespass, and Suicide Fatalities

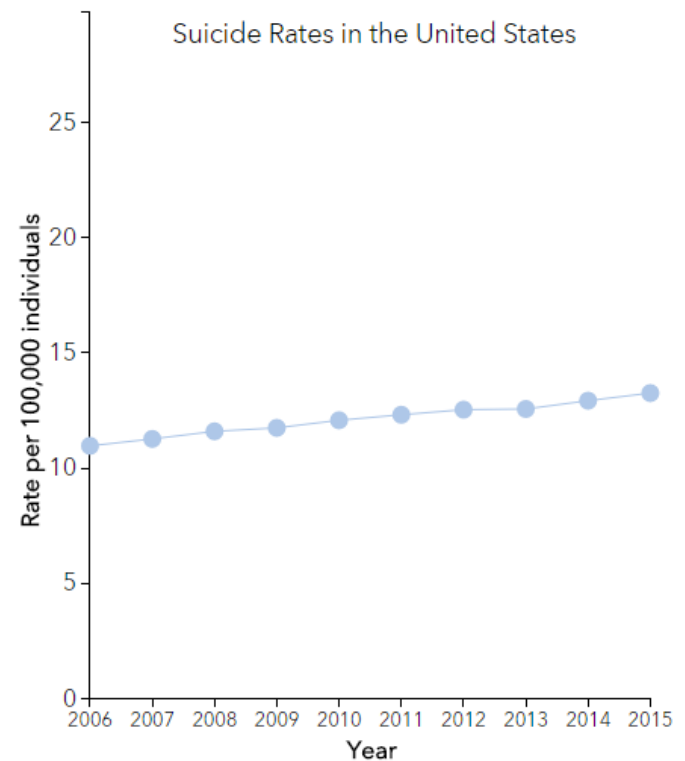


In 2015, confirmed suicides accounted for 33% of all fatal incidents

Rail suicide isn't going to disappear on its own. In fact, the issue is only likely to get worse.

- 2015 represented a 30-year high in suicide rate in the US (over 44,000 suicide deaths)
- In addition to suicide fatalities, roughly 4% of adults and 8% of young adults reported having considered suicide in 2015. Also in 2015:
 - 2.4 million adults reported having made suicide plans
 - 1.4 million adults survived a suicide attempt
- Relative to other countries, the rail suicide rate in the US is very low
 - Less than 1% of all suicides in the US occur on the rail system
 - Firearm suicides are the most common
- There is evidence of a slight shift away from firearm suicides in recent years

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DR-FFR3-2015/NSDUH-DR-FFR3-2015.htm>



If suicide accounts for over a third of all fatal railway incidents and the issue is getting worse, why is the topic understudied relative to other important rail safety topics?

I suspect some combination of the following:

A belief that if someone is going to take their life, there is nothing you can do to stop them.

A belief that suicide prevention is a public health issue and *not* a rail issue.

Lack of empirical studies showing that prevention of rail suicide is possible.

It seems easier to help people avoid mistakes than to discourage them from acting intentionally.

Suicide can be a hard topic to start talking about – it can often feel that you're saying something you shouldn't.

If suicide accounts for over a third of all fatal railway incidents and the issue is getting worse, why is the topic understudied relative to other important rail safety topics?

I suspect some combination of the following:

A belief that if someone is going to take their life, there is nothing you can do to stop them.

FALSE

It is a public health issue – but rail suicide is a blip on PH radar

So, let's go and change that...

A different approach is certainly required – but far from impossible

Absolutely – but there are many, many experts who would love to help

What are we doing about rail suicide?

❑ FRA/Volpe Rail Suicide Prevention Research Program

- Global Railway Alliance for Suicide Prevention (GRASP)
- Countermeasure Pilot Testing
- Intent Determination
- Prevalence/Demographic Assessments
- GIS Mapping
- Media Reporting of Rail Incidents

The screenshot shows the Volpe Center website. The header includes the Volpe logo and the text 'The National Transportation Systems Center'. A navigation menu contains 'About Us', 'Our Work', 'Work With Us', 'Library', and 'News & Events'. A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Our Work > Safety Management and Human Factors > Surface Transportation Human Factors'. A sidebar on the left lists categories: 'Air Traffic Systems & Operations', 'Infrastructure Systems & Technology', 'Policy, Planning, & Environment', and 'Safety Management & Human Factors' (which is selected). The main content area is titled 'Rail Suicide Prevention Resource Page' and contains the following text:

The two leading causes of rail-related death in the U.S. have nothing to do with operating or riding in a train. Instead, hundreds of people lose their lives every year on train tracks due to trespassing or suicide.

The **Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)** has long focused on safety improvements to reduce **grade crossing and trespass** deaths, but suicide was not historically considered alongside those efforts. However, in 2011, FRA began collecting suicide data and actively participating in suicide prevention efforts and studies.

Over the past decade, research from rail suicide prevention experts in Europe, Canada, and Australia has illuminated strategies that can reduce rail suicides.

U.S. DOT's Volpe Center and FRA built on this global research to develop a program with **six focus areas** to identify ways to reduce rail suicide.

If you are a researcher or rail representative who wants to get involved or get more information, please contact [Scott Gabree, PhD](#), or [Stephanie Chase, PhD](#).

On the right side of the page, there is a vertical banner for 'National Suicide Prevention Lifeline' with the phone number '1-800-273-8255' and the website 'http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org'. Below the banner, there is a small text box that reads: 'If you or someone you know need to talk, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. TALK (8255) or visit http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org'.

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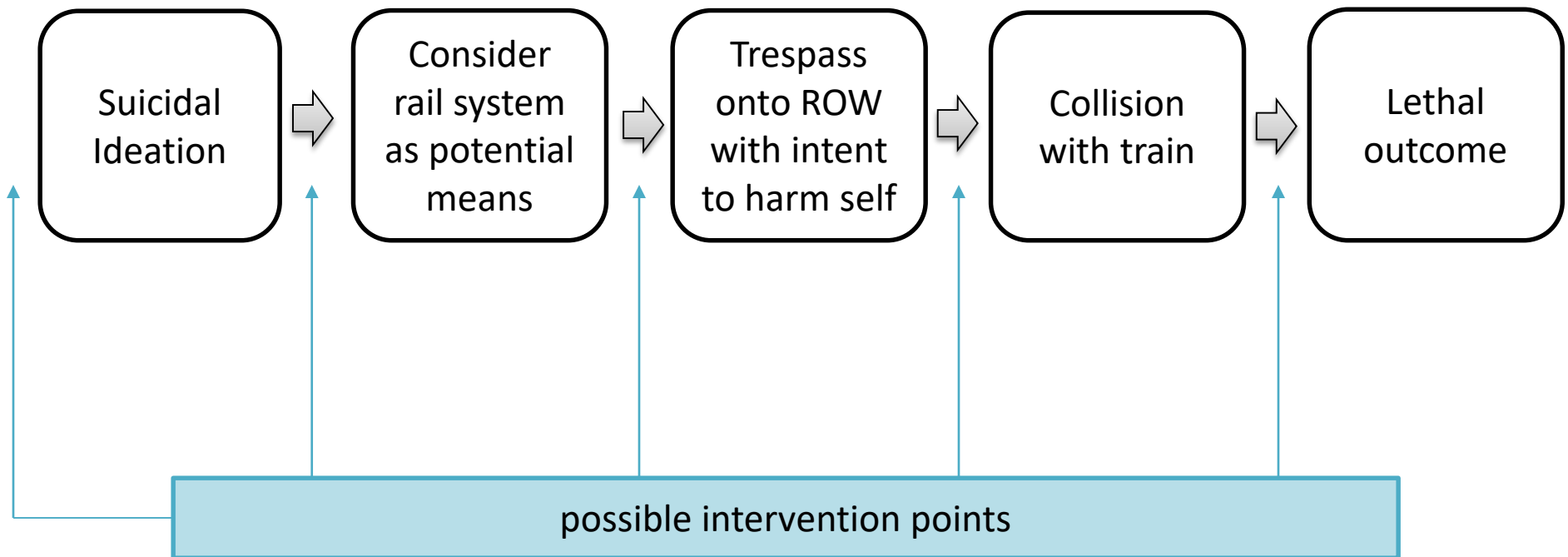
The screenshot displays the Volpe Center website, which is part of The National Transportation Systems Center. The page is titled "Rail Suicide Prevention Resource Page" and is located under the navigation path: Home > Our Work > Safety Management and Human Factors > Surface Transportation Human Factors. The page content includes:

- Volpe** The National Transportation Systems Center
- Search Volpe (input field) and Web (radio button)
- Navigation: About Us, Our Work, Work With Us, Library, News & Events
- Breadcrumbs: Home > Our Work > Safety Management and Human Factors > Surface Transportation Human Factors
- Left sidebar menu: Air Traffic Systems & Operations, Infrastructure Systems & Technology, Policy, Planning, & Environment, Safety Management & Human Factors (selected)
- Rail Suicide Prevention Resource Page**
- Text: "The two leading causes of rail-related death in the U.S. have nothing to do with operating or riding in a train. Instead, hundreds of people lose their lives every year on train tracks due to trespassing or suicide."
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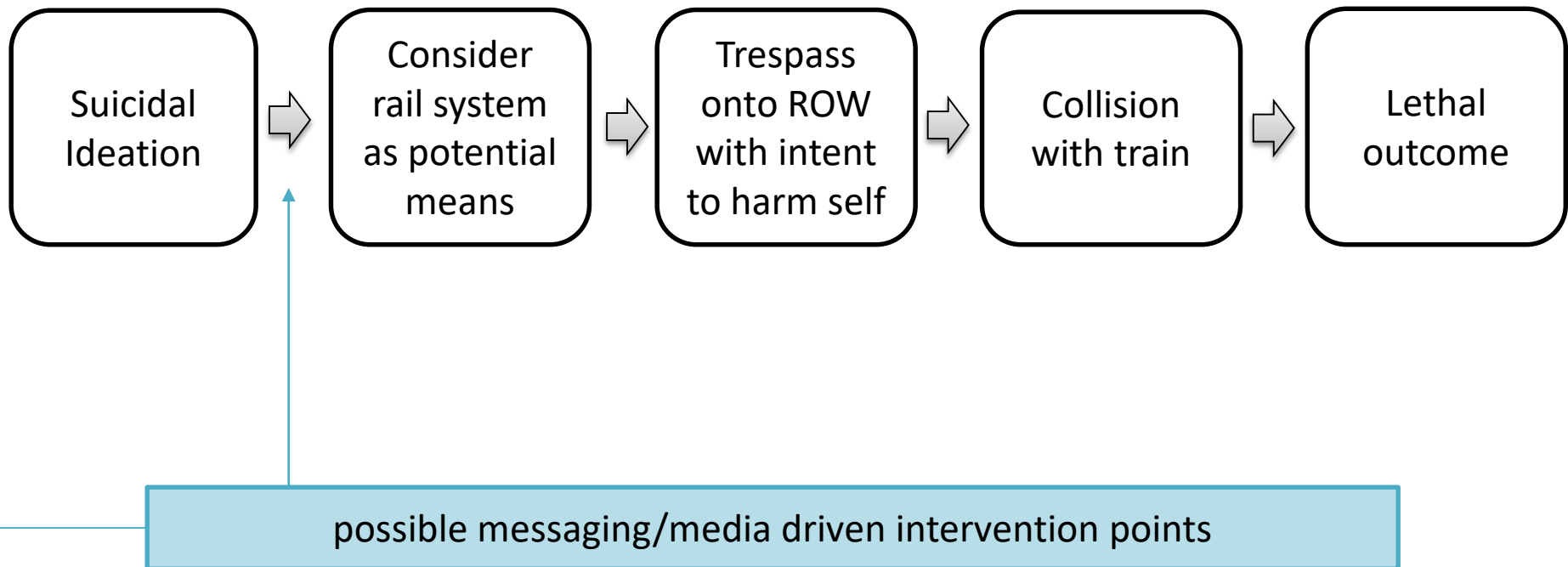
How to prevent rail suicide



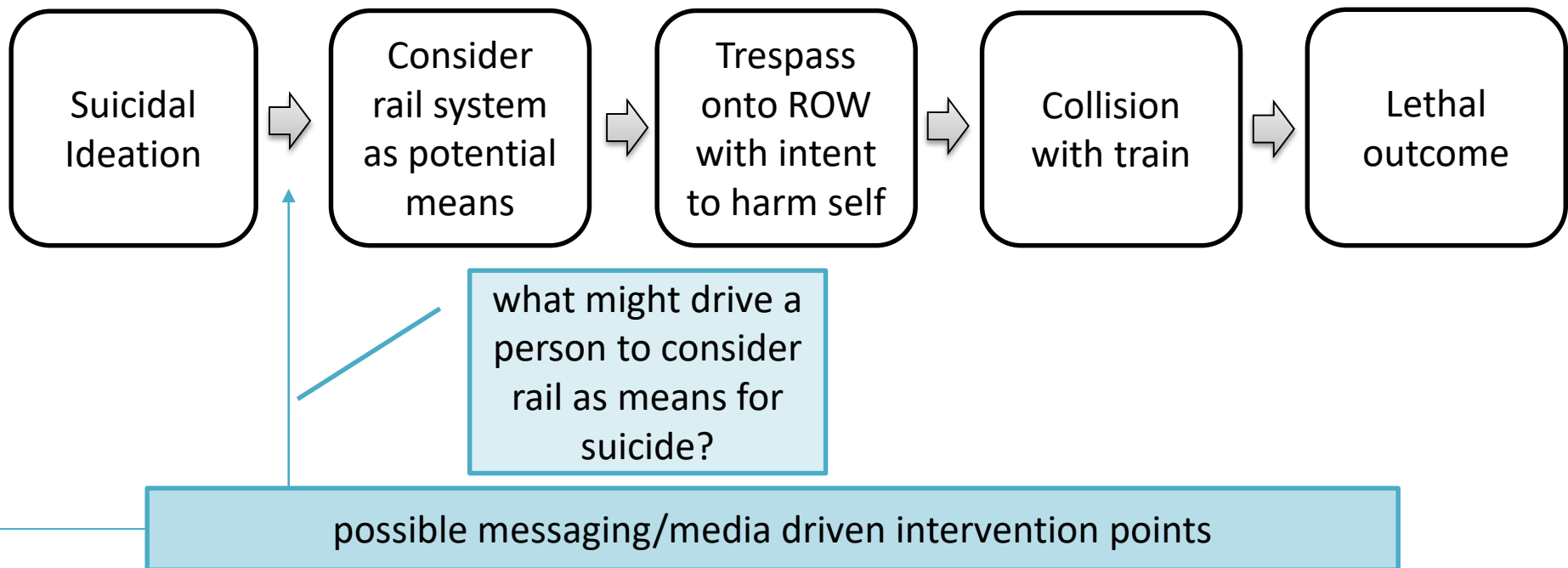
How to prevent rail suicide

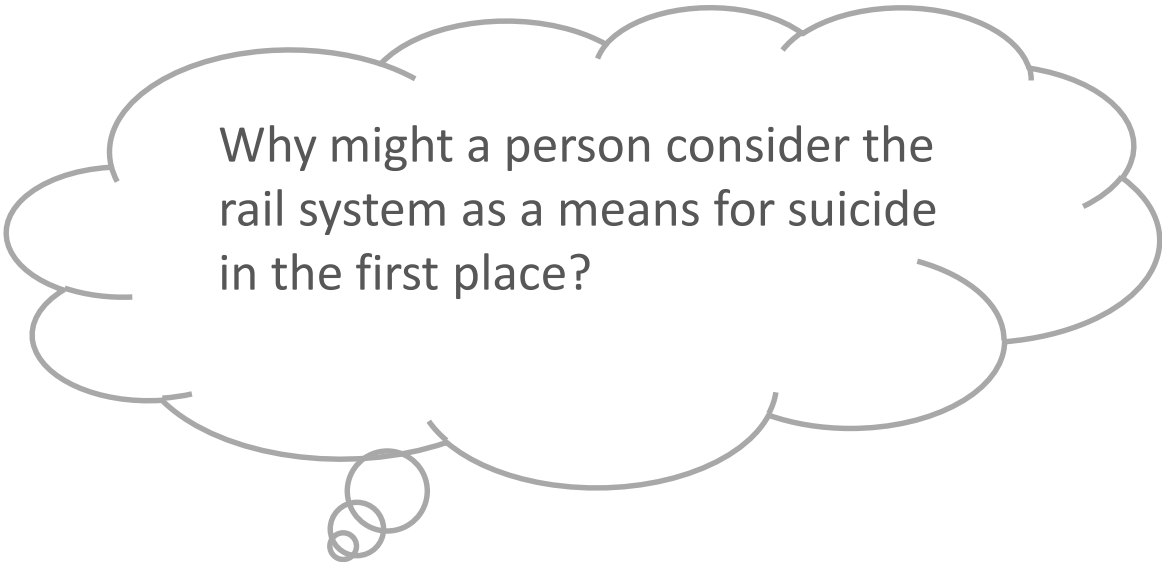


How to prevent rail suicide



How to prevent rail suicide



A large, hand-drawn style thought bubble with a grey outline. Inside the bubble, the text "Why might a person consider the rail system as a means for suicide in the first place?" is written in a simple, black, sans-serif font. The bubble has several smaller circles leading to it from the bottom left, suggesting a thought process.

Why might a person consider the rail system as a means for suicide in the first place?

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A perception that...

free,
accessible

others have
done it

intervention
is unlikely

quick and
painless

highly lethal,
death certain

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As indirectly influenced by...

Media

Public Safety
Messaging

Peer Interactions

Media

- Huge body of literature about the impacts of the media on suicide
 - The *Werther Effect* is the term used to describe a rise in suicide rate following a highly publicized suicide

- Effects have been found specifically for rail suicides
 - Robert Enke – Germany
 - Viennese Subway System – Austria
 - Student Clusters – Palo Alto, CA



Caltrain Suicide Leaves Palo Alto High School Grieving

School starts Tuesday

By Lori Preuitt



✗ Instead of This

Big or sensationalistic headlines, or prominent placement (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Used Shotgun to Commit Suicide").

Including photos/videos of the location or method of death, grieving family, friends, memorials, or funerals.

Describing recent suicides as an "epidemic," "skyrocketing," or other strong terms

Describing a suicide as inexplicable or "without warning."

"John Doe left a suicide note saying..."

✓ Do This

Inform the audience without sensationalizing the suicide and minimize prominence (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Dead at 27").

Use school/work or family photo; include hotline logo or local crisis phone numbers.

Carefully investigate the most recent CDC data and use nonsensational words like "rise" or "higher"

Most, but not all, people who die by suicide exhibit warning signs. Include the "Warning Signs" and "What to Do" sidebar in your article if possible.

"A note from the deceased was found and is being reviewed by the medical examiner."

www.reportingonsuicide.org

Reporting suicide: a quick guide for the media
Mindframe
for media professionals

This resource provides quick advice to support media professionals when reporting suicide.

Recommendations for reporting a suicide death

- Decide whether to report. Ensure a suicide has been confirmed by official sources to avoid speculation or interfering with investigations. Assess if there is a clear public interest in the story; consult your editorial policies and seek advice from experts.
- Reduce prominence. People vulnerable to suicide may be drawn to stories about suicide, so consider placing a story on the inside pages of a newspaper or further down the order of broadcast reports and removing 'suicide' from headlines and search terms.
- Modify or remove information that may increase risk.
 - Consider whether to use content from a suicide note.
 - Limit promotion of public and online memorials.
 - Avoid images that may glorify the death in some way.
 - Minimize details about method and location of death (see overview).
- Take care interviewing family and friends. Respect people's grief and privacy in the period immediately after a death. Consider delaying interviews as people bereaved by suicide may be vulnerable or at risk of suicide themselves.
- Apply cultural considerations. Naming or depicting an image of a person who has died can cause great distress in some communities. Seek advice before using the name or image of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Handle celebrity suicide with care. Coverage of a celebrity suicide can glamorise and normalise suicide. To decrease risk, minimise details about method and location, consider focusing on the wastefulness of the death, and add information about risk factors for suicide and help-seeking options for people who may be affected.

Promote help-seeking

- Add 24/7 crisis support to stories:
 - Lifeline 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au
 - Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
 - Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 www.kidshelpline.com.au
 - Menedis Australia 1300 78 99 78 www.menedis.org.au
- ✓ Add two crisis services to any story about suicide.
- ✓ Match service information (e.g. age, gender, illness).
- ✓ Provide direct links to services in online content.

Self-care for journalists: If you are affected by a story on suicide consider talking to a manager, talking with someone you trust, or contacting a support service. For more information visit the Mindframe website.

www.mindframe-media.info

DART CENTER FOR JOURNALISM & TRAUMA
A PROJECT OF COLUMBIA JOURNALISM SCHOOL

HOME RESOURCES TOPICS GLOBAL PROGR

Home > Resources > In Depth: Covering Suicide

In Depth: Covering Suicide

July 25, 2014

Like 46 Tweet Share 46

Media coverage of suicide is a public health issue. In addition to judging whether a story is newsworthy, journalists need to be aware that their reporting can have wider impacts, not just on relatives and friends of the deceased, but also on readers and audiences. Dart Centre Europe has released a new, comprehensive tip sheet for journalists on covering suicide.

www.dartcenter.org/content/covering-suicide

Media

- ❑ Some known effects of reporting are straightforward, e.g.,
 - Avoid descriptive details about the method or location of death
 - presumably because these could put an image in the mind of someone at risk and make the actions more accessible.

- ❑ Some effects of reporting are less straightforward, e.g.,
 - Avoid including images of memorials or grieving friends/family members
 - presumably because the idea that one's death may bring about a sense of comradery or an outpouring of support may make suicide more attractive.

As the train raced toward them, a man and woman – both 29, both homeless – hugged and lay down on the tracks in **Delray Beach**.



Public safety messaging



Audience matters: A wide variety of 1990's era Philip Morris campaigns that were, at face value, intended to reduce teen smoking in fact increased teen smoking.

Seen as parents interfering in their lives, smoking increased by 12% despite the warnings of the health effects and dangers of smoking.

Public safety messaging

Collisions between semi-trucks and trains make up 25% of all vehicle-train collisions

AND TRAINS WIN EVERY TIME



The Advance Warning Sign  warns drivers the road crosses railroad tracks ahead. This means you should **SLOW DOWN, LOOK & LISTEN** for the sound of a train, and **BE PREPARED TO STOP.**

NTD&S/018 NDMC_The_080412.A_AHNS



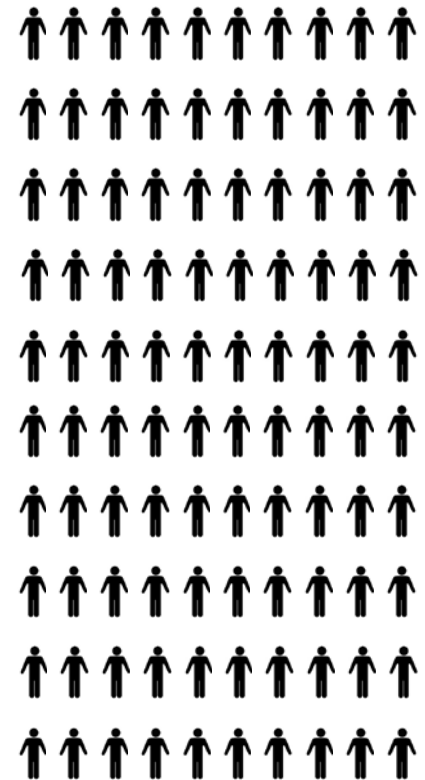
MAN VS TRAIN

IT'S NO CONTEST.
Every day, people tempt fate and die trespassing on railroad tracks.

SEE TRACKS? THINK TRAIN! 

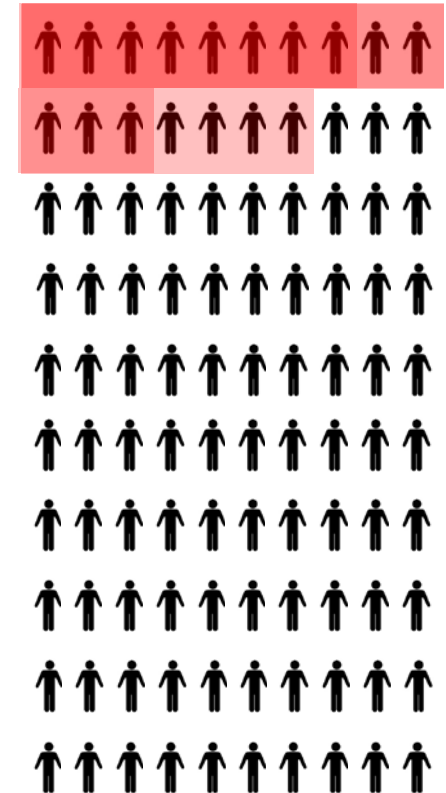
Who is receiving these safety messages?

- ❑ In 2013, 17% of students in grades 9 through 12 reported having seriously considered suicide the past year.
 - 13.6% reported having made a suicide plan in the past year
 - 8% reported at least one suicide attempt in the past year
 - This doesn't even count those who may later in life experience such thoughts
- ❑ Why not design education campaigns that take these individuals into account – thus broadening the impact of the safety messaging?



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What does all of this mean?

- ❑ The way that the media/safety orgs/public talk about rail suicide *will* influence future incidents
- ❑ There may be ways to influence rates of rail suicide through subtle shifts in how we talk about these incidents (and thus how people talk to each other about it)
- ❑ Important to consider the entire audience who will receive a message.



What is being done/can be done?

- ❑ Stakeholder group currently looking at how information gets out after a rail suicide
 - Refine rail communications with media
 - Consider social media impacts

- ❑ Look at current campaigns under new lens
 - Could these campaigns be made more effective by considering a broader audience?
 - Could these campaigns be made more effective by nudging towards certain behaviors?



Thank you to our team and sponsors!

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U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration

Thank you to the rest of our Volpe team:

- ❑ Bianka Mejia
- ❑ Dr. Stephanie Chase
- ❑ Danielle Hiltunen

Thank you!

Thoughts? Questions? Ideas?

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Surface Transportation Human Factors Division

Scott.Gabree@dot.gov

617-494-2530

www.volpe.dot.gov/rail-suicide-prevention



Backup Slides

impact of media on suicide

- ❑ We know that media depictions of suicide can drive broader interest
 - This interest can be both positive (help-seeking) or negative (normalizing)

Internet Searches for Suicide Following the Release of *13 Reasons Why*

John W. Ayers, PhD, MA¹; Benjamin M. Althouse, PhD, ScM^{2,3,4}; Eric C. Leas, PhD, MPH^{1,5}; et al

[» Author Affiliations](#) | [Article Information](#)

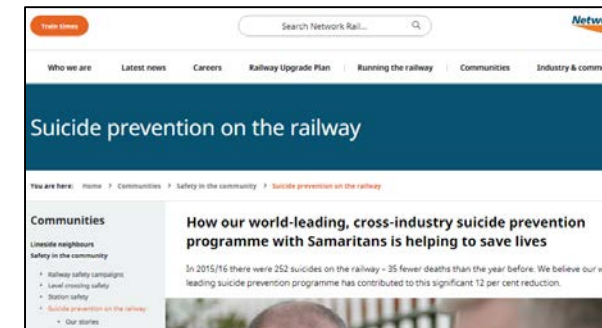
JAMA Intern Med. Published online July 31, 2017. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2017.3333

- ❑ Recent report on the effects of “13 Reasons Why” on Google searches:
 - Searches about suicide rose by 19 percent in the month after
 - “how to commit suicide” rose by 26 percent
 - “suicide songs” rose by 50 percent



GRASP

- ❑ The **Global Railway Alliance for Suicide Prevention**
 - International work group of experts in rail suicide prevention
- ❑ Partners from ten countries
- ❑ Learning best practices from experts who have been attempting to address this issue for many years



Countermeasure Pilot Testing

- ❑ Direct collaboration with US rail carriers to implement and evaluate rail suicide countermeasures
- ❑ Little empirical evidence is available about rail suicide prevention
 - Most rail suicide mitigations are done reactively, without time for a proper evaluation
- ❑ Countermeasures may be processes to work with external groups or to implement engineering or other mitigations

