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UMTA ANNOUNCES START OF SAFETY EVALUATION OF SEPTA NORRISTOWN LINE

Secretary of Transportation Elizabeth Hanford Dole has ordered a safety evaluation of a portion of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). Ralph L. Stanley, Administrator of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration says that evaluation will begin immediately. Initial emphasis will be on SEPTA's Norristown High Speed Rail Line.

Stanley said, "Secretary Dole's concern for safety prompted her to order the SEPTA evaluation because of the series of accidents that have occurred on SEPTA routes over the past 15 months. On the Norristown High Speed Rail Line alone there have been four serious accidents during this period that have injured 125 people, one of them critically. Such a record is intolerable. Users of mass transit in America must have absolute assurance they will reach their destinations safely."

The evaluation will be conducted by UMTA under the provisions of Section 22 of the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, as amended. This provision reads "The Secretary may investigate conditions in any facility, equipment, or manner of operation financed under this Act which the Secretary believes create a serious hazard of death or injury." UMTA gave \$185.7 million in grants to SEPTA last year.

A number of governmental agencies have undertaken various reviews and investigations regarding the safety of the SEPTA rail system in recent years including an investigation completed by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in October 1985; the National Transportation Safety Board investigated the

circumstances surrounding two accidents on the Norristown line in the last two years; Senator Specter chaired Congressional hearings on the safety of the system in January 1986; furthermore, the Pennsylvania State Legislature has decided to undertake an investigation focusing on the safety of the SEPTA system; and SEPTA commissioned its own review in 1985 which resulted essentially in a capital needs analysis.

After reviewing the purposes and results of these investigations, the UMTA evaluation will have a different focus. The UMTA evaluation will be designed to determine: (1) whether the operations of the Norristown line are being conducted in a manner safe enough to justify their continuance; (2) if not, the need for SEPTA to develop a remedial plan designed to correct the deficiencies; and (3) whether to suspend Federal financial assistance to SEPTA.

The first phase of the evaluation was a meeting today at SEPTA headquarters in Philadelphia. Representing the Department was Ralph L. Stanley, Administrator of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration. Also in attendance for the Department was an investigative team comprised of government and private sector safety experts and engineers. Lewis F. Gould, SEPTA's Chairman of the Board led the SEPTA participants at the meeting.

The evaluation will cover the following aspects of the Norristown line:

- a. Safety policy and its implementation.
- b. Management enforcement of operating rules and procedures.
- c. Maintenance practices.
- d. Communications.
- e. Equipment and facilities.
- f. Any changes that may adversely affect the safety of the system.

In addition, in connection with the Norristown line, the evaluation will also include a review of:

1. SEPTA's employee safety training.
2. SEPTA's emergency preparedness program.
3. Reported use of drugs by SEPTA operators and maintenance employees.

- more -

Should additional justifying facts come to light UMTA reserves the right to expand the scope of its review.

An analysis of these issues relative to the Norristown line may require that UMTA extend the evaluation to other parts of the SEPTA rail system. Although the evaluation may take several months to complete, the discovery of any unsafe conditions will immediately be brought to the attention of SEPTA management so that corrections can be made without delay.

Section 22 of the UMT Act requires that unsafe conditions, if found to exist, be corrected. It also authorizes the withholding of further UMTA financial assistance until approval and implementation of a remedial plan.

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