



Amalgamated Transit Union Canada

Here they come again: it's the neighborhood tax collector. No, not a Revenue Canada agent with an audit in hand. They work in a safe environment in little cubicles in Ottawa, ON. Someone from the Provincial Department of Taxation? Nope. Again, comfortably tucked behind a computer screen in some Provincial Capital.

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. For years, those fares have been going through the roof. Combine that with massive service cuts on 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 recent past, we have seen a dramatic increase in the level and intensity of senseless attacks on defenseless operators. Drivers have been punched, slapped, stabbed, shot, have had bodily fluids thrown upon them and on February 14, 2017 in Winnipeg, Manitoba gave their life when a passenger attacked and murdered the operator. 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.

Given Canada's role as one of the world's leading centres for transit vehicle manufacturing, we are in a unique position to enhance safety for the industry throughout our nation and the United States. Canada has three of North America's largest urban transit bus manufacturers, and together they supply nearly 70% of the entire North American market from their Canadian roots. Five transit employees are assaulted every day. Each year, more than 2,000 transit operators are assaulted, and 755 of these incidents occur on buses, putting passengers and other vehicles at risk. Thankfully, Bill S-221 is now law. Threatening or assaulting a transit operator could now result in more serious criminal charges and longer jail times. It is long overdue. However, our judicial system is failing us because more often than not the lawyers for these criminals plea bargain down their clients' charges to a slap on the wrist. Criminal penalties alone will not stop these heinous acts from reoccurring. The logical next step is structural changes to the buses -- specifically the bus operator workstation -- to ensure that these incidents don't happen in the first place. 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.

The time has come for our government and transit employers to stop putting a price on humanity. ATU Canada is demanding for a stop to these heinous assaults. Join us in demanding a change to the structural design of the transit operator workstation. Together we can keep everyone safe.

Paul Thorp
President
ATU Canada