



Inspire and influence the evolution of Integrated Urban Mobility.

Speaking Notes: House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice

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by Patrick Leclerc, President and CEO of CUTA

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, I would like to start by thanking you for inviting me to appear before you today in connection with the review of Bill C-46. My name is Patrick Leclerc, and I am the President and CEO of the Canadian Urban Transit Association, CUTA.

CUTA speaks on behalf of Canada's public transit sector. Our members include all of the public transit systems across the country, private-sector businesses, government organizations and urban mobility partners.

The safety of our communities is closely linked to the safety of our transit systems. Each year in Canada our members provide over 2 billion trips, drive over 1 billion kilometers and are on the road for more than 53 million hours.

A few years ago, CUTA worked hand-in-hand with transit leaders, transit unions, MPs and Senators to successfully and unanimously amend the Criminal Code to make assaulting a transit operator an aggravating factor in the determination of the sentence.

The reason was simple: there are about 2,000 assaults against bus operators across the country each year. The situation is dangerous and unacceptable. While some pointed to the fact that 2,000 assaults over 2 billion trips represented about 0.000001% assault per transit trip, everyone agreed, including the members of this committee, that assaulting a bus driver represented a serious public safety issue that needed to be addressed. It was a matter of public safety back then, and we're back in front of you today with the exact same consideration in mind, public safety.

Transit riders should feel confident that getting on a transit vehicle is safe. In fact, it is much safer than getting in a car. Our transit operators deeply care about their passengers. They have their safety in mind at every turn. They are well trained, very professional and they provide excellent service to our communities. There's no doubt that the vast majority of our transit operators would never drive a vehicle while impaired by drugs or alcohol.

Unfortunately, there are times when drivers and other employees carry out their duties while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. We know this from American transit systems, where random testing is mandatory, and from the recent program introduced by the Toronto Transit Commission. Although they are the exception and not the rule, those very few cases in which drivers' faculties are impaired by alcohol or drugs are in and of themselves too many.

As I mentioned, we are not talking only about drivers. When riders use public transportation, their safety also depends on the work of mechanics, supervisors, inspectors, engineers and managers, all of whom play a part in ensuring the safety of public transit operations.

In addition to public safety, this issue also is a matter of workplace safety. It is management's responsibility to ensure transit employees are safe at all times. Transit systems involve heavy duty machinery, safety-sensitive duties and no shortage of ways in which an impaired person could put their fellow workers at risk.

While transit operations, for the most part, sit outside of the federal government's purview, the government does have a role to play in providing clear leadership and unambiguous direction on safety-related issues surrounding the legalization of cannabis such as recommended by the Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation.

In addition to establishing clear mechanisms to allow for random alcohol and drug testing for safety-sensitive positions under federal jurisdiction, the government needs to show leadership and work with Provinces and Territories to ensure the approach to public safety and safety-sensitive positions, as it relates to the use of cannabis and impairment in the workplace, is consistent from Coast-to-Coast-to-Coast.

