

Rail union calls for action on Wellington rail line after TAIC report

Rail & Maritime Transport Union Media Release

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The union representing rail workers is calling for action to make a notorious Wellington rail bottleneck safer.

The Transport Accident Investigation Commission (TAIC) released a report today into an incident in November 2019 at the 'Wellington Throat', the convergence point of tracks coming into and out of the Wellington Railway Station.

A train failed to stop at a red light and potentially could have collided with another train, known as a 'signal passed at danger' event.

Rail and Maritime Transport Union General Secretary Wayne Butson has welcomed the TAIC report which reiterates points made in a 2017 report.

He says KiwiRail needs to fix the signalling system to ensure safety, and says the New Zealand Transport Authority (NZTA) is at fault for not enforcing this prior recommendation.

Mr Butson says in 1980 two trains collided at these signals and two people died.

He says the recommendations made then are the same as they are now: to redesign the 'Wellington Throat' and put in train stops.

"This report has to be a catalyst to redesign the tracks to provide proper train separation with safety margins and train stops. There are train stops sitting in Hutt workshops which could be fitted to the signals."

He says the TAIC report just looks at the facts of the case, but NZTA has the responsibility to hold parties to account.

"Why has NZTA not forced KiwiRail to make the changes to the signalling system recommended by TAIC?"

Mr Butson has says the approach of the New Zealand Transport Authority (NZTA) in this and other investigation processes is flawed.

The NZTA has adopted a posture of strict liability in their investigations which opens workers to legal charges, he says.

"This is treating workers as the problem rather than fixing systemic issues, and is entirely the wrong approach."

The RMTU had asked the Government look at the approach and function of NZTA as a priority.

ENDS

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