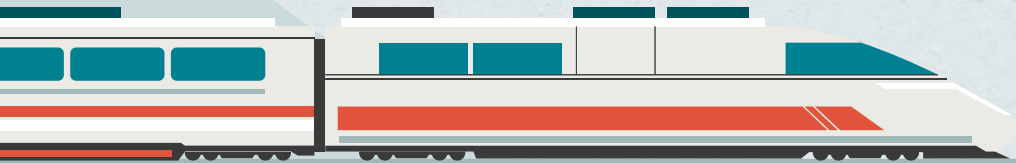


# Transit Operator Assaults & Maintenance Worker Exposures Research ATU Local 589 Boston, MA

**Annaliese Peña** (University of Delaware) and **Abena Afriyie** (Penn State University)



## ATU Local 589

ATU Local 589 (Boston Carmen's Union) is the Boston local of the international Amalgamated Transit Union, and it serves over **6,000 transit employees** of the MBTA.

589 is well-loved and longstanding (over 110 years old); we want to start by giving them a special thanks for all their mentorship and guidance.



Executive Board (*right to left*): Rudy, Eddy, Jim Bradley, Henry, Jim Evers (Pres.), Scott, Wayne, and Billy. (Missing Karen)

# Transit Workers and Violence

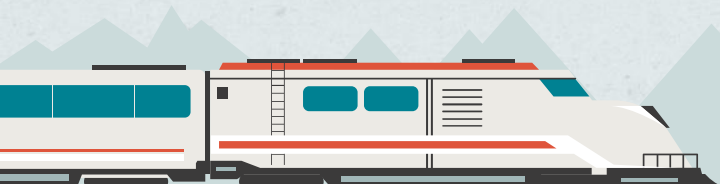


## Rates of Assault

Violent assaults against transit workers have tripled in the past 15 years, and are at new record highs post-pandemic.

2022 saw a record of 492 assaults against transit workers

Forward facing employees (i.e. operators) suffer the majority of these assaults





# Maintenance Workers and Health Exposures



## Workplace Exposures

Rail maintenance workers are, as a function of their jobs, exposed to a variety of dangerous ergonomic and chemical exposures that put their safety and wellbeing at risk

The union voiced concerns for maintenance worker wellbeing and wanted to investigate these issues alongside assaults



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# Methodology





## Transit Worker Safety Study

The purpose of this survey is to understand the experiences of violence, stress and safety among transit workers. This study is conducted by ATU Local 589 and seeks recommendations from its members to improve working conditions throughout the transit system, both for operators and maintenance workers.

TO TAKE THE SURVEY, PLEASE  
SCAN EITHER QR CODE BELOW



Operator Survey



Maintenance Survey



# Survey Development



## Dual Format

Based on feedback from workers, we decided to develop **two survey versions**: one focused on **operator assaults** and one focused on **maintenance exposures**.



## Qualtrics

These surveys were developed in Qualtrics, QR codes were made and distributed on flyers (see left). Paper copies were also made.



# Field Work: Networking and Engaging Workers



Meeting Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll (MA)



Meeting Maintenance Rail Workers on the Blue Line  
(at Orient Heights)



# Numbers Served

8

Worksite visits/ Union Meetings

386

Completed surveys





# Who We Are Talking About When We Say “Operator” and “Maintenance”

**Bus Operators**

**Light-Rail Operators**

**Heavy Rail Operators**

**Non-Revenue Operators  
(Shifters, Yard Motor  
People etc.)**

**Bus Maintenance**

**Rail Maintenance**

**Railcar Maintenance**

**Facilities  
Maintenance**

**Dispatch/Clerk**

**Customer Service  
(CSA)**



# Field Work: Survey Distribution



Pounding the pavement at Riverside



At the Bus Garage in Forest Hills



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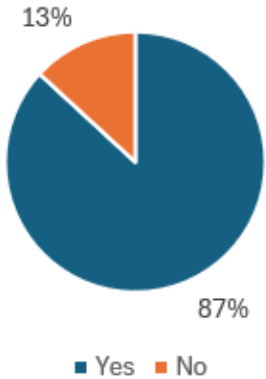
# Results Found



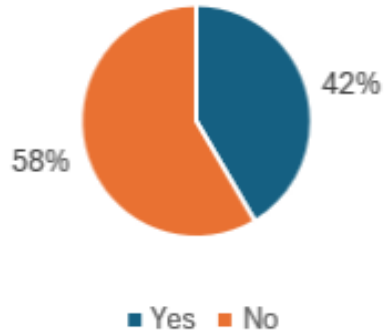


# Rates of Assault by Type Among Operator Transit Workers

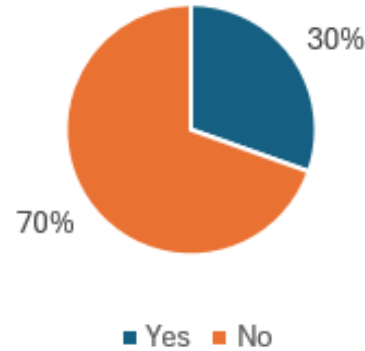
Verbal Assault



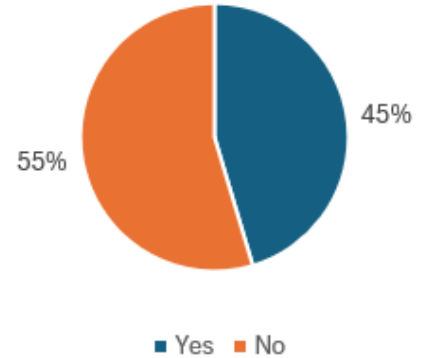
Simple Assault



Sexual Harrassment



Expectorate Assault



# Percent Reporting Working Conditions Unsafe By Race and Gender



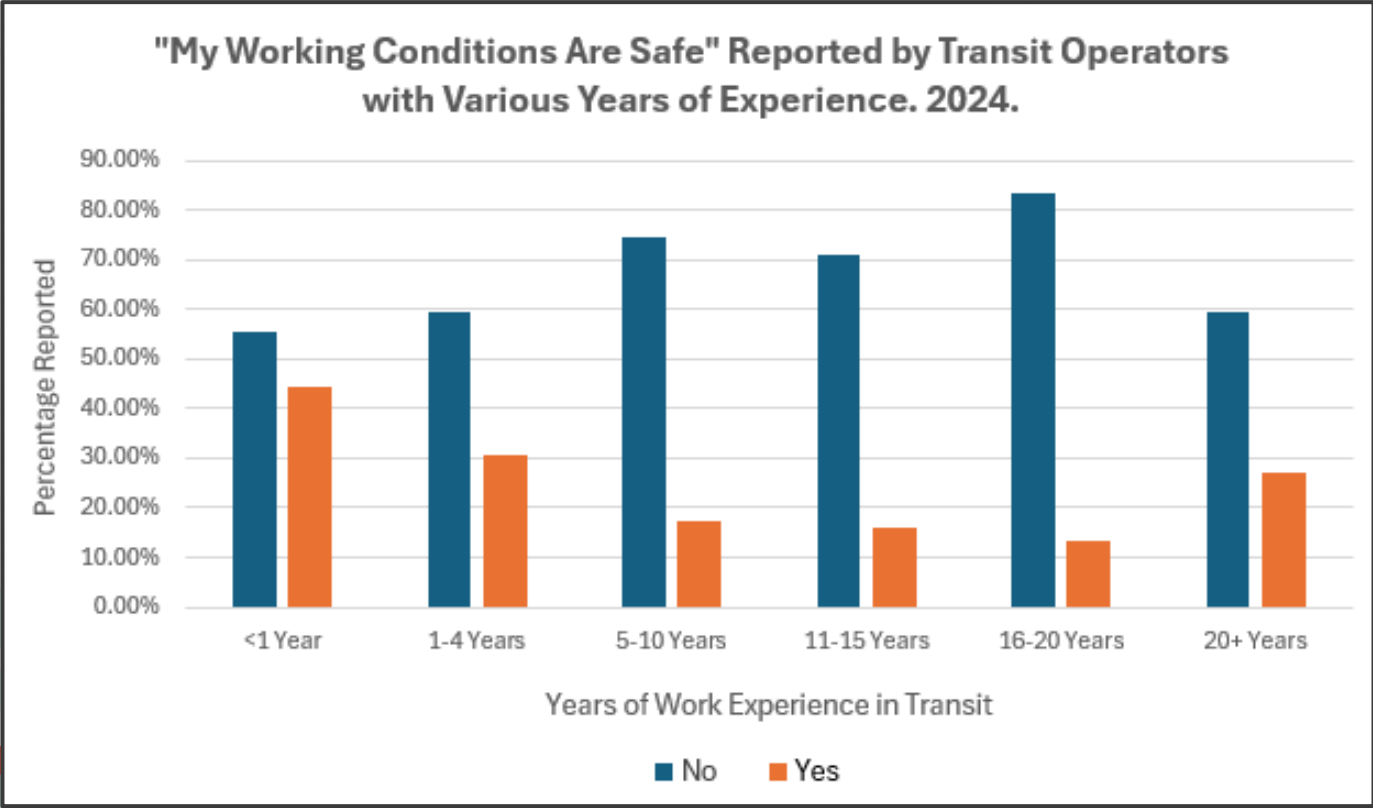
79.73% of women, 61.88% of men.

- Odds ratio of 1.39, or **39% more likely to feel unsafe.**

71.95% of Black participants, 63.53% of White participants, 83.64% of Biracial participants.

- Odds ratio of 1.85, or **85% more likely to feel unsafe.**

# Percent Reporting Working Conditions Unsafe By Years in the Field

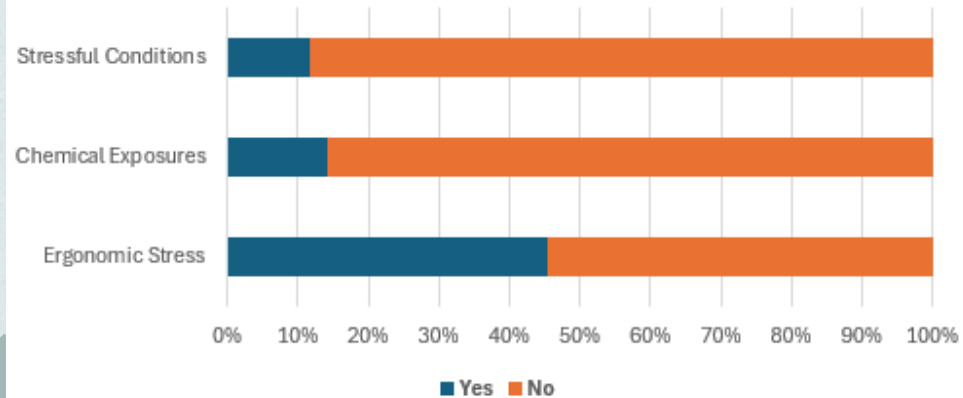




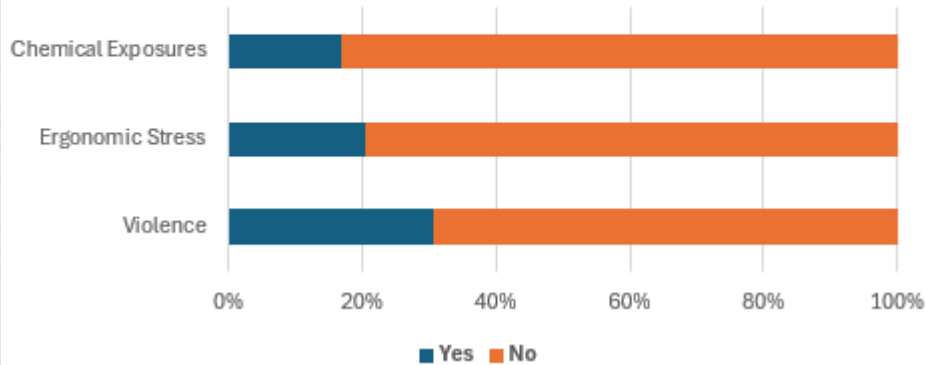
# Operator vs. Maintenance Primary Health Concerns

Percentages of each primary long-term health concern for maintenance worker participants

## What is Your Primary Long-Term Health Concern for Exposures at Work? Maintenance Workers (N=119)



## What is Your Primary Long-Term Health Concern for Exposures at Work? Operators (N=267)



Percentages of each primary long-term health concern for operator participants



*"I used to work in law enforcement, in corrections, and I see more violence and rough stuff as a driver here now." - MBTA operator*

*"I had a man threatening me just the other week to slit my throat, and I know if it happened and I call the T police, I'd be dead and buried before they show up. We're on our own." - MBTA operator*

*"What you have to realize is, it's not even about you...that person was having a bad day already, and they see you and think, 'there's a worker, they seem like a good target'." -MBTA operator*

*"We are caretakers of our community, so I always do my best to spread kindness because I look back [in the rearview mirror] and I see our mom's and grandmom's—we gotta take care of them." - MBTA operator*





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# **Deliverables & Future Implications**





# Deliverables in Production



## Educational Pamphlet

- Pamphlet with quick stats for distribution to workers to support open-access information and transparency

## Lobbying Materials

- Slide decks for senate/house presentations to bolster support for safety advocacy

# Future Implications



- Build support for assault bill currently undergoing its third reading before being passed through the MA senate and house
- Will require higher minimum fines for perpetrators of violence, as well as higher minimum jail times.
- Hope to use recommendations and stats from this work to support that bill, and advocate for changes with the MBTA and FTA (Federal Transit Administration).



# Reflecting on This Internship

*“This internship has been an invaluable learning experience for me in many ways. I think it greatly improved my professional skill sets, and personally it also **connected me to my family**, who were lifelong union factory workers, and showed me the **great importance of advocacy in this work**. This internship has made me want to continue in this field for myself, but also for all the people who came before me. **I genuinely could not recommend this program enough.**”*

-Annaliese

*“The experience at the OHIP program has been transformative for me as a labour advocate, **providing a practical understanding of the complex issues of violence and harassment faced by MBTA workers**. The hands-on experience of interacting with workers, conducting surveys, and analyzing data underscored the critical role of unions in advocating for safer working conditions, deepened my understanding of occupational safety and health, and highlighted the importance of policy advocacy in protecting workers' rights. **This internship reinforced my commitment to advancing labour standards and informed my future efforts** to address similar issues within the global labour movement.” - Abena*



# Thanks!



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ATU Local 589

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The OHIP Program

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And the Employees of the MBTA for participating!