

TORONTO STAR

SEPTEMBER 20, 2013

LEGISLATIVE SERVICES	
COPY TO:	FOR:
Chair	Committee
CFO	
Corrections Services	Council
Public Works	✓ Oct 10/13
Employee and Business Services	
Health Services	File
Human Services	
Peel Living	

REFERRAL TO _____
 RECOMMENDED _____
 DIRECTION REQUIRED _____
 RECEIPT RECOMMENDED _____

Whistle ban prevented warning before train crash

Investigators turn attention to bus involved in collision that killed six in Ottawa

BRUCE CAMPION-SMITH
OTTAWA BUREAU CHIEF

OTTAWA—The crew of a Via Rail train that collided with an Ottawa transit bus did not sound their whistle as they approached the level crossing because of a municipal ban on whistles.

That ban is one factor investigators are looking at as they probe Wednesday's horrific crash that killed the driver of the double-decker OC Transpo bus and five of his passengers. The train's engineer applied the emergency brakes two seconds before the collision, likely when it became apparent that the bus wasn't going to stop, said Rob Johnston,

lead investigator with the Transportation Safety Board of Canada. "Things happen pretty quick... the expectation is the vehicle is going to stop," Johnston said Friday as he provided an update on the crash probe.

The train was going about 75 km/h — well below the 160 km/h speed limit — when the bus drove into the side of the locomotive. The impact sheared off the front of the transit vehicle.

Investigators revealed on Friday that the warning systems were working at the crossing — the lights were flashing, bells ringing and the barricades were down 25 seconds before impact.

"The automated crossing protection functioned as designed," Johnston told a news conference.

But as it sped towards the crossing, the train did not sound its whistle

because of a city regulation that bans train whistles between 8 p.m. and noon.

"That ban has been in place a long time," Johnston said.

Trains are usually required to sound their whistle about 365 metres ahead of a crossing and by that time the warning lights and gates have already been activated, Johnston said.

While whistles are another layer of safety at a crossing, Johnston noted it's not always guaranteed they get the attention of drivers.

"Today's cars are pretty sound proof and if you've got the stereo on and windows up... they're not always effective at warning people," Johnston said.

In 2010, Transport Canada issued new rules requiring new, more powerful two-tone horns and it ordered



Rob Johnston says the bus involved in an Ottawa train crash will be taken apart in a bid for answers.

them installed near the front of locomotives to make it easier for motorists to hear.

Two days into the crash probe, investigators say they've ruled out several possible causes: in addition to finding no problems with the warning systems, the probe has turned up no issues with the operation of the train or the condition of the tracks.

Now the focus turns to the mechanical fitness of the bus, its driver and the design of the crossing itself. Johnston said they'll be doing a detailed mechanical examination of

the bus and review all the data that can be retrieved from devices on board.

"We're going to take that bus apart," Johnston said.

As well, they will be taking a close look at bus driver Dave Woodard.

"We will evaluate factors that may have affected the driver's performance. We will assess bus operations and driver training," Johnston said.

"We're going to look at medical history. We're going to review the work schedule of the individual."

Johnston said they will be looking at how visible the warning lights and gate are to approaching drivers.

And the safety board says it will be looking at provincial rules that don't require transit buses to stop as a precaution at rail crossings protected by gates and lights, unlike school buses which must stop at all crossings.

Pw-C2-1