

# US RAIL SAFETY UNDER MICROSCOPE AFTER DEADLY CRASH

**NEW YORK:** This week's train crash at a major transport hub to Manhattan - the fifth deadly US rail accident in under three years - spotlighted safety concerns and chronic underinvestment in America. One woman was killed and more than 100 people injured when a commuter train traveling "at a high rate of speed" plowed into the station at Hoboken, New Jersey during the morning rush hour on Thursday.

Experts said it was miraculous that more people were not killed given that the train was carrying 250 passengers and the first carriage flew into the air before slamming into the interior wall of the terminal, collapsing portions of the roof. Investigators said Friday that it could take days before they can comment on the cause of the crash, but experts highlighted safety problems and sluggish investment in upgrading railroads in a country where most people travel by car or plane. Thursday's destruction marked the fourth deadly rail crash in less than three years on the East Coast alone. New Jersey's Republican Governor Chris Christie, a prominent ally in Donald Trump's race to become president, in July temporarily shut down \$2.7 billion worth of New Jersey Transit projects in a political dispute with state Democrats. His transportation official denied any culpability in Thursday's crash, saying that no safety or maintenance expense had been affected. But New Jersey Transit, which ferries hundreds of thousands of commuters to and from work each week, has suffered from poor investment for years.

## Expensive Technology

A federal law passed in 2008 required rail companies to adopt Positive Train Control, a technology designed to help prevent accidents, by the end of 2015. The date was then pushed back to 2018, but with the technology expensive and state budgets tight, many parts of the country are still lagging behind. The system slows a train automatically if the conductor does not abide by signals or the mandated speed limit.

But it has yet to be installed on any New Jersey trains or track segments, and no staff have been trained how to use it, according to an NJ Transit report filed two weeks ago with the department of transportation, the Daily News reported. The vice president of the National Transportation Safety Board, while refusing to speculate on the cause of Thursday's crash, confirmed that investigators would examine what role the system could have played in this case.

Speeding was the cause of both an Amtrak derailment in Philadelphia in 2015 that killed eight people and wounded 200 others and the Metro-North crash in New York in December 2013 which killed four people and wounded 67. Robert Halstead, a railroad accident reconstruction specialist based in Syracuse, New York, told AFP that around half the country has so far adopted the Positive Train Control technology, with California the most advanced.



**NEW YORK:** Afternoon rush hour commuters are seen in a NJ Transit train prior to departure at Penn Station on Sept 29, 2016. — AP

"The problem is the cost: It costs between \$75,000 and \$100,000 to equip one single locomotive. Then there is the cost of equipping the line," he

said. "Nationwide the cost to equip everything with PTC is \$10-\$15 billion - and that is money taken out of the maintenance budget," he said. — AFP



**FORT PIERCE, Florida:** Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton takes a selfie with supporters after speaking at a rally about national service at the Sunrise Theatre on Friday. — AFP

# CLINTON WINS ENDORSEMENTS, BUT THEY MAY NOT HOLD MUCH SWAY

'UNBIASED' USA TODAY ALSO SLAMS TRUMP

**NEW YORK:** "A clear and present danger to our country." "Xenophobia, racism and misogyny." "Beneath our national dignity." Those aren't excerpts from attack ads by Hillary Clinton's campaign. Those are longtime Republican newspapers disavowing Donald Trump. If newspaper endorsements equaled victory, Clinton would be in line for a historic landslide. She has been endorsed by dozens of papers ranging from such expected backers as The New York Times to such once-certain GOP advocates as The Dallas Morning News, the Arizona Republic and the Cincinnati Enquirer, which on Sept 23 called for "a leader who will bring out the best in Americans, not the worst."

On Friday, USA Today ended its tradition of not taking sides and published an anti-endorsement, contending that Trump "lacks the temperament, knowledge, steadiness and honesty that America needs from its presidents." The paper didn't back Clinton but advised readers to "Stay true to your convictions." The same day, The San Diego Union-Tribune endorsed Clinton - the first Democrat it has endorsed in its history.

Trump, meanwhile, is supported by far fewer publications. They include a paper owned by son-in-law Jared Kushner (the New York Observer) and the National Enquirer, a tabloid whose parent

company is run by Trump friend David Pecker and whose content usually focuses on celebrity scandal. Trump scorned the negative editorials Friday, tweeting that "The people are really smart in cancelling subscriptions to the Dallas & Arizona papers & now USA Today will lose readers! The people get it!" "I don't read USA Today," he said later to WZZM13 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, "It's not much of a newspaper as far as I'm concerned."

If Clinton's overwhelming advantage among editorial boards mirrors the revulsion Trump has inspired from officials in both parties, the endorsements may also illustrate the decline in newspapers' power to shape opinions and the strength of Trump's anti-establishment appeal. Polls show Clinton trailing in Texas, Arizona and Ohio despite the unexpected support of GOP papers. During the primaries, the venerable conservative paper the New Hampshire Union Leader endorsed Chris Christie, only to have the New Jersey governor lose the state decisively, drop out and back Trump. The Arizona Republic favored John Kasich in the state's GOP primary, but Trump won easily, and the Ohio governor finished fourth.

## Impact

"Newspaper endorsements don't have nearly

the impact they used to," says Mark McKinnon, co-host of Showtime's political show "The Circus" and a longtime adviser who has worked with former President George W Bush and Sen. John McCain of Arizona, the GOP's 2008 presidential candidate. "There are just way too many other sources of information for voters today."

"They are just part of the wave," says political historian Rick Perlstein, who is in the midst of a multivolume series on the rise of the conservative movement and has written in depth about elections of the 1960s, '70s and beyond. "They don't start anything, and probably didn't determine much - but betoken a widespread disgust in the air."

Readers may not let editorials tell them how to vote, but they care enough to respond. Dallas Morning News editor Mike Wilson recalls a group of about a dozen people demonstrated against the endorsement across the street from the paper. Wilson went down to talk with them. In a series of tweets, he described a discussion that began angrily but settled into a serious dialogue. "I got a few words in and persuaded zero people," he tweeted.

Wilson said he's received some messages from Clinton supporters thanking the newspaper for the editorial, but hasn't heard that it changed anyone's mind. "They're not really meant to end arguments, they're meant to start discussions, and this one certainly did that," he said. "One of the reasons we exist is to take editorial positions on things that can improve lives in our community," he said. "That is one of the core functions of a newspaper."

Peter Bhatia, editor and vice president of audience engagement at the Cincinnati Enquirer, said he knows that the impact of editorial endorsements has lessened. "The days of people taking the endorsements of an editorial board and going into the polling place with them are pretty much long gone," he said. But he still considers it an important obligation. The newspaper's editorial board came to consensus pretty quickly so they decided to get it out.

As anticipated, some readers lashed out. Bhatia said he received some 150 angry emails and there were some canceled subscriptions. "I am impressed by how thoroughly rehearsed some of the attacks on Hillary Clinton are," he said. "They have a very familiar bent to them." He also cites their incivility, but doesn't find that unusual in the Internet age. He said there also have been a few dozen positive notes. He said he gave an interview to CBC radio in Canada and got a long email from someone who found his arguments convincing. Just one problem: The person lives in Canada and can't vote. — AP

# TRUMP'S HABIT OF FUMING OVER SLIGHTS COMES AT POLITICAL COST

**NEW YORK:** Donald Trump's five-day feud with a former beauty queen is only the latest example of his insistence on airing and re-arranging his grievances no matter the political cost. The Republican nominee's brash, confrontational style has thrilled his millions of supporters, who have cheered the celebrity businessman's tenacity and thirst for verbal combat. He bragged in the early weeks of his campaign last year, "When people treat me unfairly, I don't let them forget it."

Critics say that stubborn refusal to back down is born of a thin skin and overwhelming pride - and it gets him into political trouble again and again. He repeatedly brings up perceived slights, breathing new life into damaging storylines, instead of making the politically savvy calculation to move on. Other feuds that have dogged his campaign:

## Alicia Machado

The 1996 Miss Universe winner has been at the center of the campaign since Democrat Hillary Clinton noted in this week's debate that Trump had ridiculed the Venezuela-born actress for gaining weight and dubbed her "Miss Piggy" and "Miss Housekeeping". Trump fumed on stage and the next morning, in an interview, said that Machado's "massive" weight gain had been "a real problem" for the pageant, which he then owned. As Machado did a series of interviews attacking Trump, the celebrity businessman and his allies hit back, prolonging the story's lifespan.

And then Trump took to social media before dawn Friday to unleash a tweetstorm on Machado, saying she had a "terrible" past that a "duped" Clinton had overlooked before holding her up "as an 'angel'" in the first presidential debate. He also accused the Democrat's campaign of helping her get US citizenship but offered no proof. "Did Crooked Hillary help disgusting (check out sex tape and past) Alicia M become a US citizen so she could use her in the debate?" read a missive from Trump posted on his verified Twitter account at 5:30 am. Clinton later Friday ripped Trump, calling the series of posts "unhinged, even for him."

## Family of Capt Humayun Khan

Khizr and Ghazala Khan, a Muslim-American family whose son, Capt Humayun Khan, was killed while serving in Iraq in 2004, became one of the most dramatic moments at July's Democratic National Convention. Khizr Khan denounced the candidate's plan to temporarily ban Muslim immigrants from entering the United States, accused Trump of sacrificing "nothing and no one" and produced his pocket copy of the Constitution while suggesting Trump had never read it.

Trump hit back in an interview days later - he implied that the soldier's mother stood silently alongside her husband during the speech because her religion restricted her from speaking - and then returned to it on social media. "Mr Khan, who does not know me, viciously attacked me from the stage of the DNC and is now all over TV doing the same - Nice!" he tweeted. The back-and-forth between the nominee and the Khans rapidly escalated, prompting several top Republicans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, a nonprofit service organization with 1.7 million members, to denounce Trump, whose poll numbers soon sank.

## Judge Gonzalo Curiel

In May, Trump said that the federal judge presiding over a lawsuit brought by former Trump University students had an "absolute conflict" in handling the case because he is "of Mexican heritage". Trump, who at the time was the presumptive Republican nominee, claimed that US District Judge Gonzalo Curiel - he was born in Indiana - had "an inherent conflict of interest" because Trump plans to build a wall along the border between the US and Mexico.

Trump's comments were condemned by Democrats and Republicans alike. House Speaker Paul Ryan described what Trump said as the "textbook definition of a racist comment". The episode lingered for days, and while Trump eventually released a statement saying his comments were being "misconstrued", he did not apologize or suggest that Curiel was treating him fairly. Trump University is the target of two lawsuits in San Diego and one in New York that accuse the business of fleecing students with unfulfilled promises to teach secrets of success in real estate.

## Pastor in Flint, Michigan

Trump earlier this month visited Flint, where he intended to further his recent pitch to African-American voters while highlighting how the federal government had failed the impoverished city. But in a speech to a traditionally African-American church, he was cut off, chastised and then heckled after he began to attack Clinton. "Mr Trump, I invited you here to thank us for what we've done in Flint, not give a political speech," said the Rev Faith Gene Timmons, the pastor of the Bethel United Methodist Church.

The Republican nominee stopped, then said: "OK, that's good. Then I'm going to go back to Flint" and its water crisis that had sickened its citizens. But Trump went after the pastor the next morning during a "Fox and Friends" interview. He claimed that the pastor was "a nervous mess" and accused her of having a political agenda while insisting that he thought "something was up".

## Ted Cruz

A day after accepting the Republican presidential nomination at his party's convention, Trump suddenly pivoted back to the GOP primaries, choosing to re-litigate a pair of months-old battles with rival Ted Cruz. In what should have been a feel-good victory lap the morning after his thundering acceptance speech, Trump instead defended his decision to retweet an unflattering photo of Cruz's wife, Heidi, and returned to wondering about possible links between Cruz's father and President John F Kennedy's assassin.

"All I did was point out the fact that on the cover of the National Enquirer there was a picture of him and crazy Lee Harvey Oswald having breakfast," Trump said in front of a group of bewildered supporters in Cleveland. "Did anybody ever deny that was the father? They're not saying, 'Oh, that wasn't really my father.' It was a little hard to do. It looked like him." Actually, Cruz had ridiculed the idea as "nuts". He also declared that, two days after Cruz was loudly booed at the Republican National Convention for not endorsing the new nominee, he would never accept the Texas senator's backing. Last week, Cruz said he would support Trump. — AP

# US POLICE RELEASE VIDEO OF FATAL SHOOTING OF BLACK MAN

**LOS ANGELES:** Following days of protests, police in San Diego on Friday released video footage of the fatal shooting of an unarmed black man, saying the decision was made to counter "misinformation" being circulated about the incident. The grainy cellphone and surveillance videos show the victim, Alfred Olango, 38, a Ugandan immigrant, pacing back and forth as he is confronted by two police officers in the parking lot of a strip mall.

He is then seen being tasered and shot as he points an object at one of the officers. The cylindrical object turned out to be a vape inhaler. The deadly confrontation in El Cajon, a suburb of San Diego, has prompted daily street demonstrations that turned violent late Thursday after protesters blocked some streets, hurling bottles and rocks at passing vehicles and police and smashing car windows. One person was also pulled off his motorcycle.

Davis said police used tear gas to disperse

the crowd and five people were arrested. "Our goal today is to clarify and hopefully calm the community's concerns regarding the recent officer-involved shooting," police chief Jeff Davis told reporters on Friday as he released the video footage. "Our only concern at this point was community safety," he added. "We felt that the aggression of some of the protesters was escalating to the point where it was necessary to release some information."

Davis said several stores had shut down on Friday and schools had let out students early, fearing more violence. The shooting took place as the United States is reeling from a string of police shootings of black men, including one earlier this month in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and another in Charlotte, North Carolina, that also ignited protests and heightened racial tensions. Local officials in El Cajon have vowed a thorough and transparent investigation and initially refused to release the video of the incident pending the outcome of a probe. — AFP



**NOVI, Michigan:** Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump arrives at a rally Friday. — AP