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## Mineta Transportation Institute Issues a Pilot Study on Possible Patterns in Suicides on Commuter Rail Lines in California

*Researchers expect that other rail lines can use the study as a template to detect similar patterns.*

**San Jose, Calif., November 4, 2010** – The [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI) has released its newest research report [Suicides on Commuter Rail in California: Possible Patterns – A Case Study](#). The overall objective was to conduct a pilot study to identify possible patterns in suicides associated with urban commuter rail systems in California. The Caltrain commuter rail system in the San Francisco Bay Area was the subject for the study. Jan L. Botha Ph.D. was principal investigator. Other investigators included Kristina A. Elmasu and Philip J. Leitzell.

“Suicides on rail systems constitute a significant social concern,” said Dr. Botha. “Reports in local media have made more people aware of this sensitive and personal subject. In recent months, a great deal of attention has been given to a series of teenage suicides in the San Francisco Bay Area. These events cause severe trauma not only for those who knew the victims, but also for the train operators and system staff. Society also suffers disruption and cost.”

Several conclusions were drawn regarding possible patterns. For example, there was no year-over-year trend, though suicides have been more common lately, perhaps because of increased population in the area. No monthly trends emerged, although September had the fewest suicides. Most suicides occurred on weekdays, especially Monday and Friday. Fewer trains on the weekends could account for the lesser number on those days. Most suicides were fairly close to a road crossing or a station. Males were 3.5 times more likely to commit suicide by train than females.

Researchers recommended that Caltrain continue to monitor suicides as a way to detect patterns and attempt to mitigate the circumstances where the suicides could be prevented. This assumes that these prevention methods would be feasible from economic and other standpoints. Other commuter rail system operators may find the study’s analyses helpful as a basis for detecting patterns in suicides.

The full report may be downloaded at no charge from [www.transweb.sjsu.edu/MTIportal/research/publications/summary/2926\\_10-05.html](http://www.transweb.sjsu.edu/MTIportal/research/publications/summary/2926_10-05.html). Or visit [www.transweb.sjsu.edu](http://www.transweb.sjsu.edu), click “Research,” then “Publications” and scroll down to the report.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JAN L. BOTHA, PH. D., PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**, is a professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at San José State

University. He earned a Ph.D. in engineering, with a focus in transportation engineering from the University of California at Berkeley. He worked in the field of civil practice for a period of almost ten years and has taught and conducted research in civil engineering as a faculty member for a period of 24 years.

#### **ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE**

The [Mineta Transportation Institute](http://www.transweb.sjsu.edu) (MTI) was established by Congress in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and was reauthorized under TEA-21 and again under SAFETEA-LU. The institute is funded by Congress through the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) Research and Innovative Technology Administration, by the California Legislature through the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and by other public and private grants and donations, including grants from the US Department of Homeland Security. DOT selected MTI as a National Center of Excellence following competitions in 2002 and 2006. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI's focus on policy and management resulted from the Board's assessment of the transportation industry's unmet needs. That led directly to choosing the San José State University College of Business as the Institute's home. MTI conducts research, education, and information and technology transfer, focusing on multimodal surface transportation policy and management issues. Visit [www.transweb.sjsu.edu](http://www.transweb.sjsu.edu)

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