



Moving Public Transportation  
Into the Future

## Conflict De-Escalation

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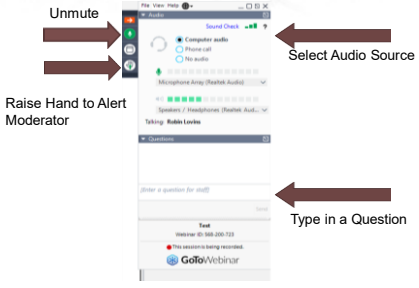
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## Webinar Etiquette



Unmute

Raise Hand to Alert Moderator

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## Course Content

- ◆ Definitions of Conflict and De-escalation
- ◆ Identify Situations That Cause Passenger Frustrations
- ◆ Review Strategies for De-escalation



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## Training Goals

- ◆ Gain a Better Understanding Of...
  - Your community
  - Your riders
  - Your role as a transit operator
  - The impacts of your words, posture and actions
- ◆ Effective Use of Customer Service Skills
- ◆ Learn Techniques To Mitigate Conflicts With Passengers, Community Members and Co-workers

**This Class Does Not Teach Self-Defense Skills**

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## The Public Transit Operator's Reality

- ◆ Operator Conflicts or Assaults Are Ever-Increasing
- ◆ Safety of Transit Operators Is a Top Priority



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**RLS** **Types of Conflict**

- ◆ Passenger Against Driver
- ◆ Passenger Against Supervisor
- ◆ Passenger Against Passenger



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**RLS** **Three Influencers of Communication**

- ◆ Words
  - What we say
- ◆ Tone
  - How we say it
- ◆ Body Language
  - How our body says it



➤ These 3 Join Together To Express the Overall Message

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**RLS** **Working Definition of Conflict**

- ◆ Conflict
  - A disagreement in which the people involved see a threat to their needs, interests or concerns
- ◆ Key Thought
  - Work through issues with riders BEFORE verbal/physical violence ensues



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## Definition of De-escalation

- ◆ De-escalation
  - The effective use of verbal and non-verbal (body language) communication skills to calm an angry or out of control passenger
- ◆ Escalation Phase
  - When interaction turns into conflict
  - It is vital to initiate de-escalation strategies during this phase

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## Why De-escalation Is Important

- ◆ Increases the Confidence of Operators in Difficult Situations
- ◆ Demonstrates the System's Desire To Meet Passenger Needs
- ◆ Diffusing Tense Situations
  - Reduces stress
  - Helps provide greater safety for everyone on the vehicle

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## Passenger Types

- ◆ Families
- ◆ Students
- ◆ Elderly
- ◆ Transient/Homeless
- ◆ Adults
- ◆ Commuters



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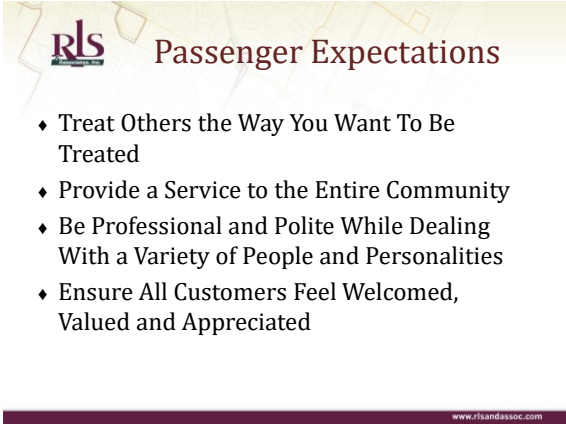
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**RLS** Passenger Expectations

- ◆ Treat Others the Way You Want To Be Treated
- ◆ Provide a Service to the Entire Community
- ◆ Be Professional and Polite While Dealing With a Variety of People and Personalities
- ◆ Ensure All Customers Feel Welcomed, Valued and Appreciated

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**RLS** Six Basic Service Desires

- ◆ Reliability
- ◆ Safety and Security
- ◆ Convenience and Accessibility
- ◆ Cleanliness and Comfort
- ◆ Simplicity
- ◆ Affordability

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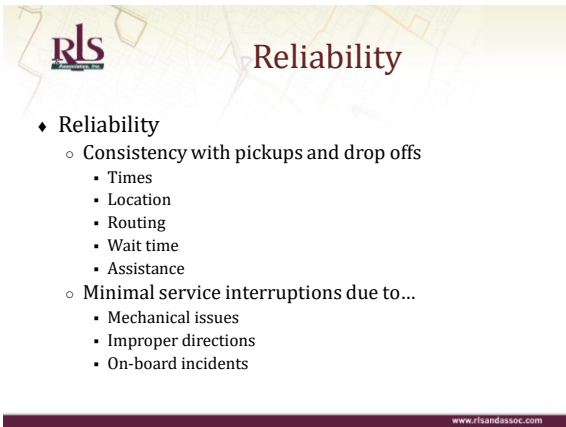
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**RLS** Reliability

- ◆ Reliability
  - Consistency with pickups and drop offs
    - Times
    - Location
    - Routing
    - Wait time
    - Assistance
  - Minimal service interruptions due to...
    - Mechanical issues
    - Improper directions
    - On-board incidents

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## Safety and Security

- ◆ Safety and Security
  - Providing freedom from harm or disruptive behavior
  - Minimal distractions of operator
    - Constant dispatch communication
    - Interaction with technology
    - Constant adjustments to operator area
    - On-going discussions with passengers
  - Exhibits patience while driving
  - Enforcement of policies
  - Ensuring passengers feel secure while onboard
  - Properly marked safety equipment and evacuation exits



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## Convenience and Accessibility

- ◆ Convenience and Accessibility
  - Providing service that is user-friendly and meets needs
  - Amenities
    - Seating
    - Lighting
    - Trash receptacles
  - Easy to read and understand schedules and ride guides
  - Simple reservation process

These communicate appreciation of passengers

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## Cleanliness and Comfort

- ◆ Cleanliness and Comfort
  - Vehicles free of garbage and odors
  - Clean, well maintained vehicles and equipment
  - Neutral climate control
  - Securement system properly stowed
  - Operator looking professional

Show pride in the service

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**rls** **Simplicity and Affordability**

- ◆ Easy To Use and Affordable
  - Help riders understand system's services
  - Reasonable fare structure
    - Adjustable for "ability to pay" levels – low income, disabled, seniors or students
    - Use of vouchers, passes or smartcards
  - Reservation process has minimal hold time or phone tree options with one number to call

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**FIRST POLL QUESTION!**

**YOU MAY NEED TO EXIT OUT OF FULL SCREEN MODE TO ANSWER THE POLL QUESTION!**

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**rls** **Triggers**

- ◆ What Is a Trigger?
  - An incident perceived as a threat by an individual
- ◆ Types of Triggering Events
  - Fear-based
    - A person feels threatened and believes they are about to lose something they value
  - Frustration
    - A person feels their needs are not being met

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## Why Does Transit Conflict Occur?

- ◆ Unmet Expectations
  - Promptness
  - Affordability
  - Friendly and personable
  - Ease of use
  - Accessibility for disabled
  - Ease of scheduling
  - Availability
  - Cleanliness



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## Root Causes for Rider Conflict

- ◆ Transit Service Dissatisfaction
- ◆ High Stress Level
- ◆ Resentment of Authority
- ◆ Mental Health Issues
- ◆ Under the Influence of Alcohol/Drugs



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## Transit Conflict Instigators

- ◆ Unwanted Advances or Harassment
- ◆ Use of Profanity
- ◆ Delays in Services
- ◆ Bullying
- ◆ Language or Cultural Differences
- ◆ Fare Disputes
- ◆ Vandalism of Vehicle

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## Recognizing Signs of Conflict

- ◆ Clinched Fists or Jaw
- ◆ Sweating, Restlessness or Pacing
- ◆ Change in Voice Tone, Eye Contact, Stance
- ◆ Blame, Anger, Frustration
- ◆ Spatial Distancing Reduced

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## Recognizing Signs of Conflict (Con't)

- ◆ Disruptive Behaviors
  - Yelling, bullying, refusing to comply with rules
- ◆ Lowering of Body Posture
- ◆ Heavy Breathing
- ◆ Raised/Hidden Hands
  - Holding hands in air out of frustration
  - Hiding hands behind back or in pockets

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## Types of Assaults

- ◆ Verbal Assault
- ◆ Spitting (Becoming More Common)
- ◆ Assault With an Object
- ◆ Physical Assault
- ◆ Assault With a Weapon



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## Strategies To Reduce Transit Conflict

- ◆ Install Protective Barriers
- ◆ Video Surveillance
- ◆ Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL System)
- ◆ Operator De-Escalation Training
- ◆ Consistent Reporting of Assaults
- ◆ Periodic Route or Driver Evaluations

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## Control Strategies (Con't)

- ◆ Meet With Passengers and/or Caregivers To Discuss Strategies To Mitigate Transit Conflict
- ◆ Involve Operators in Safety Committees
- ◆ Enforce Passenger Codes of Conduct
- ◆ Suspend Service for Violations
- ◆ Provide Adequate Escape Routes and Opportunities To Escape

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## De-Escalation Training Is a Must!

- ◆ Training Plays a Critical Role in Reducing Assaults
  - Provides employees with knowledge about agency expectations to address a variety of common situations related to conflict that could lead to assault
  - Agency must identify latest trends that may increase potential for conflict (i.e. politics, sports event, latest Tiktok video, rise in gang activity, recent local industry layoffs)

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## Training Benefits Everyone

- ◆ Employees Respond to High-risk Scenarios in One of Three Ways
  - Taking actions that de-escalate the situation
  - Retreating into “hostile withdrawal”
  - Responding aggressively in a way that promotes conflict

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## Early Observations

- ◆ An Operator Should Not Make Assumptions About a Passenger’s State of Mind...
  - But, an operator should make a mental note of strange behavior exhibited while boarding or during the trip

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## Early Observations (Con’t)

- ◆ Proactive Actions
  - Be attentive to passenger conduct and actions
  - Check (passenger) rear-view mirror similar to side view mirrors
  - Listen for any disruption or increased volume or negative tone
  - Think about next steps if disruptions elevate
  - Know safe stops on the route of travel
  - Calculate trigger(s) for intervention

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## Early Observations (Con't)

- ◆ Proactive Actions (Con't)
  - Do not overly focus on potential disruption at the cost of defensive driving
    - Pull over if distraction is too much
  - Review training and policy while thinking through possible next steps
  - Use professional judgement versus personal judgement

Better to be prepared than blind-sided

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## Conflict De-Escalation Strategies

- ◆ The Best Fight Is the One You Don't Have To Have



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## Assessing Conflict Escalation

- ◆ VIDEO  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUr5z8lJxnQ>)
- ◆ RTA Bus Driver Talks About What Led Him To Uppercut Passenger

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## Assessing Conflict Escalation

- ◆ What Could Have Been Done Differently?
- ◆ Viewer Discretion Is Advised
  - Violence

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## De-Escalate Yourself

- ◆ Act Calm/Remember To Breathe
- ◆ Maintain Non-Threatening Eye Contact
- ◆ Neutral Facial Expressions
- ◆ Relaxed Body
- ◆ Keep Gestures to a Minimum

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## Act vs React

- ◆ When We Act
  - We remain in control
- ◆ When We React
  - We can “respond impulsively”
  - Responding impulsively leads to mistakes and regretful decisions

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## Practice The Pause

- ◆ Gives You a Chance To Stop and Think!
- ◆ As You Pause
  - Observe
  - Aim to listen
  - Thoughtfully respond

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## Use Connecting Questions

- ◆ Don't Tell Passengers To Calm Down
- ◆ Instead
  - Validate their feelings
  - Ask "What do you need?"
  - Ask "How is it going?"
- ◆ Let Them Vent

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## Protect Your Reactionary Gap

- ◆ Avoid the Danger Zone
  - Within 1 arm's length
- ◆ Maintain Safety Zone
  - Outside of person's reach
- ◆ Create a Zone of Influence
  - Within safety zone but close enough for effective communication

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## Make a Personal Connection

- ◆ Use the Passenger's Name
- ◆ Ask What the Issue Is
- ◆ Acknowledge Their Emotion
  - Upset, frustrated, angry, etc.
- ◆ Empathize With Their Feelings
- ◆ Offer Help

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## SECOND POLL QUESTION!

**YOU MAY NEED TO EXIT OUT OF  
FULL SCREEN MODE TO ANSWER  
THE POLL QUESTION!**

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## Actively Listen

- ◆ Ask What the Issue Is
- ◆ Acknowledge Their Concern or Complaint Before Offering a Response
- ◆ Summarize the Issue
- ◆ Seek "Common Ground" of Agreement



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## Non-Verbal De-Escalation Skills

- ◆ Maintain Neutral Facial Expression
  - Initiate an attentive expression
  - Helps reduce hostility & expresses that you care
- ◆ Mirror Behavior You're Seeking
- ◆ Avoid Aggressive Body Stances and Posture
- ◆ Minimize Excessive Gesturing, Pacing, Fidgeting, or Weight Shifting

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## Flip the Roles Approach

- ◆ Mentally Try Arguing Their Point of View
- ◆ Practice Perspective Taking
  - Ask them why they feel the way they do
  - Don't just assume how they feel

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## C.A.I.R.O

- ◆ Method of Conflict Management
  - Calm
  - Assertive
  - Informing behavior
  - Reflect/Redirect
  - Opening behavior

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## Calm

- ◆ Don't Challenge Your Passenger
- ◆ Don't Raise Voice
  - Resist "natural" reaction
  - Use neutral, consistent voice tone
- ◆ Calm Helps To
  - Diffuse the situation
  - Decide if there are other threats
  - Discern possible escape routes

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## Assertive

- ◆ When Our Voice Tone and Body Language Betray Us, We Often Come Across As Controlling, Parental, Insecure and Aggressive
- ◆ Have Confidence in Your Ability
- ◆ Have an Empowered Pitch
- ◆ Take the Middle of the Road Approach

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## Informing Behavior

- ◆ Communicate What's Going On in Neutral Terms Without Using "You Messages"
- ◆ Use "WE" Phrasing With the Irrate Rider
  - WE are moving on now
  - WE can talk now
  - WE all want to remain safe
  - WE do not want to disrespect each other
- ◆ Do Not Order or Command Them To Do Something

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## Reflect/Redirect

- ◆ Actively Listen
- ◆ Let Them Vent / Don't Interrupt Them
- ◆ Let the Passenger Know You Heard Them
- ◆ If the Rider Is Frustrated Take the Time To Affirm Their Frustrations
- ◆ Appear Sympathetic to What They Are Feeling
- ◆ Use a Reflective Statement With an Informing Statement To Calm a Passenger

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## Opening Behavior

- ◆ Try To Make a Personal Connection
- ◆ Ask Questions That Help the Person Feel Acknowledged and Visible
  - Can I help you?
  - Do you need something?
  - How are you doing today?
  - What do you think about what I am saying?
- ◆ Allow Them To Open Up and Express Themselves To Address Their Feelings

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## Strategy for Mitigating Escalation

**REMEMBER:** *Aggression breeds aggression, potentially escalating a bad situation into an emergency*

- ◆ Handle the Situation From the Driver's Seat When Possible
- ◆ Avoid Invading the Offender's Personal Space
- ◆ Your Calmness Is Paramount To Enhance De-escalation
- ◆ Project Sense of Control Without Conveying Aggressiveness

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### Strategy for Mitigating Escalation (Con't)

- ◆ Listen To Concerns Without Passing Judgement
- ◆ Your Body Posture Should Be As Non-Threatening As Possible
- ◆ Use a Non-Excitable Tone of Voice Presentation
- ◆ Try To Connect in a Personable Way

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### Strategy for Mitigating Escalation (Con't)

- ◆ Strive To Get Them To Say “Yes” in Your Dialogue
  - If the offender is agreeing with you, it is difficult for them to stay angry at you
- ◆ Treat Every Passenger With Respect
  - Don't embarrass, humiliate or intimidate passenger
- ◆ Share a Verbal Confirmation of Onboard Cameras, if Equipped
  - If problem person knows they're being recorded it could help to diffuse the scenario

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### THIRD POLL QUESTION!

**YOU MAY NEED TO EXIT OUT OF FULL SCREEN MODE TO ANSWER THE POLL QUESTION!**

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## Strategy for Mitigating Escalation (Con't)

- ◆ Avoid These Statements
  - Calm Down
    - Could be perceived as commanding them
  - Why
    - May be perceived as an accusation
    - Promotes defensiveness
  - You Should Or You Shouldn't
    - These statements may incite inadequacy, shame or frustration within passenger

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## Strategy for Mitigating Escalation (Con't)

- ◆ De-Escalation Skills Are Not Foolproof
- ◆ Although Effective in Most Settings, There Are a Few Passengers Who Will Refuse to De-Escalate
  - Recognize this serious red flag and protect
  - Maintain a safe distance
  - Allow the passenger to exit
  - Follow system policy

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## Training Scenarios

- ◆ 2 Training Scenarios (refer to the handout to read the scenarios)
- ◆ We'll Walk Through Each Scenario and Discuss Possible Solutions
- ◆ Unmute Your Microphones To Speak
- ◆ Let's Have Some Good Discussions!

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## Training Scenario #1

- ◆ Discussion Question #1
  - How could this event have been avoided?
- ◆ Discussion Question #2
  - What role do you think company policy played in the driver's decision to do nothing?

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## Training Scenario #2

- ◆ Discussion Questions
  - Who was responsible for escalating this discussion?
  - What other factors should be considered that may have influenced this situation?
  - What were some of the triggers causing the dispatcher to show anger towards the driver?
  - How could the dispatcher have handled the situation differently?
  - Does the driver have any responsibility for the escalated discussion?

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## Role of Management

- ◆ Though the Operator Is on the Front-Line, There Are Steps Management Can Take To Help Mitigate Conflict



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## Role of Management

- ◆ Preventive Steps
  - Conduct service/operator evaluations more than once a year
  - Depending on state laws, spot check surveillance footage randomly or when known trouble areas exist (post signage on vehicle of surveillance system)
  - Maintain training standards and timeline for refresher training

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## Role of Management (Con't)

- ◆ Preventive Steps (Con't)
  - Seek feedback from operators or dispatchers on elevated passenger behavior
  - Be aware of trends in community through police, peers, community agencies, local news or passenger tips (be wary of false insinuations)

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## Conclusion

- ◆ The Safety of Employees and Passengers Is a Tenet of Every Transit System
- ◆ By Understanding How To Recognize and Respond to Conflicts Effectively, Employees Can Reduce the Risk of Violence to Them and Passengers

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