

Rail Suicide Prevention

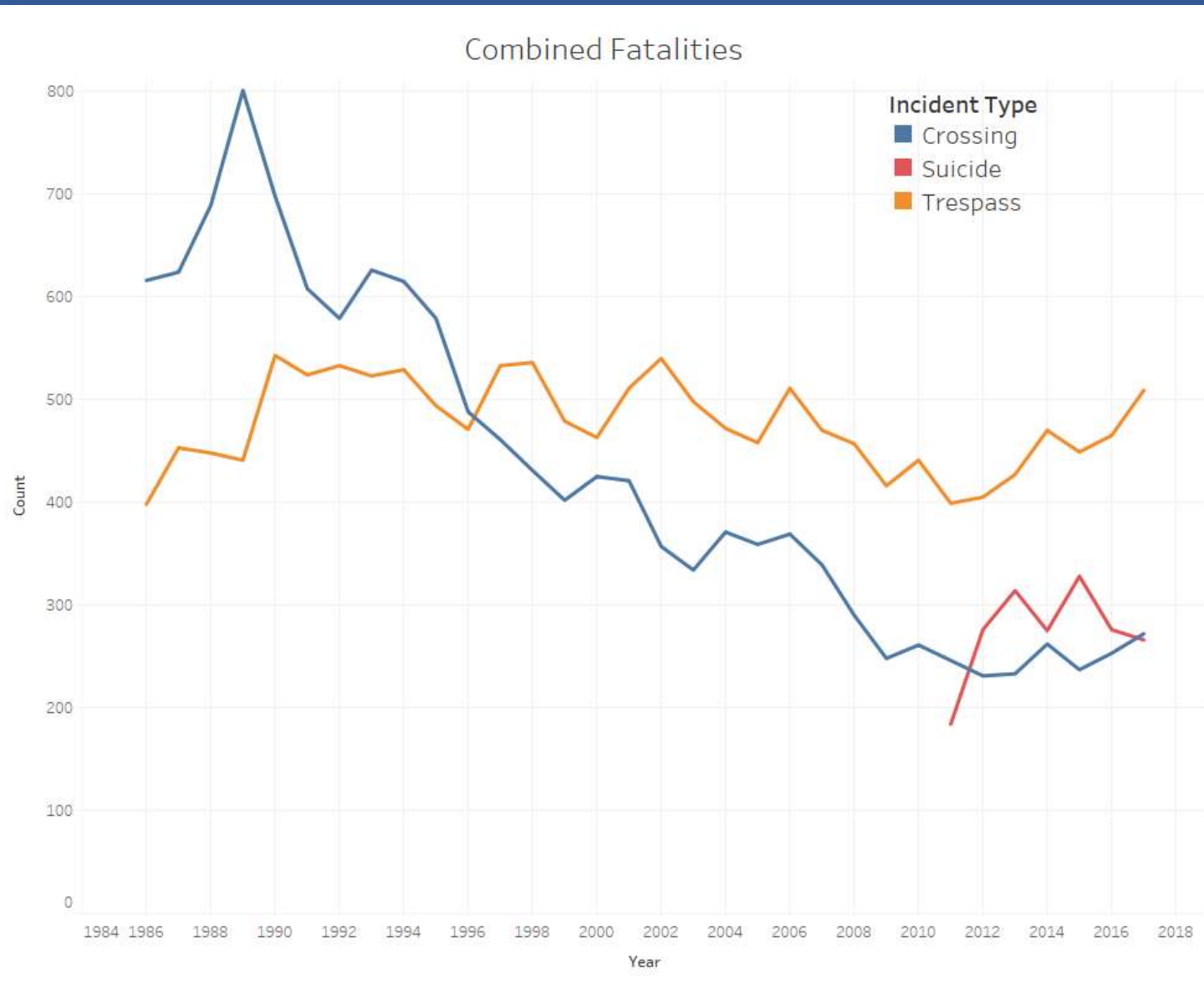
What do we know about prevention?

Scott H. Gabree, PhD

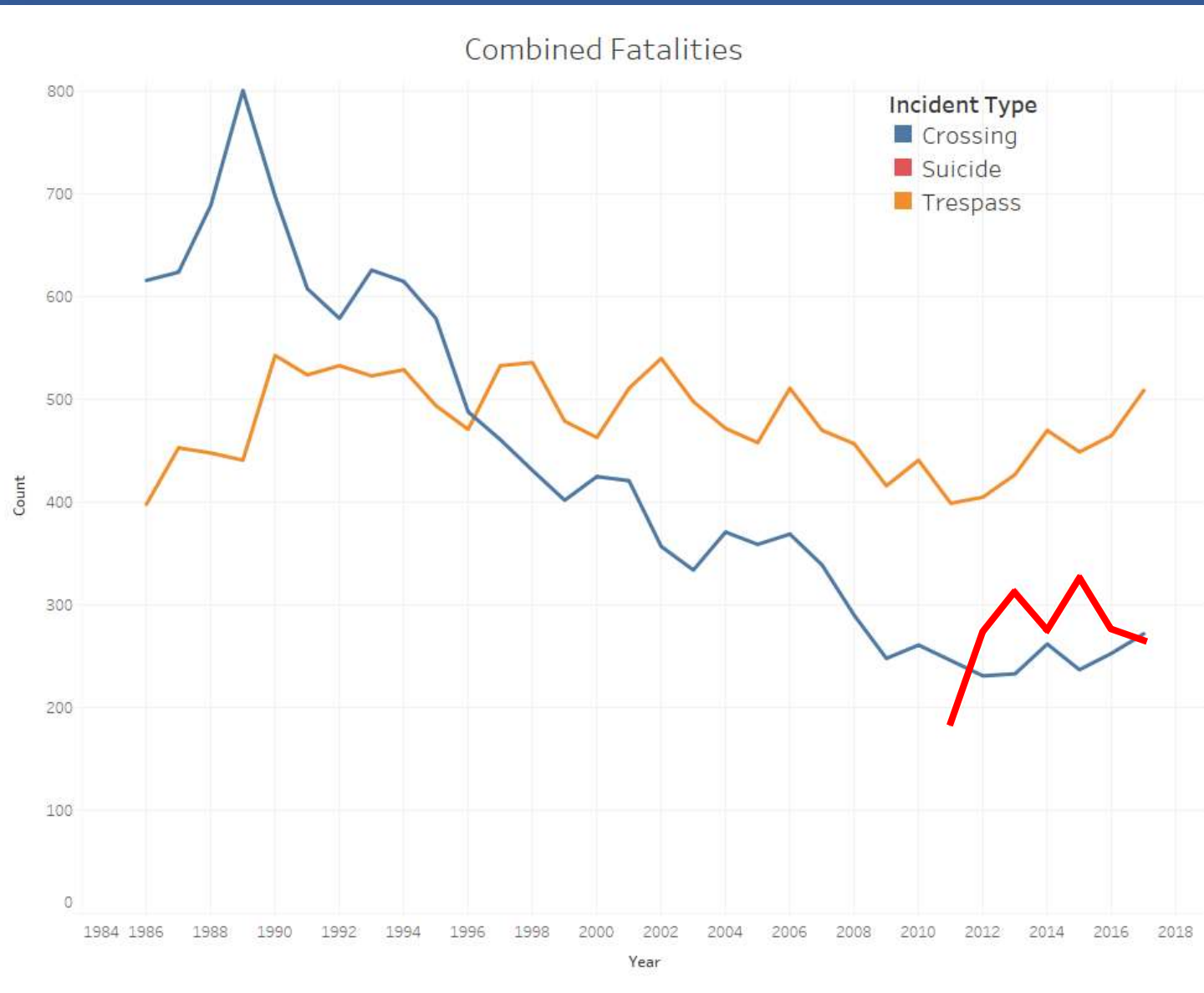
27 September 2018



Rail Fatalities

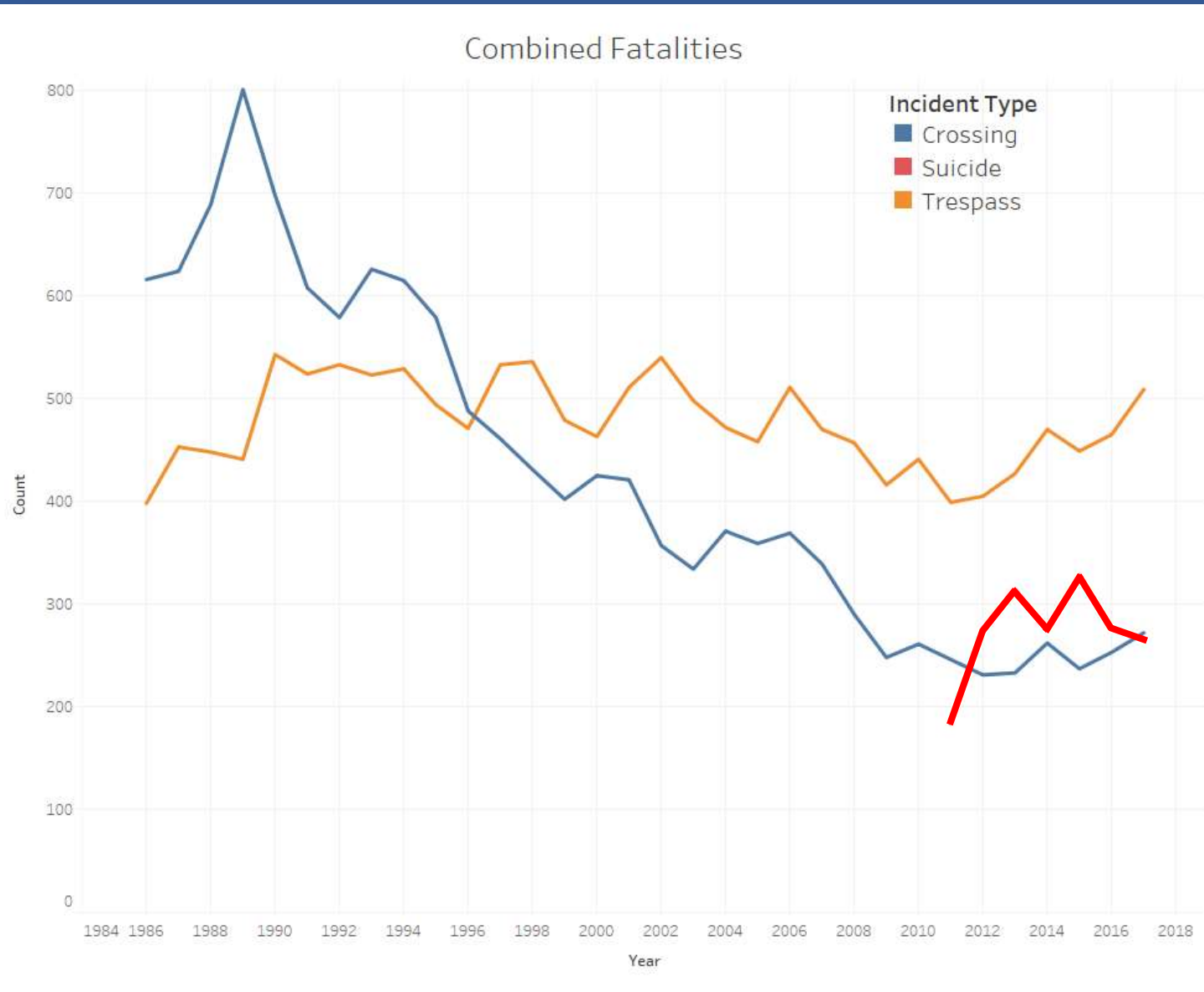


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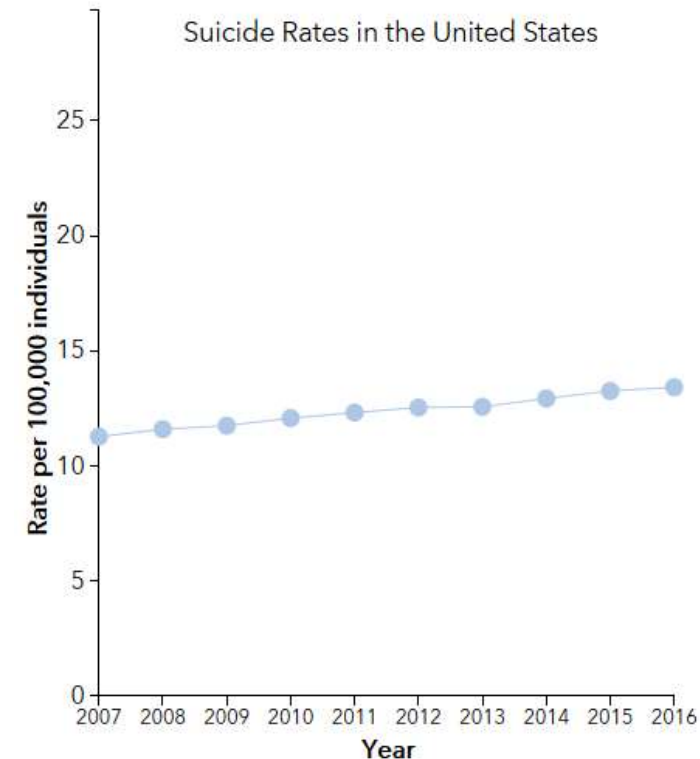
at least 30% of
all rail fatalities
are confirmed
suicides



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- 2016 represented a 30-year high in suicide rate in the US; 13.42 suicide deaths per 100k people (nearly 45,000 suicide deaths)
- Relative to other countries, the *rail* suicide rate in the US is very low
 - Less than 1% of all suicides in the US occur on the rail system
 - Firearm suicides are the most common
- Still, firearm suicide decreased from 57% of all suicides in 2000 down to 50% of all suicides in 2015
- In addition to suicide fatalities, roughly 4% of adults and 8% of young adults reported having considered suicide in 2015. Also in 2015:
 - 2.4 million adults reported having made suicide plans
 - 1.4 million adults survived a suicide attempt



<https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>

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So, let's go and change that...

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What are we doing now – at Volpe?

- FRA/Volpe Rail Suicide Prevention Research Program
 - Countermeasure Pilot Testing
 - Media Reporting of Rail Incidents
 - Intent Determination
 - Prevalence/Demographic Assessments
 - GIS Mapping
 - Global Railway Alliance for Suicide Prevention (GRASP)



www.volpe.dot.gov/rail-suicide-prevention

or

www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P1109

Countermeasure Pilot Testing

- Direct collaboration with US rail carriers to implement and evaluate rail suicide prevention countermeasures
- Currently, little empirical evidence is available about rail suicide prevention
 - Most rail suicide mitigations are done reactively, without time for a proper evaluation
- Countermeasures may involve the direct implementation of engineering or other mitigations, or involve coordination with external groups



Impact of Media on Suicide

- Established body of literature about the impacts of the media on suicide
 - The *Werther Effect* is the term used to describe a rise in suicide rate following a highly publicized suicide
- Effects have been found specifically for rail suicides
 - Robert Enke – Germany
 - Viennese Subway System – Austria
 - Student Clusters – Palo Alto, CA



Caltrain Suicide Leaves Palo Alto High School Grieving

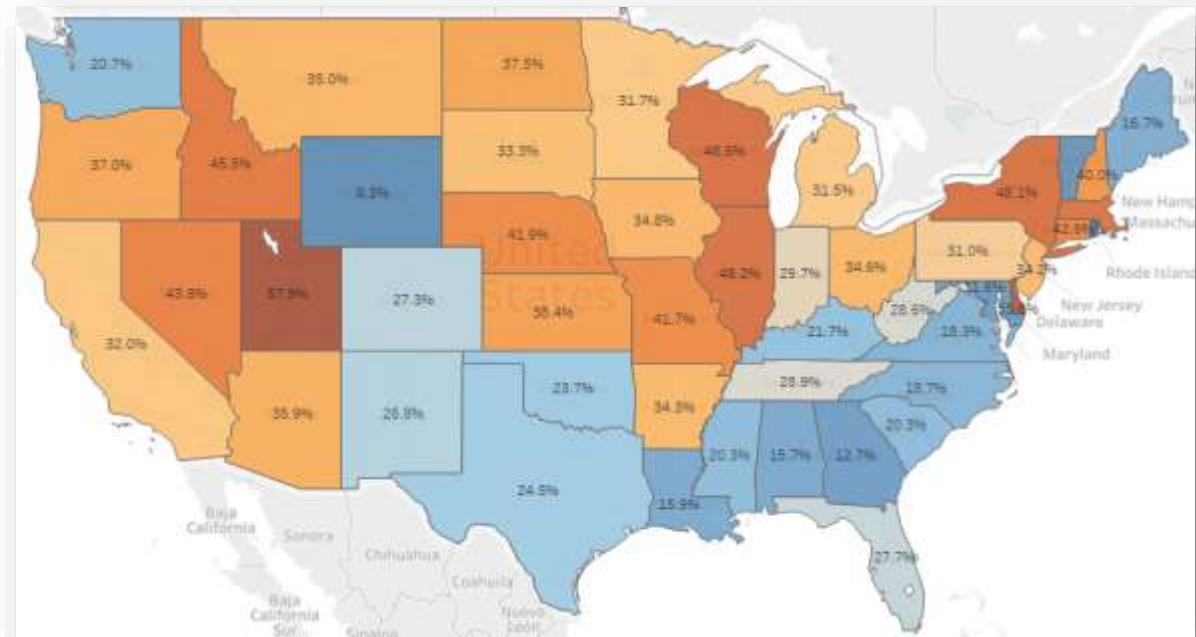
School starts Tuesday

By Lori Pruitt



Data-Driven Efforts

- Determination of Intent
 - How reliable are suicide vs. trespass determinations?
 - TIDE criteria
- Prevalence and Demographic Analyses
 - What can we learn from studying trends in the data?
 - Are there any common characteristics with respect to:
 - individual involved
 - location
 - timing
- GIS Mapping of Incidents
 - Can mapping be used to allocate resources more effectively?



GRASP

- The **G**lobal **R**ailway **A**lliance for **S**uicide **P**revention
 - International work group of experts in rail suicide prevention
- Partners from ten countries
- Learning best practices from experts who have been attempting to address this issue for many years



GRASP

- Information provided by GRASP was quite broad
- Certain countermeasures were discussed during the most recent meeting:
 - Increasing awareness of help services
 - Station improvements
 - Community collaboration
 - Surveillance
 - Media reporting



International Efforts: Increasing Awareness of Services

- Australia: Pause.Call.Be Heard Campaign which includes a “breathing sign” for real-time stress relief
- UK has a traditional signage effort as well as the Small Talk Saves Lives campaign which is intended to encourage passengers to engage with one another



International Efforts: Station Improvements

- In the UK and Netherlands, they are asking station vendors to play a role and look out for people in need
- In Australia they have launched a *Community Stations* initiative which is aimed at improving the atmosphere at stations



International Efforts: Community and Governmental Collaborations

- Australia: In-person meetings with state-level officials (both rail and mental health)
- UK: Close coordination with Parliament and local government officials
- Netherlands: Efforts to coordinate with mental health facilities, including with security staff to help them identify people in need



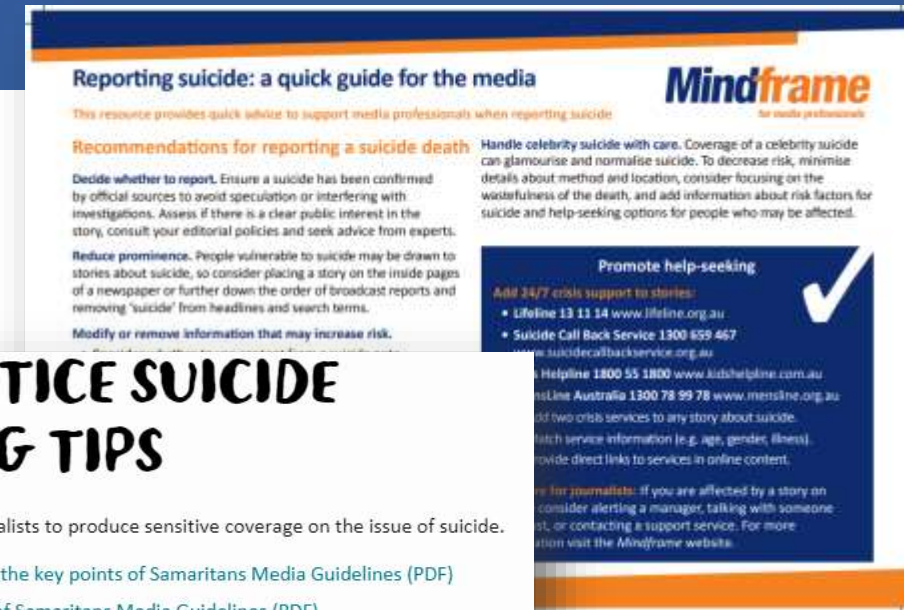
International Efforts: Surveillance

- The Netherlands is currently exploring the potential to use intelligent camera systems to identify warning signs for suicidal risk
- UK is exploring similar technology
- Potential interest in researching this in the US as well



International Efforts: Media Reporting

- Mindframe (Australia) provides resources and workshops to help teach responsible media reporting practices
- Network Rail, with support from Samaritans, are proactive in reaching out to reporters who report irresponsibly
 - Also work with media to provide positive stories of rail safety initiatives or of people overcoming suicidal thoughts



BEST PRACTICE SUICIDE REPORTING TIPS

There are many ways for journalists to produce sensitive coverage on the issue of suicide.

- Download a summary of the key points of Samaritans Media Guidelines (PDF)
- Download a full version of Samaritans Media Guidelines (PDF)



Reporting on suicide and the inquests that follow can be difficult for a news organisation. As journalists we must report the story sensitively while still ensuring that the public are kept informed.

Jonathan Grun
Editor, The Press Association



In the first instance, journalists may find the following reporting tips helpful:

Do's and don'ts

1. Think about the impact of the coverage on your audience

Your story might have an effect on vulnerable individuals or people connected to the person

International Efforts: Why rail?

- Death believed to be certain
- Death believed to be quick and painless
- Aware of prior incidents from media and announcements
- Accessible and intervention is unlikely



UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER

Why do people take their lives on the Railways in Great Britain? A research study

Final Report

Lisa Marzano, Middlesex University
Jo Borrill, Westminster University
Jay-Marie Mackenzie, Westminster University
Bob Fields, Middlesex University
Ian Kruger, Middlesex University

Where can we go from here?

- We are still just learning how to best address this issue
 - Upstream vs. Downstream?
- Ensure that we understand the quality of the data we use to evaluate
 - Identify likely cause of hotspot areas
 - Increased confidence in selecting effective mitigation strategies
- Who are the most appropriate partners and what is everyone's role?



Thank you to our team and sponsors

This work is sponsored by **Starr Kidda** of the FRA Office of Research, Development, & Technology



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration

Thank you to the rest of our Volpe team:

- Dr. Stephanie Chase
- Bianka Mejia
- Danielle Hiltunen
- Emerson Wenzel

Thank you!

Thoughts? Questions? Ideas?

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