Assaults against transit workers continue to be a significant concern for workers, transit agencies, and the travelling public. In the US, at least one transit worker is assaulted during their shift every day and in some localities the average can be more than 5 assaults each day. These assaults happen in both rural and urban communities and contribute to productivity shortfalls, workplace absence, and increased levels of stress for assaulted workers.

According to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), these assaults are caused by a variety of factors, including fare and rules disputes from passengers. However, many assaults are uncategorized and appear to be random acts of violence from transit customers. All frontline transit workers are at risk of assault—not just bus drivers.

Addressing these assaults is complicated by inconsistent and under-reported data collection, as well as under-investment in mitigation infrastructure and training. Under the FTA’s current practices, an assault victim could have their nose broken, be hospitalized for 24 hours, suffer first degree burns without triggering any reporting requirements. Additionally, the FTA does not separate customer assaults from worker assault in the National Transit Database, making it nearly impossible to conduct statistical analysis on a large scale using federal data.

Many local transit agencies have found effective ways to prevent assaults. Barriers, increased police presence, and route changes have all demonstrated significant decreases in the frequency and severity of worker assaults. Localities must dedicate the resources necessary for whichever strategy will most immediately protect workers from assault on the job.

In order to enable local decision makers to take the steps necessary to prevent transit worker assault, Congress must update the FTA’s data collection requirements to accurately gauge the issue at each transit agency and identify the best practices of successful agencies. Agencies that are failing to decrease the number and severity of assaults must be required to spend dedicated resources addressing this issue in partnership with their workers.