Motorman’s Death in Subway Fire Adds to Transit Worker Fears

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The subway fire that killed a motorman early Friday and injured 16 other people came as transit workers grappled with what they called rising dangers on the job brought on by the coronavirus crisis.

Multiple sources told THE CITY that authorities discovered a charred shopping cart with a possible accelerant inside the second car of a northbound No. 2 train that filled with smoke and flames as it pulled into the Central Park North-110th Street station at 3:14 a.m — around the same time as three other fires in and around the subway system.

The train operator — identified by Transport Workers Union Local 100 as Garrett Goble, 36, of Brooklyn — was found unresponsive on the tracks after authorities said he and another transit worker who was onboard as a passenger helped riders evacuate.

A 2 train caught fire at 110th Street early Friday morning.

Motorman Garrett Goble died in the No. 2 train fire early Friday.

Goble’s death came during a week in which an MTA bus driver and a subway conductor succumbed to COVID-19.

“This has already been a devastating week for New York City Transit and this is another horrific moment for our family,” said Sarah Feinberg, interim president of New York City Transit.

“For this to happen, after we lost two of our union brothers to the coronavirus, is hard to comprehend,” said Tony Utano, president of TWU Local 100. “A young man serving the public during a national crisis was killed at just 36 years of age.”

Troubling Track Incidents

Some transit workers told THE CITY they felt increasingly unsafe as the coronavirus has led to an 87% ridership plunge that’s left many subway stations desolate.

The system recorded more than 80 incidents of people on the tracks so far this month — including one around 2 a.m. Sunday, near where Goble would die days later.

While the number of track incursions was roughly on par with previous months, the incidents rattled workers, who said they feel more exposed amid the pandemic, the ridership drop and what they called an increase in people taking late-night refuge in trains.

“I’ve seen people on the trains just flicking lighters, setting papers on fire and there’s nothing done about it,” Jamar Pearson, a train operator, told THE CITY. “It gets overlooked as a problem because no one considers it an issue until something happens.”

“The situation on the trains is out of control,” said Crystal Young, a conductor on the No. 2 line. “They could be homeless, they could be emotionally disturbed, but they know they’re not going to be removed from the trains, so they’ll ride all day.”
Transit workers, as THE CITY reported this week, have also been demanding masks to wear while on duty. MTA officials announced Friday night that they were planning to give out 75,000 masks to the “heroic frontline workforce” operating subways, buses and commuter rails.

The MTA said the masks will be made available to employees who choose to wear them, while pointing out that medical guidance continues to be that the shields “are not recommended as protection against COVID-19.”

“That said, I know wearing a mask at this uncertain time offers additional comfort to many of our employees, and I am grateful we are able to provide that,” said MTA Chairman Patrick Foye.

A distribution plan hadn’t been finalized, though the agency said the supply is expected to increase, allowing for weekly replenishment. The exact type of mask to be supplied wasn’t immediately clear.

**Four Fires Along Line**

Meanwhile, Brian McGee, a deputy chief of detectives with the NYPD, said arson investigators are trying to determine whether three other subway fires that occured around the same time as Goble’s death are tied to each other.

According to an internal MTA incident report obtained by THE CITY, at 3:02 a.m., a conductor on the No. 1 line reported light smoke inside the 86th Street station. Eight minutes later, the report says a conductor on a No. 2 train reported a trash-can fire on a platform at 96th Street.

At 3:18 a.m., the incident report says, Goble notified the Rail Control Center of a “very loud noise” coming from a subway car and that “thick black smoke was also coming from under the car.”

A small fire later followed at street level outside the 116th Street stop on the No. 2 and 3 lines.

“I’m not saying they are connected, but it’s something we have to investigate,” McGee said.

“This incident once again points out the many life-threatening dangers that await transit workers across the city when they go to their jobs every day, 24 hours a day,” Utano said. “This is a sad day for our entire city.”

The MTA is offering a $50,000 reward for information leading to an arrest and conviction in Goble’s death. Crime Stoppers and the New York City Police Foundation added $2,500 to the reward.

“These may be the darkest days that TWU Local 100 has gone through,” Utano said.

Pearson, a friend of Goble’s, was in a train at the 86th Street station on the No. 1 line when the deadly fire started.

“George was a really nice young man,” he said. “He made the station stop in order for people to get off that train. He was a standup guy.”
NYC subway operator and father of 2 dies a hero saving lives

When flames erupted MTA operator Garrett Goble jumped into action, helping guide subway passengers to safety

Melanie Eversley - March 28, 2020

A 36-year-old married father of two lost his life earlier this week saving passengers from a New York City subway fire.

Emergency responders found the body of Garrett Goble on the subway tracks near a station in Harlem after the blaze erupted shortly after 3 a.m. Friday, according to the New York Daily News.

He was pronounced dead at nearby Mount Sinai Hospital later that morning.

Authorities were investigating to determine whether the fire that left nine passengers with injuries, some serious, was a case of arson. A suspect had been taken into custody and was being questioned by police, a source with the NYC Fire Department told the news organization.

The tragedy was a particular blow to New York City, considered the epicenter of the United States portion of the coronavirus pandemic. The day before, bus driver Oliver Cyrus, 61, and train conductor Peter Petrassi, 49, died of COVID-19, the Daily Mail reported.
A subway co-worker described Goble, a husband, and father of sons aged 10 and 7 months, as a gem of a person.

“He was the best, he really was,” Linda Echevarria told the News. “He was a loving, kind man, and he died helping others. It’s heartbreaking.”

A neighbor in Brooklyn described Goble as an all-around nice person who always greeted her with a hug.

“All I can tell you is he was a beautiful young man,” Katherine Gray, 73, told the News about the man who married two years ago. “I’ve known him all his life. He was a good son, an excellent father and a great husband.”

She added that she was not surprised that he would rush to help others in the middle of a crisis.

“If he did, that’s his character,” Gray told the news organization. “He would help anyone he could.”

Authorities found a charred shopping cart inside the train and believe an accelerant in the cart helped the fire spread, the News reported.

When the flames erupted, Goble reportedly jumped into action, helping guide subway passengers to safety before he disappeared into the smoke-filled tunnel, possibly getting lost, the news organization reported a source said.

Goble, a six-year veteran of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority that operates New York’s subway system, may have died of a coronary arrest, the source said.


FDNY

Police Seek Man in Connection With Subway Fire that Killed ‘Hero' Train Operator, Hurt 16

A 36-year-old train operator from Brooklyn was found on the train roadbed and pronounced dead at a nearby hospital, police said

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The NYPD is seeking a man for questioning in connection with a subway fire that killed a 36-year-old train operator and injured 16 other people early Friday.
NYPD, FDNY fire marshals and ATF investigators responded to the 1, 2 and 3-train subway station at 110th Street and Lenox Avenue in Manhattan shortly before 3:30 a.m. Friday after large plumes of smoke were seen billowing from grates on the street.

Emergency responders found three men and one woman suffering from smoke inhalation at the scene, the NYPD said. A fifth man, 36-year-old train operator Garrett Goble, of Brooklyn, was found on the train roadbed, according to police. He was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital.

Police on Saturday released a photo of a person wanted for questioning in connection with the blaze.

The man wanted for questioning in connection with the blaze.

TWU Local 100 President Tony Utano said Goble had worked with the MTA for six years, and had a 5-month-old child.

"This is a terrible tragedy for this young train operator, his family, and for the entire transit workforce," Utano said in a statement. "A young man serving the public during a national crisis was killed at just 36 years of age."

"Our conductor acted heroically to move passengers to the platform out of danger and deserves our deepest thanks and support for his bravery," Utano added.

A total of 16 people aside from Goble, some of them firefighters, were hurt. The NYPD on Saturday said the three men and one woman found suffering from smoke inhalation at the scene were in stable condition.

Police are investigating the fire as an act of arson.

Anyone with information about the man police are searching for is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 1-800-577-TIPS.
Widow of Motorman Killed in Subway Arson Fire Still Waiting for Answers

Subway train operator Garrett Goble is among more than 130 transit workers to die since March. Unlike most, however, he didn’t succumb to COVID-19 — yet his widow considers him a victim of the pandemic.

“When I say my husband died, automatically it’s like, ‘Oh, COVID,’” Delilah Goble told THE CITY.

“And I’m like, ‘No, it’s not how he lost his life, it’s because some idiot tried to set a train on fire.”
One week before what would have been Garrett Goble’s 37th birthday — and nearly three months after he died in a Harlem subway blaze in the wee hours of March 27 — his grieving widow remains baffled over the circumstances surrounding his death.

She’s upset there have been no arrests in a case that investigators believe was arson. And she’s left to wonder what would have happened had transit officials instituted the systemwide overnight closure for subway cleaning before May 6.

“If they would have done that sooner, this situation could have been avoided,” Goble said. “It’s upsetting.”

**Worried About COVID**

The surge in MTA worker deaths in the early weeks of the pandemic had weighed on the 33-year-old mother of two before Garrett Goble would leave their Brooklyn home to start his overnight shifts.

“I would say to him, ‘Be careful, be sure you clean your cab, disinfect it,’” Delilah Goble told THE CITY. “I kept stressing that, never thinking someone would think it’s OK to set a train on fire.”

Her husband was operating a nearly empty No. 2 train when it started smoking and then burst into flames after entering the Central Park North-110th Street station shortly after 3 a.m. — around the same time as three other small fires in and around subway stations.

A shopping cart with a possible accelerant was recovered from one of the subway cars, sources told THE CITY, and Garrett Goble was found unresponsive on the tracks. Officials have said he and two conductors, including one who was off-duty, helped riders off the train and out of the station.

The NYPD has publicly classified his death as a homicide and released two photos of a man wanted for questioning.

“I’m still trying to piece it together,” Delilah Goble said. “I find it hard to accept that even during a pandemic, that there were people out there setting fires. That just blows my mind.”
Mired in ‘Isolation Grieving’

Goble, a bank teller in Manhattan, had taken the Q train to work the morning of the fire.

After her husband didn’t respond to text messages and as initial news reports identified the fire victim as a 36-year-old male who had died at Mount Sinai Hospital, she took an Uber to the Manhattan medical center. Her fears were quickly confirmed.

“I already knew it wasn't good,” she said.

The 11 weeks since have been a blur of what Goble described as “isolation grieving.” Because of the pandemic, her husband’s Brooklyn funeral was limited to 10 mourners at a time, and loved ones were not able to see his coffin lowered into the ground.
The couple has two sons, 8-month-old Hunter and 10-year-old Noah. Delilah Goble said her husband was “super close” with their elder son.

“He reads the news, he watches it,” she said of Noah. “He’s looking for justice, for someone to answer for his dad’s death and I don’t want him to feel like his dad is forgotten.”

In the days after the fatal fire, a No. 4 train was tagged in The Bronx with Goble’s name and the words “Rest in Peace!” and “Protect the Workers!”

THE CITY reported this month that train operators and conductors have recorded the highest number of COVID-19 cases among subway workers. An MTA spokesperson said nearly 4,000 workers at the transit agency have tested positive for the virus.

“We feel each individual loss deeply and each part of the organization feels it uniquely,” Sarah Feinberg, the interim president of New York City Transit, told THE CITY. “Garrett’s presence is felt each day — I know that because I hear from his friends and colleagues.”

‘They Don’t Forget Him’

Delilah Goble said she feels her husband’s presence, too.

“Sometimes I just think he’s at work, but we know he’s not,” she said. “Now that the process has slowed, every day is a different kind of pain.

“Some days are OK and some days I don’t want to do anything.”

Goble said she and her children will have to “readjust” as New Yorkers emerge from months of lockdown.

“So much is going on, and it’s like [his death] is slipping through the cracks,” she said. “I understand, we have big issues in the world — COVID, protests — I understand all of that. But this is important to my family.”

Feinberg said there are plans to memorialize and honor Garrett Goble, along with the other MTA workers who have died, once gatherings are able to be held again.

“There are so many families in pain, but the people who worked with him, they don’t forget him,” Delilah Goble said. “You want to thank everyone and hug everyone for not forgetting him.”