STANDARDS:
THEY’RE GOOD FOR YOU AND THEY DON’T HURT

Charles A. Spitulnik
Kaplan Kirsch & Rockwell LLP - Washington, DC
APTA Rail Conference
June 4, 2013
STANDARDS:  WHY WE CARE

• Why are they good for you
• Why don’t they hurt
• Why/how do they help
WHY ARE THEY GOOD FOR YOU

• Practical issue:
  ➢ Someone else has already done analysis of what works, what doesn’t
  ➢ Provides a baseline for beginning design and construction

• But you knew that already
WHY ARE THEY GOOD FOR YOU – PART 2

• Accidents happen
• And when they do - - -

- Evidence that your agency was in compliance with its own internal standards may be evidence that your agency was not negligent – Spivey v. NYC Transit Authority, slip op. 31945 (U), (NY Sup. Ct. 2009)
Evidence that your agency was in compliance with a federal standard means that state law negligence claims may be preempted. *SCRRA v. Superior Ct. of Los Angeles*, 163 Cal. App. 4th 712, 731-32, 736-37 (Cal. Ct. App. 2008)

- Even where there is no express federal standard regarding the activity in question, state law negligence claims may be preempted where related federal standards have substantially subsumed state regulation of the activity. *Id.* at 734-735.
WHY THEY DON’T THEY HURT

• Establish a base line, not a ceiling

• Not a limit on creativity in design, but a spur to find new ways to satisfy criteria while building the next, better mousetrap
BUT IN FAIRNESS....

• Standards CAN hurt your agency if you don’t follow them:
  
  ➢ Failure to comply with an internal agency standard CAN be evidence of the agency’s “duty of care”.

  ➢ Failure to comply with an industry standard can be evidence of negligence (St. Louis – San Francisco Ry. Co. v. White, 369 So. 2d 1007, 1011 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1979))
IN CONCLUSION

To modify slightly the title:
Standards –
• Are good for you because they create a common understanding of good and safe practices
• They don’t hurt as long as you follow them
• They CAN hurt if you don’t
QUESTIONS?

Charles A. Spitulnik
Kaplan Kirsch & Rockwell LLP
Washington, D.C.
(202) 955-5600
cspitulnik@kaplankirsch.com