

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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COLLISION OF AMTRAK SPECIAL TRAIN *

P0923 31 AT THE HIGHWAY-RAIL GRADE * Accident No.: HWY18MH005

CROSSING AT LANETOWN ROAD IN *

CROZET, VIRGINIA, JANUARY 31, 2018 *

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Interview of: MICHAEL EDWARD CHASE

Amtrak Ivy Yard
Washington, D.C.

Monday,
February 5, 2018

APPEARANCES:

GEORGETTA GREGORY, Railroad Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

JEFFREY APPLE, MP&E Mechanical
Federal Railroad Administration, Region II

JOHN RANSCHAERT, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration, Region II

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:15 a.m.)

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2
3 MS. GREGORY: Okay. My name is Georgetta Gregory, and I'm
4 the NTSB Railroad Operations Group Chairman for this accident.
5 I'm also filling in for the Track Group Chairman and the
6 Mechanical Group Chairman.

7 We are here today on February the 5th, at the Amtrak Ivy Yard
8 in Washington, D.C., to conduct an interview with Michael Edward
9 Chase, who works for Amtrak as a mechanical -- as a locomotive
10 technician. This interview is in conjunction with the NTSB
11 investigation where an Amtrak train struck a refuge truck at the
12 highway rail grade crossing at Longtown [sic] Road in Crozet,
13 Virginia, on January 31, 2018. The NTSB accident reference number
14 is HWY18MH005.

15 The purpose of the investigation is to increase safety, not
16 to assign fault, blame or liability.

17 It is now 11:15 Eastern Standard Time.

18 Before we begin our interview and questions, let's go around
19 the table and introduce ourselves. Please spell your last name,
20 who you are representing, and your title. I would like to remind
21 everybody to speak clearly so we can get an accurate recording.
22 I'll start off and then pass off to my right.

23 Again, my name is Georgetta Gregory. The spelling of my last
24 name is G-r-e-g-o-r-y, and I'm the Operations Group Chairman for
25 this accident.

1 MR. APPLE: I'm Jeffrey Apple, A-p-p-l-e, and I work for the
2 Federal Railroad Administration, Region II, MP&E Mechanical.

3 MR. RANSCHAERT: John Ranschaert, R-a-n-s-c-h-a-e-r-t,
4 Federal Railroad Administration, Region II, Operating Practices
5 Inspector, Richmond, Virginia.

6 MR. CHASE: My name is Michael Chase, C-h-a-s-e, and I'm a
7 locomotive technician with Amtrak's mechanical department, and I
8 work in Ivy City, Washington, D.C.

9 MS. GREGORY: Okay. Thank you. Do I have your permission to
10 record our discussion today?

11 MR. CHASE: Yes, ma'am.

12 MS. GREGORY: And do you understand that the transcription
13 will be a part of the public docket, and as such, we cannot
14 guarantee any confidentiality?

15 MR. CHASE: Yes, ma'am.

16 MS. GREGORY: Do you wish to have a representative with you
17 at this interview?

18 MR. CHASE: No, I'm fine.

19 MS. GREGORY: Okay. And again, before you begin speaking,
20 please clearly announce your name and title before asking your
21 questions. And so we'll get started.

22 Do you mind if I call you Mike?

23 MR. CHASE: No, ma'am.

24 INTERVIEW OF MICHAEL EDWARD CHASE

25 BY MS. GREGORY:

1 Q. Okay, Mike. Can you just walk us through your employment
2 history with Amtrak, when you started and as you've progressed up
3 into the position you're in today?

4 A. I've been with Amtrak since September 1992. I started off as
5 an electrician. I moved into a technician's position in the car
6 department, and after a couple of years, I progressed into the
7 locomotive department and became a locomotive technician, and I've
8 been there probably 15, 20 years.

9 Q. Could you describe to us what a locomotive technician does?

10 A. A locomotive technician troubleshoots and makes repairs on
11 various types of engines, electric engines, diesel engines, yard
12 engines.

13 Q. Okay. And how long -- you told us already how long you've
14 been doing that. Okay. On the day of the accident, could you
15 just tell us how your day started and then walk us through the
16 entire event until the time of the accident? Just tell us what
17 you saw happen.

18 A. The day started normally, just like any other trip.
19 Everything was fine when we left Washington. Got to
20 Charlottesville, they changed engineers. We picked up Shaun Young
21 in Charlottesville, and road foreman Steve Kenney was there. And
22 we left Charlottesville, departed, went down the Buckingham
23 Branch, and we got a little ways down the Buckingham Branch and
24 saw a trash truck ahead of us came into the crossing. It looked
25 as if he was stuck. I assumed he was stuck between the gates.

1 But he sat there, and the closer we got -- he pulled off to
2 the left of the track and then he stopped. We thought he was
3 going to clear the track, but he stopped again with his rear tires
4 just to the left of the fireman's side rail. And we got closer
5 and we realized he wasn't going to clear the truck, and we
6 impacted the trash truck.

7 Q. Okay. Where were you at the time of the collision with the
8 truck?

9 A. Well, I was originally sitting in the center seat of the cab,
10 but the closer we got to the trash truck and realized he wasn't
11 going to move, I ended up on the floor with everybody else.

12 Q. Okay. And were you injured in the collision?

13 A. Just a couple bumps and bruises. I bit my lip. That's about
14 it.

15 Q. Okay. And you're okay today?

16 A. Oh, yeah.

17 Q. Okay. Good. You said you saw the trash truck in the
18 crossing. Did you notice if the gates were down, the crossing
19 gates were down?

20 A. You know, I'm going to be honest with you. I saw the trash
21 truck; that's all I was focusing on was the trash truck. There
22 could have been -- I was focusing on the trash truck hoping he
23 would clear the track.

24 Q. So you didn't notice if the gates were down or not. And in
25 that same line of questioning, did you notice if the lights at the

1 crossing were activated?

2 A. I did see the lights.

3 Q. And they were --

4 A. They were flashing.

5 Q. Okay. Very good. Thank you.

6 And you said you thought he -- you said he stopped and then
7 he pulled -- moved again and you thought he was going to clear.

8 A. Yeah. We were hoping he would clear.

9 Q. And you said that his wheels were to the left of the rail on
10 the fireman's side.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And the fireman's side being --

13 A. Left side.

14 Q. -- left side of the train. Very good. Was there anybody
15 else in the cab with you?

16 A. Yes, the engineer, Steve -- I mean Shaun Young. Excuse me.
17 The road foreman was sitting in the fireman's seat, Steve Kenney;

18

19

20 Q. Okay. Okay. And did you notice what the engineer was doing
21 as you got closer?

22 A. I did not.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I did not know what he was doing. Like I said, I was
25 focusing on the trash truck, hoping he'd get out of the way.

1 Q. I understand that. Thank you for that. So I'm going to
2 change gears just a little bit. Were there any mechanical -- you
3 said you got on the train at Washington, D.C.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Were there any mechanical issues with the train?

6 A. There was a report of a wayside hot journal activation on one
7 of the cars towards the rear of the train in the middle somewhere,
8 which didn't make any sense to me because, to my knowledge, the
9 wayside detectors detect outboard journals. These all have
10 inboard journals and they have onboard detector systems on each
11 car. None of the car detectors were activated. What I heard
12 later on, they inspected the car when we stopped at
13 Charlottesville to change engineers and, to my knowledge, nothing
14 was found.

15 Q. So there were no wayside detector activations, just
16 something --

17 A. There was a wayside detector activation, but I don't
18 understand how that could have picked up something off of a car
19 with inboard journals. To my knowledge, the wayside detectors
20 just sense the outboard journals. I don't know that they sense
21 the inboard.

22 Q. Okay. So there was no issue with the journals on the
23 locomotive itself?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Okay. And then there was a locomotive on the rear of the

1 train as well, correct?

2 A. Yes, Number 4.

3 Q. And we've been told it was I push/pull configuration. Could
4 you explain that to us a little bit?

5 A. Push/pull configuration, basically you have an engine on each
6 -- or a cab car on each end of the train, and it's configured
7 where you can power the train or the locomotive to move the train
8 in either direction.

9 Q. Um-hum. So as the train is proceeding westward towards the
10 destination, what is the trailing unit doing? Is it pushing or is
11 it just -- does it mirror the --

12 A. The trailing unit was -- I mean, I'm assuming. I don't know
13 warehouse at the configuration is. The engineers usually
14 configure it the way that they want. I'm assuming it was online.
15 It did not have to be with this amount of cars and the engine on
16 the other end, it did not have to be. Now I don't know whether
17 the engineer went back and put it online. I don't know.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. You know, I can't tell you.

20 MS. GREGORY: Okay. I'm going to hand it off to Jeff Apple.

21 MR. APPLE: I'm Jeffrey Apple, again, mechanical for FRA.

22 BY MR. APPLE:

23 Q. You said you had -- you got -- hit the deck and got down in
24 the locomotive. Did everybody get down that you remember?

25 A. Yeah. To my knowledge, yeah, we all ended up on the floor.

1 Q. Okay. Was there anyone else injured up there? Bumps or
2 bruises or --

3 A. Steve Young -- I mean not Steve Young. Correction. Shaun
4 Young, he had an issue with his knee.

5 Q. That's the road foreman?

6 A. Shaun Young was the engineer.

7 Q. Engineer. Okay. Do you remember if the engineer initiated
8 the emergency brake application or did anyone else in the cab
9 initiate an emergency brake application?

10 A. I do not know. I was focusing on the trash truck.

11 Q. I understand.

12 MR. APPLE: I'm good for right now. John?

13 MR. RANSCHAERT: All right. John Ranschaert, Operating
14 Practices Inspector.

15 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

16 Q. Do you recall the weather conditions?

17 A. It was clear.

18 Q. It was clear?

19 A. Weather was clear. Sunny.

20 Q. Clear and Sunny. Okay. Good visibility or --

21 A. Good visibility.

22 Q. All right. And so the -- with Georgetta, we discussed
23 briefly the mechanical issue with the wayside detector. Was that
24 something that you got out and inspected at Charlottesville or was
25 there another individual that inspected and gave it a thumbs up?

1 A. Yeah, there was a car technician.

2 Q. A car technician?

3 A. Yes, Gary Lachica.

4 Q. Do you know how to spell his name?

5 A. I want to say L-a-c-h-i-c-a.

6 Q. Okay. And he gave it the mechanical --

7 A. Well, him. I believe the conductor was there also. I do not
8 remember the conductor's name.

9 Q. But it wasn't you?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Okay. Great. All right. Do you recall if there was any
12 conversation approaching when you first saw the trash truck that
13 was -- when you first saw it, what was it doing? Was it on the
14 proper side of the crossing? Was it in the middle? Or was it --

15 A. It entered the crossing --

16 Q. You saw it enter the crossing?

17 A. -- and stopped. It stopped dead in the center of the
18 crossing as if it was caught between two gates. But I did not see
19 the gates -- to be honest with you, at the angle we were at, I
20 mean, you've got the posts and it's kind of hard to actually tell.
21 And the closer we got, I wasn't looking for the gates. I was
22 looking at the trash truck.

23 Q. I got you. You -- if you were to close your eyes and think
24 about the situation, do you recall -- I know you were focused on
25 the trash truck, but do you recall if there was any other vehicles

1 or any pedestrians in the area?

2 A. I could not tell you.

3 Q. Okay. Very good. And then after you saw him and he was
4 stopped, is it correct -- I believe you said earlier, and I'm just
5 verifying this, that you saw him begin to pull forward?

6 A. Yes, he did move forward.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. He moved forward and we were hoping he was going to clear the
9 track, but he stopped again with his -- I can tell you his rear
10 tire was just to the left of the left rail, the fireman's side
11 rail.

12 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay. All right. That's all I have for
13 questions for right now.

14 MS. GREGORY: Okay. I have just a couple more. This is
15 Georgetta Gregory.

16 BY MS. GREGORY:

17 Q. You mentioned a car technician, and I didn't get his full
18 name but it's on the record. Where was he positioned?

19 A. I could not tell you.

20 Q. So you don't know if he was on the train or not?

21 A. Oh, he was on the train.

22 Q. Oh, he was on the train?

23 A. But where on the train, I don't know.

24 Q. Okay. Okay.

25 A. And are you talking about at the time of the incident?

1 Q. Um-hum.

2 A. I believe he was on the 9800, which was the car right behind
3 the locomotive. And that's what he explained to me.

4 Q. Okay. I have reports that the doorway between the
5 locomotive, the crew compartment, and then the doorway back to
6 where the blower motors and the equipment --

7 A. The engine.

8 Q. -- the engine component of the locomotive and I cannot bring
9 to mind what that's called right now.

10 A. The engine room.

11 Q. The engine room. Thank you. Thank you, Mike. I've had
12 reports that there was duct tape on that doorway and, for survival
13 factors, I'm just curious as to what that tape was on that door
14 for.

15 A. That tape, it's not uncommon. In the wintertime, the
16 engineers will try to seal the cab up to keep cold air from
17 blowing into the cab, and in the summertime, they'll seal the cab
18 up with tape to try and keep the warm air from coming into the cab
19 and keep, you know, the temperature at a comfortable level.

20 Q. Okay. Thank you. And is there a lock on that door?

21 A. There are no locks on any internal doors on those
22 locomotives, only exterior.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Now, except for the bathroom door. The bathroom door and the
25 electrical compartment door, there are locks, but those can be

1 unlatched.

2 Q. Okay. But there was no reason to put tape on the latch for
3 this door?

4 A. No, none whatsoever.

5 Q. It would just be for comfort in the cab?

6 A. That's all.

7 Q. Just to keep the cold air out.

8 A. And that practice was not done on this trip. That tape had
9 been there --

10 Q. Okay. Thank you.

11 A. -- previously.

12 Q. After the collision and the train came to a stop, what did
13 you do?

14 A. I got off the engine and I wanted to assess the damage and
15 call my boss and give him some kind of a report before he heard it
16 from CNN.

17 Q. And what did you -- did you document your inspection of the
18 locomotive?

19 A. I just gave him a verbal inspection. I took a picture of the
20 locomotive and I sent him that.

21 Q. Okay. And how would you describe that, that damage?

22 A. The damage, it was pretty severe. The front end, fireman's
23 side, smashed completely, but that's all fiberglass anyway. The
24 pilot was pushed back, MU receptacle, com cable receptacles were
25 smashed, track receiver damage underneath the pilot. I did not

1 see any -- well, the FN truck was derailed. Both wheels were on
2 the ground. I did see that. I didn't see really anything else
3 that I recall except for the FN smashed.

4 Q. You mentioned FN. Could you explain that for the record?

5 A. Front end.

6 Q. Okay. So just the lead two axles, the front -- the lead
7 truck was derailed?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. All four wheels --

10 A. On the ground.

11 MS. GREGORY: Okay. I can't think of anything else right
12 now, so I'll hand it back to Jeff.

13 MR. APPLE: Jeff Apple again.

14 BY MR. APPLE:

15 Q. I know you said you're having a hard time recalling, but do
16 you remember were they blowing the horn?

17 A. Yes. Horn --

18 Q. That you can?

19 A. Yes, I do remember that. Yes.

20 Q. Have any recollection of the bell?

21 A. Yes, I do.

22 Q. And was the bell --

23 A. Yes.

24 MR. APPLE: Okay. That's all I've got off the top of my head
25 right now.

1 MR. RANSCHAERT: John Ranschaert, OP Inspector, FRA.

2 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

3 Q. Do you recall the speed of the train, how fast you guys were
4 going?

5 A. I could not tell you.

6 Q. Okay. All right. Do you have any idea -- you said earlier
7 that the engineer -- I believe you said the engineer put the train
8 in emergency.

9 A. I don't recall --

10 Q. You don't recall who did it?

11 A. I don't recall and, you know, as far as what they did, I
12 don't know.

13 Q. Okay. All right. So when you were sitting in the middle
14 seat, about how many seconds prior to impact did you make a move
15 or was the force of the collision what put you on the floor?

16 A. About 2 seconds prior to I realized the truck wasn't moving,
17 I better get on the floor.

18 Q. Okay. So you made the attempt to move down?

19 A. Right.

20 Q. Okay. All right. And no recollection of the speed.

21 Mr. RANSCHAERT: All right. That's all I have for now.

22 MS. GREGORY: Okay. Georgetta Gregory.

23 BY MS. GREGORY:

24 Q. You said the horn and bells, you do recall those going --

25 A. They were functional.

1 Q. Do you know if it was the crossing sequence or did the
2 engineer lay on the horn for a constant horn before the collision?
3 Do you recall that, Mike?

4 A. I know the horn was working.

5 Q. Okay. Very good. And I think earlier you said that somebody
6 applied the emergency brakes before the collision. Did I hear
7 that correctly or --

8 A. You didn't hear that from me.

9 Q. Okay. Do you recall the position of the switches in the cab
10 of the locomotive after it came to a rest?

11 A. No, I, you know --

12 Q. Okay. That's fine, Mike. Just a little piece of curiosity
13 there on my part.

14 MS. GREGORY: That's it for me. Jeff?

15 MR. APPLE: I think I'm good.

16 MR. RANSCHAERT: I just have one last question.

17 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

18 Q. After you came to a stop, you said you got off the engine to
19 inspect the damage. Do you recall like what order? Did the road
20 foreman get off first? Did you get off first? The police officer
21 get off first?

22 A. I don't know. You know, I wasn't -- we made sure everybody
23 was okay, and my first thought was I got to get off the engine. I
24 got to see what's going on.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And I got off the engine. Now whether anybody beat me to it
2 or came after me --

3 Q. You don't recall?

4 A. No.

5 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay. At this point I can't think of
6 anything that might be --

7 BY MS. GREGORY:

8 Q. Okay. Once you got off -- this is Georgetta Gregory. Excuse
9 me. Once you got off, Mike, did you notice any other injured
10 persons?

11 A. Not at the -- at the time, you know, not until I started
12 talking to, you know, Shaun, the engineer, [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED] Steve Kenney, the road
15 foreman, he was taking care of, you know, I guess his part of what
16 needed to be taken care of so I didn't really see too much of him
17 either.

18 Q. Okay. Did you go over to the refuge truck, the trash truck?

19 A. No.

20 Q. Okay. So you --

21 A. I stayed around the site of the engine.

22 Q. Okay. Great. Have you had any training with Amtrak in
23 regards to emergency response?

24 A. Not that I recall.

25 MS. GREGORY: Okay. That's it for me. One more time, Jeff?

1 BY MR. APPLE:

2 Q. Were you involved at all -- this is Jeff Apple. Were you
3 involved at all in preparing the train to take the passengers back
4 to Charlottesville?

5 A. Are you talking about the train after --

6 Q. Yeah, after the accident, to --

7 A. No.

8 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay. I just thought of another question,
9 if I may. John Ranschaert, FRA.

10 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

11 Q. How many trips have you ever ridden on a train, made trips to
12 another destination, where you've done what you did on this
13 particular trip? Was this your first trip or have you --

14 A. Oh, no. I've had many, many, many.

15 Q. Many, many, many?

16 A. Many, many.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Years and years' worth.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. First time anything like this has happened. But I do want to
21 say -- I take back. I did go down to the trash site because one
22 of the road foreman picked Shaun Young up and myself and we just
23 ended up down there, but I didn't go over and observe anything. I
24 looked at it from a distance and turned around and headed back up
25 towards where the engine was, and I ran into a road -- not road

1 foreman, general foreman Scott Dudzik, and he gave me a ride over
2 to where the train was so I could come back to Washington.

3 MR. RANSCHAERT: I guess that's all I have. Thank you.

4 MS. GREGORY: Georgetta Gregory.

5 BY MS. GREGORY:

6 Q. You mentioned you rode the train back to Washington, D.C. So
7 did you seek medical -- did you get medical attention once you got
8 back to D.C.?

9 A. No, I was seen three times by -- well, I should say by three
10 EMTs, and there was one doctor on the site, and basically I just
11 had bumps and bruises and nothing worth really going to the
12 hospital for. So, you know, I didn't pursue it.

13 Q. Very good. And then you said you took a couple of days off,
14 too?

15 A. I took 1 day.

16 MS. GREGORY: Okay. That's it for me. Jeff?

17 MR. APPLE: Jeff Apple. I have nothing else.

18 MR. RANSCHAERT: John Ranschaert, I have nothing else. I do
19 want to say thank you for your time, and thank you for --

20 MR. CHASE: Oh, no problem.

21 MR. RANSCHAERT: -- talking with us about this.

22 MR. CHASE: I know I'm not a lot of help. I'm not very
23 informative, you know. I'm not used to --

24 MR. RANSCHAERT: We do appreciate it though.

25 MS. GREGORY: Yes.

1 MR. RANSCHAERT: Thank you.

2 MR. CHASE: No problem.

3 MS. GREGORY: This is Georgetta Gregory with the NTSB, and I
4 have no further questions, and I also want to thank you on behalf
5 of the NTSB for agreeing to our interview today, and you have been
6 helpful.

7 MR. CHASE Okay.

8 MS. GREGORY: So -- absolutely helpful, and I wish you a
9 speedy recovery from your bumps and bruises.

10 MR. CHASE: I've already recuperated. I'm fine.

11 MS. GREGORY: Okay. Very good. And with that, this
12 concludes the interview.

13 MR. APPLE: Jeff Apple. One more thing.

14 MS. GREGORY: Sure.

15 MR. APPLE: Do you have any questions for us?

16 MR. CHASE: No, sir.

17 MR. APPLE: You're good?

18 MR. CHASE: I'm good.

19 MS. GREGORY: Anything you'd like to add to the record?

20 MR. CHASE: No, ma'am. Nothing I can think of.

21 MS. GREGORY: It is 11:42 a.m., and this concludes our
22 interview with Mr. Michael Chase. Thank you.

23 (Whereupon, at 11:42 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: COLLISION OF AMTRAK SPECIAL TRAIN
P0923 31 AT THE HIGHWAY-RAIL GRADE
CROSSING AT LANETOWN ROAD IN
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Interview of Michael Edward Chase

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY18MH005

PLACE: Washington, D.C.

DATE: February 5, 2018

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber