

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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IN RE: :

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THE AMTRAK ACCIDENT : NTSB Accident No.

IN WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA: DCA16FR009

ON JULY 6, 2016 :

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INTERVIEW OF: JAMES KNOX

Wednesday,

July 8, 2016

Jacksonville, Florida

BEFORE

DAVID BUCHER, NTSB

RICHARD RUSNAK, FRA

This transcript was produced from audio

provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

APPEARANCES:

On behalf of the Interviewee:

JOSE GUTIERREZ

P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

1
2 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: This is Dave
3 Bucher, Real Action Investigator for the National
4 Transportation Safety Board and this is the interview
5 of Mr. James Knox, locomotive engineer for Amtrak. The
6 interview is relative to the action of July 6, 2016 at
7 West Palm Beach , Florida. NTSB action number
8 DCA16FR009.

9 And let's see here. James, the purpose
10 of this investigation is to increase safety, not assign
11 fault, blame or liability, however, NTSB cannot
12 guarantee confidentiality or immunity from legal or
13 certificate actions.

14 A transcript or a summary of this
15 interview will go into the public docket and the
16 interviewee has the right to have one, a representative
17 or, of his choice to accompany him to the interview.
18 And that's --

19 MR. GUTIERREZ: Jose Gutierrez is Mr.
20 Knox's representative.

21 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay, we'll go
22 around the room. To my right have I have --

23 INSPECTOR RUSNAK: Richie Rusnak, R-U-S-
24 N-A-K, chief inspector, FRA.

1 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: And Mr. Knox, if
2 you would just give your name and spell it for the
3 transcriptionist, please?

4 MR. KNOX: James C. Knox. It's J-A-M-E-
5 S, C., Knox, K-N-O-X.

6 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Great thank you.
7 Mr. Knox, just like we said early, if you could go back
8 to the day of the accident, July 6 and just recount
9 your day for us from the time that you went on duty in
10 Miami, through to the action and anything you can
11 remember, as little or as much as you can remember.
12 It's really just what we're looking for here.

13 MR. KNOX: Went on duty at 7:10 a.m. at
14 the Miami Train Station. Crew gathered all their
15 correct documents. We did a job briefing, a complete
16 job briefing and then waited for the train to be shoved
17 down to the train station. Mr. Griffin and I went to
18 the head in to do our little walk around inspections.
19 We got on the train and we departed on time at 8:10
20 a.m.

21 I operated the train from Miami to West
22 Palm Beach. No exceptions taken, train or equipment.
23 Everything operating correctly, smoothly. At West Palm
24 Beach, I got up out of the seat and Mr. Griffin took
25 over.

1 Before departure from the West Palm
2 Beach station, we had a clear intermediate signal which
3 is the distant signal to Coral. We had a work
4 authority starting at the 967.4 or 5. I can't remember
5 called the section foreman, ~~Dr Campbell~~ Campbell as we were leaving. And
6 got clearance that his work authority and few, a minute
7 or so after we did that we passed the signal at Coral
8 and came around the corner, and I observed automobiles
9 crossing the crossing. It just caught my attention.

10 And then realized something was wrong
11 and looked and seen gate on the east side standing
12 straight in the air. At that moment, I yelled, "Gates
13 aren't working," or something to that affect. And Mr.
14 Griffin acknowledged, said he knew, too. And started
15 taking the action of reducing the throttle and putting
16 the brakes on the train and as we entered the crossing.

17 As we were coming toward the crossing, I
18 was focused on the traffic on the east side coming
19 towards the tracks. I observed a black SUV-type
20 automobile in the inside lane and a white car behind it
21 on the opposite, in the outside lane, running from east
22 to west.

23 The black SUV on the inside lane slowed,
24 as they have seen us. They started slowing down. The
25 white car went in behind and it appeared to have slowed

1 down. And I thought we were clear, we're going to be
2 okay and then the white car came out from behind the
3 black SUV and Mr. Griffin put the train into emergency.

4 Train goes into emergency before we
5 stop. I grabbed the radio and announced, emergency,
6 emergency, emergency. Train 98 un emergency on Track
7 number 2. And then told the conductors to go to
8 Channel 10, which is the dispatching channel, and I
9 keyed up dial tone number 9, which is the emergency
10 key, and announced, emergency, emergency, emergency,
11 Train number 98 in emergency on Track number 2.

12 And the dispatcher immediately came on
13 and he asked me my location. It took a second to get
14 what we needed at mile post but we ended up at the, the
15 action was at the SX968.3, and we were stopped about
16 the 968.1. I'm not sure of the exact mile post
17 location. And went from there.

18 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay, just have a
19 couple questions and I know Richie's got a couple
20 questions, too. You performed all the proper
21 (abrotusky) before you left Miami?

22 MR. KNOX: Yes, we had a Class 2 which
23 is a set and release, which we're required to do. That
24 was performed and then upon departure, I did the
25 running break test as required in initial conduct.

1 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay, you were,
2 you were operating the train leaving Miami, did you,
3 did the train handle normally? There were no
4 exceptions with the actual, the way train handled?

5 MR. KNOX: No exceptions.

6 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: I'm not trying to
7 put words into your mouth, I mean. Okay, the lead
8 locomotive. A couple of questions about the lead
9 locomotive. It operated as it should --

10 MR. KNOX: Yes.

11 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: -- and no
12 exceptions with the operation of the lead locomotive?

13 MR. KNOX: No exceptions.

14 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay. All right,
15 I'm going to pass it off to Mr. Rusnak. I'll have, I
16 probably have a couple more than.

17 MR. KNOX: That's fine.

18 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: Okay, Mr. Knox,
19 could you go over again when you came out of West Palm
20 beach, you came by Coral. You had a clear single to
21 Coral?

22 MR. KNOX: Yes.

23 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: And then when
24 you came around the curve, could you pick up there

1 again, all the way to the , kind of the incident, what
2 you saw, what you observed?

3 MR. KNOX: As we came around the corner,
4 I guess I was settling in and I just looked up and kind
5 of glanced over there. As I glanced up and noticed,
6 something caught my attention. Something was off. And
7 I noticed cars going across the crossing, when you
8 normally don't see automobiles in the crossing at that
9 point in time.

10 And then you can't see the left gate.
11 The west gate you can't see because it sits away from
12 the tracks too far, so I think there's a building or a
13 palm tree or something on the left side. So I didn't
14 see that one, but then when I looked back to the right,
15 that's when I noticed the gate staying straight in the
16 air.

17 So it was just instinct, grabbed my
18 attention. You just then noticed something was out of
19 place.

20 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: Mm-hmm. And,
21 and you said you saw a black SUV --

22 MR. KNOX: Approaching the crossing,
23 yes. And that's what my focus and my attention went at
24 that point in time, was on those automobiles.

1 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: Okay, and where
2 was the, the white automobile at that time?

3 MR. KNOX: It was, when I first noticed
4 them, they were, black, black SU, the white car, behind
5 and then as the Black SU slowed down, the white car
6 came in beside it, which appeared to be slowing down,
7 also. And but once the Black SU stopped, and we were
8 almost on the crossing and then we see the white car
9 come out. And at that point in time, Mr. Griffin put
10 it in emergency.

11 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: Now you were
12 located where in the cabin locomotive?

13 MR. KNOX: Fireman seat.

14 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: Fireman seat.
15 Okay. And your, your vision. Was there anything
16 blocking your vision from --

17 MR. KNOX: No.

18 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Nothing. So you
19 had a clear picture of the crossing, except for the --

20 MR. KNOX: The center bar, but from
21 where I, when I first noticed it, I had no trouble
22 seeing from where I was at. Until they were sitting in
23 the intersection.

24 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay, that's all
25 I have.

1 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay, a couple of
2 follow up questions. And what was your next station
3 stop? The next time you were going to stop the train?

4 MR. KNOX: The next stop would be
5 Sebring.

6 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Sebring. Okay.
7 Thanks. And, all right, according to the schedule, you
8 had five prior station stops before West Palm Beach, or
9 did that include West Palm Beach?

10 MR. KNOX: You, I'm going to count these
11 things.

12 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: I'm just curious.

13 MR. KNOX: So you start on Miami, and
14 you got Hollywood, Fort Lauderdale, and then we're
15 going to go into the Delray, Deerfield, Delray and then
16 West Palm.

17 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay.

18 MR. KNOX: Yes, so yes, however you want
19 to count those.

20 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay. Have you
21 ever experienced failed gates before in your career?

22 MR. KNOX: No, never.

23 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: We actually try
24 to track when the emergency responders arrived. Did

1 you happen to see when the emergency responders arrived
2 for the car, the automobile? No?

3 MR. KNOX: No, I can't remember.

4 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: And just on, in
5 the same vein, the manager showed up. Do you have any
6 idea when they showed up afterwards?

7 MR. KNOX: Not a clue. Couldn't tell
8 you. No.

9 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay. Okay.
10 Okay. Did you have, just for my information, you were
11 operating on clear signals the whole way up the grade,
12 does that sound --

13 MR. KNOX: Yes.

14 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: -- I mean is that
15 a correct statement?

16 MR. KNOX: Go back and recount, because
17 I hadn't thought about that. Yes, we, well, other than
18 crossing from, crossing from two track to one track at
19 Hardy, South Carolina -- Hardy, South Carolina. Hardy,
20 the cross over at Hardy went from two track to one
21 track, which we had limited signals to, because that's
22 what we normally do. And then we got up the road, we
23 had to cross back from one back to two at Parker, which
24 is just before Deerfield.

25 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay.

1 MR. KNOX: Which is not that unusual.

2 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Not unusual.

3 Okay.

4 MR. KNOX: The normal trail.

5 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay, that,
6 that's all I have.

7 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: Okay, just a
8 follow up. Richie Rusnak again, FRA. Once the train
9 stopped, after you placed it in emergency, what did you
10 do then? Did you stay on the locomotive?

11 MR. KNOX: Yes. Now I did get down at
12 some point in time and inspect the locomotive. After
13 everything calmed down, we knew traffic was stopped, we
14 were protected, I did get down to inspect the
15 locomotive.

16 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: Okay. And your
17 conductor?

18 MR. KNOX: He was with them. I couldn't
19 see them. They were too far back to.

20 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: He was in back
21 there.

22 MR. KNOX: Yes. And he did eventually
23 walk up I guess after they figured what was going on.
24 Mr. Appleman did come up to look, inspect. But as soon
25 as he, he went straight back.

1 CHIEF INSPECTOR RUSNAK: Okay. Thank
2 you. That's all I have.

3 SPECIAL AGENT BUCHER: Okay. I don't
4 have anything else. This concludes the interview of
5 Mr. Knox.

6 (End of recording.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: Amtrak Accident, July 6, 2016
West Palm Beach, FL
Accident No. DCA16FR009
Interview of James Knox

DATE: 07-08-16

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 14 inclusive are to the best of my professional ability a true, accurate, and complete record of the above referenced proceedings as contained on the provided audio recording; further that I am neither counsel for, nor related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this proceeding has taken place; and further that I am not financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.



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