

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

METROLINK GRADE CROSSING ACCIDENT \*  
OXNARD, CALIFORNIA \*  
FEBRUARY 24, 2015 \*

Docket No.: HWY-15-MH-006

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: VINCENT COVINGTON

Amtrak Offices  
Los Angeles Union Station  
Los Angeles, California

Friday,  
March 13, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: TED T. TURPIN  
Railroad Accident Investigator

## APPEARANCES:

TED T. TURPIN, Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

KENNETH BRAGG, Human Performance Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

MIKE GALVANI  
Safety Task Force  
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET)

LOUIS COSTA  
UTU Safety Team  
Sheet Metal, Air, Rail Transportation

SCOTT WOOLSTENHULME, Operating Practices  
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

MATTHEW CARDIFF, Railroad Safety  
California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)

ERIC SMITH, Superintendent of Commuter Operations  
Amtrak

RICHARD PENNISI, Operations Compliance Officer  
Metrolink

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>I N D E X</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Vincent Covington:		
By Mr. Turpin		5
By Unidentified Speaker		14
By Mr. Turpin		15
By Mr. Bragg		19
By Mr. Turpin		24
By Mr. Bragg		34
By Unidentified Speaker		35
By Mr. Turpin		38
By Unidentified Speaker		38
By Mr. Turpin		40

I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 MR. TURPIN: All right. My name is Ted Turpin. Today  
3 is March 13, 2015, and we're at the Amtrak Offices at Union  
4 Station, Los Angeles, interviewing the conductor in connection  
5 with an accident that occurred at Oxnard, California, February 24,  
6 2015. The NTSB accident number is HWY-15-MH-006.

7 Do you understand that this interview is being recorded?

8 MR. COVINGTON: Yes, I do.

9 MR. TURPIN: Okay. Thank you.

10 Now we'll go around the room, have everybody state their  
11 name, spell it, and their title, please. Okay.

12 MR. SMITH: Eric Smith, E-r-i-c, S-m-i-t-h. I'm the  
13 Superintendent of Commuter Operations for the Metrolink contract  
14 working for Amtrak.

15 MR. GALVANI: Mike Galvani, M-i-k-e, G-a-l-v-a-n-i, BLET  
16 Safety Task Force.

17 MR. PENNISI: Rich Pennisi, R-i-c-h, P-e-n-n-i-s-i, with  
18 Metrolink. I am a compliance officer.

19 MR. CARDIFF: Matt Cardiff, M-a-t-t, C-a-r-d-i-f-f. I'm  
20 with State of California Public Utilities Commission.

21 MR. WOOLSTENHULME: And I'm Scott Woolstenhulme,  
22 S-c-o-t-t, W-o-o-l-s-t-e-n-h-u-l-m-e. I'm with Operating  
23 Practices, FRA.

24 MR. TURPIN: Very good.

25 INTERVIEW OF VINCENT COVINGTON

1 BY MR. TURPIN:

2 Q. Okay. Mr. Covington, if you'd just tell us what  
3 happened.

4 A. Well, we had just left Oxnard, and I went upstairs. We  
5 had some problems with the ticket vending machine, and Gary  
6 Thompson was upstairs. I knew he had something to do with it, and  
7 I was just asking him because we had a guy that had problems with  
8 his card. And I was like, well, you know, has anyone else had  
9 problems with the card, with the machines? And he said, well, he  
10 said it shows that the machines are working, but he -- it might be  
11 a problem with his particular card.

12 And as I was walking away, I heard the air, you know,  
13 heard the emergency brakes. After I heard the emergency brakes, I  
14 see Glenn run out, then I see Richard run out. And when I saw  
15 them run, I did the same thing. I ran back. I got about halfway  
16 down the car before it hit. And, of course, I was expecting --  
17 you know, I've been in these before, so I'm expecting, you know, a  
18 collision. I didn't know what with. I'm thinking maybe a car.  
19 You know, and I'm expecting the train to just stop.

20 And, of course, it didn't just stop. I could kind of  
21 feel the front end go up. Then it started to fall. So at that  
22 time I was in a seat, and I just grabbed the side of the seat, and  
23 we fell backwards for quite a -- I was on the engineer's side, so  
24 it fell to that side.

25 And after we landed, I knew I was hurt; I didn't know

1 how bad. I know my back was hurting, but I wasn't sure. So I  
2 didn't move at first. I just asked everybody how they were; how  
3 is everyone? Glenn said that he think he broke his back and he's  
4 having a hard time breathing. Richard said he was okay. There  
5 was a lady -- I don't know her name -- she said she thought she  
6 had a broken arm. She was crying. And I didn't see Gary until I  
7 got outside, and he said that his arm was in pretty bad shape  
8 also.

9           What else? Oh, yeah. When I finally felt like I was  
10 going to try to get up, I got up. It was hard getting up. My  
11 back did hurt. I could feel the pain in my back. A passenger --  
12 I don't remember his name -- he kind of led me to the outside. I  
13 went toward the front of the train. Of course, you couldn't get  
14 downstairs. I had to -- well, it wasn't downstairs; it was --  
15 because it was sideways, I had to get down from where the stairs  
16 were. There was a bicycle down there and I remember using that to  
17 kind of pull myself down. And then we headed toward the door.

18           And I just remember the paramedics are already there. I  
19 don't know how soon they got there, but they were there by the  
20 time I got to the door. And I asked them, said is anyone taking  
21 care of Glenn? I said my engineer. I didn't say Glenn, but I  
22 said anyone taking care of the engineer? They said oh, yeah, we  
23 have someone up there to try to get him out.

24           And I was -- I stood at the door for a few minutes to  
25 make sure all the passengers got out. And once all the passengers

1 got out, I got out. I walked to the triage area. I just --  
2 there's a -- I just remember, you know, just seeing all the  
3 people, different stages, you know. Most of the people were good,  
4 you know, they were standing upright. There was a few people  
5 laying down.

6 And, you know, I don't know if it was the -- it was  
7 adrenaline, but I was able to walk and carry my bags to the triage  
8 area. And I stood there for a while talking to the different  
9 passengers. Gary was there. That's where I asked him how he was.  
10 That's when he told me his arm was in bad shape. And I was able  
11 to stand for a while, but then I got dizzy and I just kind of laid  
12 on my side and just stayed there until the -- they took me away.

13 Q. By ambulance?

14 A. Yes. Yeah, they came out -- they basically asked  
15 everyone in there how they were. I guess they put me in, maybe in  
16 the -- I don't know what category.

17 Q. Yellow?

18 A. Yeah. Anyway, yellow category. I wasn't immediate -- I  
19 didn't need immediate attention, but I did need attention.

20 Q. Um-hum.

21 A. So I was -- I'm guessing I was there about 30 minutes,  
22 then they took me away. And I was -- I just laid down. They gave  
23 me a backboard and I laid on that until they took me away.

24 Q. Okay. Very good. Thank you.

25 So now we're going to backtrack just a little bit. So

1 when you left Oxnard, the first thing you did was you went  
2 upstairs?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay. And who is Gary? Who is --

5 A. Gary Thompson. I have his card. I remember he works  
6 for SCRRA. He --

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah. He's director of projects,  
8 motor -- not motor products. I can't think of what it is.

9 MR. COVINGTON: But, yeah, he rides the train from  
10 Oxnard to L.A.

11 MR. TURPIN: Okay.

12 MR. COVINGTON: Or to Glendale, wherever he decides to  
13 get off that particular day.

14 BY MR. TURPIN:

15 Q. Okay. And when you say the ticket machine, you mean the  
16 one at the platform?

17 A. The ticket vending machine at -- I had problems with the  
18 one in East Ventura, and the guy had the same problem with one in  
19 Oxnard.

20 Q. On the platform?

21 A. Yeah, on the platform.

22 Q. Okay. So you were upstairs, just down from, say, mid-  
23 car, you say, when the air blew?

24 A. I was right across from the cab area.

25 Q. Oh, okay.

1           A.    Because Gary was sitting in the seat furthest -- that  
2 would be further south, I guess, upstairs.

3           Q.    Uh-huh.

4           A.    He was sitting in the seat across from the cab area.

5           Q.    Okay.

6           A.    So I was right there.

7           Q.    Okay.

8           A.    Yeah.

9           Q.    And that's when you heard it go in emergency?

10          A.    Yeah. I heard it go into emergency, and I kind of  
11 looked at Gary. I don't even remember what I said. I said  
12 something. I don't remember what I said, but --

13          Q.    Okay.

14          A.    Anyway, so then I saw Glenn come out.

15          Q.    He came out first?

16          A.    Come out running. Then I saw Richard. So when I saw  
17 both -- them both running, that was my clue that I need to do the  
18 same thing.

19          Q.    Okay. And so you were upstairs, you got about halfway  
20 back the car?

21          A.    Yes.

22          Q.    Got into a seat?

23          A.    Yes.

24          Q.    Okay. Could you tell what Glenn had done or the --

25          A.    Glenn did the same thing. He didn't get as far down.

1 Q. Uh-huh.

2 A. He was maybe four seats down from me.

3 Q. But he was able to sit down?

4 A. He was in a seat also.

5 Q. Okay. And the student?

6 A. I don't remember exactly where he was. I thought he was  
7 on the other side.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. On the other side of the car --

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. -- upstairs. But I don't remember exactly where he was.

12 Q. Okay. That's fine.

13 MR. TURPIN: Real quick, one more person has entered,  
14 and if you'll give your name and spell it, and your position?

15 MR. BRAGG: Kenny Bragg, National Transportation Safety  
16 Board, Office of Highway Safety.

17 MR. TURPIN: All right. Thank you.

18 BY MR. TURPIN:

19 Q. So you explained it very well, by the way, after the  
20 collision and the way the car turned and flipped on its side.  
21 When you -- you -- understand you crawled downstairs into where  
22 that wheelchair open area is using a bicycle --

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. -- is that what you're saying?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. And then you used a door to escape? How did --

2 A. I escaped out of the end door.

3 Q. Out the end of the car.

4 A. I walked toward the end, and the end door, of course, it  
5 had separated, so --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- we were able to get out, go to end area.

8 Q. So you had to, you had to actually --

9 A. Well, they helped me get out, but -- the paramedics  
10 helped me get out.

11 Q. They had actually entered the car before you got out?

12 A. They were standing like outside, helping people out.

13 Q. Okay. Had any of them entered the car that you could  
14 tell?

15 A. Yeah. There was a couple inside also, yeah.

16 Q. Okay. Do you have an idea how many people were in that  
17 car total?

18 A. Maybe six or seven. There wasn't that many in that car.

19 Q. In the lead car?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. If -- and I think that's probably stretching it too.  
23 There were --

24 Q. That's besides you and --

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. -- engineer and the conductor?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. Okay. Do you know if they were mostly on the  
4 bottom or the top?

5 A. There were two people that ride -- normally that ride  
6 the top. I know they were there. And there was people I hadn't  
7 seen before, new people, so about three or four at the bottom and  
8 -- who else? At least one more guy that normally rides, and he  
9 doesn't normally ride that early, but I usually see him on the way  
10 back. It's the same guy that was on the interview on TV.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. I can't remember his name, but --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. He normally rides a later train in the morning, but he  
15 usually rides the 117 train back, which is the train I take back.

16 Q. Did you notice who was the last one they helped out of  
17 the car?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. No. I thought I might have been, but I'm not sure.

21 Q. You didn't see --

22 A. I'm thinking maybe -- I never saw them take Glenn out,  
23 so maybe he was the last one.

24 Q. Okay. And you don't know if he was still in the car  
25 when you got out, then?

1           A.    I think he was still in when I got out because I asked  
2 was anybody taking care of him. I'm sure they didn't want to move  
3 him right away.

4           Q.    Okay.

5           A.    Because of his injuries, so --

6           Q.    Okay. Do you recall when you came out of Oxnard was the  
7 door open or closed to the cab?

8           A.    The door to the cab?

9           Q.    Yeah.

10          A.    It was closed.

11          Q.    It was closed. And Glenn and the --

12          A.    It was closed, yes.

13          Q.    -- Glenn and the student were inside?

14          A.    Yes.

15          Q.    Okay. Okay. So when it went in emergency, you started  
16 to walk back down because you know they were behind you. Did you  
17 see them open the door and actually come out?

18          A.    I saw Glenn open the door.

19          Q.    Okay.

20          A.    Because I remember the look on his face. It's probably  
21 something I'm going to remember for the rest of my life. It's the  
22 look of fear, and I could see it in his eyes. So when I saw that,  
23 I know it was time for me to move back.

24          Q.    Right. Okay. All right. I'm going to do some follow-  
25 ups about some other things, but right now I'd like to go around

1 the room, just about the accident itself, and people kind of focus  
2 on just the part you gave so far --

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. -- any follow-up questions. I let everybody kind of  
5 help here, fill in gaps.

6 MR. TURPIN: Eric, do you have anything?

7 MR. SMITH: You've done a great job.

8 MR. TURPIN: Mike, do you have anything?

9 MR. GALVANI: I don't.

10 MR. TURPIN: Okay. I'm sorry. Ken, you missed part of  
11 that. Do you have any --

12 MR. BRAGG: I have no further questions.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

14 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

15 Q. You did a great job. I just have one, like just so it's  
16 clear in my mind. On the top of the cab you went to, sitting in  
17 the left side facing forward or were you right behind the cab car  
18 entrance like --

19 A. Where was I sitting?

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. You mean when -- once I ran down? I wasn't --

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. -- when I was up there, I wasn't sitting at first.

24 Q. Okay. So you were standing?

25 A. I was standing up talking to Gary.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. When they came out, that's when I ran back. And I was  
3 on the right side, the engineer's side.

4 Q. Okay. Thanks.

5 A. Because I remember it seemed like it fell in slow  
6 motion. Because I remember holding onto the side of the seat  
7 before it hit, you know. And when it hit, I'm like -- I said, oh,  
8 this is going to hurt kind of to myself, you know. And, you know,  
9 it hit. You know, I don't know if I went -- because I was  
10 surprised. I saw on TV that the cab had almost completely turned  
11 around in the opposite direction. I didn't know that. I thought  
12 it was just sliding straight.

13 BY MR. TURPIN:

14 Q. Um-hum. Yeah. Yeah, the car turned 180 and then fell  
15 on its side at about the same time. So you were on the bottom  
16 basically. You were against the --

17 A. Yes. I was on the bottom, yes, when it hit.

18 Q. And Glenn was also in front of --

19 A. Glenn was also on the bottom.

20 Q. Do you remember the other passengers? Were they on the  
21 left side or right side?

22 A. This one lady, she was on the same side. She was on the  
23 engineer's side also. And there was a guy, I remember -- I don't  
24 know his name, but he -- I remember he refused treatment because  
25 -- and he was on the other side, opposite side. But he wasn't

1 hurt. At least he said he wasn't hurt.

2 Q. Okay. All right. Let's back up to the start of your  
3 day, when you went on duty, where you started from. Just start.

4 A. Oh, boy. Well, I live in Lawndale, so I get up -- my  
5 alarm goes off at 2:45. I get up, take a quick shower, get in the  
6 car, and drive to work in Ventura. I get there on time. I get  
7 out of the -- out of my truck. And then Glenn was there when I  
8 got there. I remember seeing him there. Rich was there also.

9 Go in. I get the paperwork together for all the crews.  
10 I call up the UP dispatcher to see if the current general order is  
11 still in effect because we don't have a printer there, which I  
12 think some -- which to me, they should just put it on the warrants  
13 or the bulletins anyway. But I do that. You know, we have our  
14 crew briefing. I'm trying to -- I don't remember exactly what we  
15 had that day. We had -- did we have anything? I don't remember.  
16 We did a crew briefing.

17 Q. Okay. That's fine.

18 A. But we did the crew briefing. You know, I checked to  
19 see if we had any surveys.

20 Q. Now, is that Oxnard Station or up at Ventura?

21 A. This is at Ventura.

22 Q. Okay, Ventura.

23 A. Check to see if I got any surveys, did the crew  
24 briefing, head out to the train. I usually -- once I walk out, I  
25 put my handset in the car next to the locomotive because that's

1 where I'll be closest to once -- after we do the shove. You know,  
2 so I did that. Up to the cab car, put my bags in there. I then  
3 put my bag where the conductor normally sits, up to -- in the  
4 north end of the car, in the mezzanine area, I usually sit there.

5 Q. The back of the cab car?

6 A. Yeah, and in case -- because what happens, I was sitting  
7 there at first, but there had been -- you know, we're getting a  
8 lot of disabled passengers and I was having to give up my seat.  
9 So I said, well, instead of giving it up every day, I'll just give  
10 it up beforehand.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And sit somewhere else. And I sit there and it's -- put  
13 all my paperwork there. I go back, I release the handbrake on the  
14 cab car, get out, and, you know, go back to the locomotive where  
15 we shove out. Then we shove out of the Y, then back to the  
16 station platform.

17 That particular day, we got there kind of early because  
18 that's why I know something was wrong with the machine. This guy  
19 said he had problems with the machine, so, you know, I went up,  
20 took a quick look at the machine, walked back, did my announcement  
21 before we left, and we took off. Shove out again -- I get back on  
22 the locomotive, we shove out and we get the signal at CPY. I get  
23 out of the locomotive, walk up to the car number 1. As we're  
24 going, I do a quick announcement saying the next stop is Oxnard  
25 and walk back through up to the cab car.

1 Q. Okay. And obviously, from your other story, you made it  
2 all the way to the cab car and you were upstairs and you were  
3 looking -- you were up there --

4 A. Yes. I was upstairs -- I wasn't upstairs, of course,  
5 when we got to Oxnard. But yeah, we get to Oxnard and, you know,  
6 get out. That's when the other people told me they had problems  
7 with the machine. They had problems with the machine taking cash.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And like I said, the other guy had a problem with the  
10 machine taking a credit card.

11 Q. Right.

12 A. So he had a problem with both machines at East Ventura  
13 and Oxnard with the credit card, and everyone else at Oxnard --  
14 that's why I went upstairs to ask Gary about the machines; did he  
15 know if they were working properly?

16 Q. Okay. Great. Do you recall the running test?

17 A. Yes. Yeah, we do that -- we did it when we shoved out.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. When we shoved out of the yard -- it should have been on  
20 the tape. But we shoved out of the yard at East Ventura, the  
21 first shove move, so --

22 Q. Do you give him a callout or does he just do it -- he  
23 feels it?

24 A. I call him when he does it.

25 Q. Okay. All right. It's 2:45, you get up. What time do

1 you usually leave your house?

2 A. I usually leave about 3:15, 3:20, somewhere in there.

3 Q. All right. And your on-duty time at Ventura is --

4 A. 4:25.

5 Q. 4:25. And your departure time is?

6 A. 5:25.

7 Q. Do you know where Glenn lives, by the way, just --

8 A. Sperry or somewhere like that. I'm not exact --

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Menifee.

10 MR. COVINGTON: Menifee, yeah.

11 BY MR. TURPIN:

12 Q. And he drives it every day, too?

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, reverse lodging.

14 MR. COVINGTON: No. He does the reverse lodging.

15 MR. TURPIN: Okay. All right. I think Ken's  
16 probably -- or we can just do that right now. Do you want to go  
17 back through the last 72 hours or 4 days?

18 MR. BRAGG: Yeah. One of the things I'm interested  
19 in --

20 MR. TURPIN: Ken Bragg, NTSB. Go ahead.

21 BY MR. BRAGG:

22 Q. One of the things I'm interested in is your activity for  
23 72 hours. And that basically just allows us to answer  
24 questions --

25 A. The first 72 hours of --

1 Q. The 72 hours prior to the accident. So let's go back.  
2 So you got up that morning at 2:45. That's when your alarm goes  
3 off, right?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. What time did you go to bed the night before?

6 A. I don't remember. Probably around 9, I'm guessing.

7 MR. TURPIN: What's your normal time that you go down?

8 MR. COVINGTON: Around 9.

9 MR. TURPIN: Okay.

10 BY MR. BRAGG:

11 Q. Are you married? Do you have a family?

12 A. I'm married. Yeah. The kids are gone.

13 Q. Kids are gone?

14 A. Yeah. That's good.

15 Q. The reason I'm asking, so what's your normal evening  
16 routine? Is your wife normally home with you?

17 A. She's normally there. I usually get home about 8,  
18 depending on the traffic. And, like I said, I usually do a couple  
19 of things and I go to bed.

20 Q. So do you have a part-time job or anything like that?

21 A. No.

22 Q. No? (Indiscernible).

23 A. It's a full and a part-time job with the way the hours  
24 are.

25 MR. TURPIN: So you worked Monday?

1 MR. COVINGTON: I worked Monday, yes.

2 BY MR. BRAGG:

3 Q. So it's pretty much the same routine?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And how about Sunday?

6 A. No, I don't work the weekend.

7 Q. What did you do on Sunday?

8 A. Go to church.

9 Q. With respect to what time did you get up in the morning?

10 A. I don't remember, but probably -- I still wake up early.

11 I probably got up before 7. So I probably got up around 6:30

12 Sunday morning, just guessing.

13 Q. And you just hang out with the family all day?

14 A. Yeah. Well, I go to church Sunday morning, get back --  
15 what did we do Sunday? I don't remember what --

16 Q. What time on Sunday when the service started?

17 A. I try to be there for 10:45, which is -- well, 9:45 with  
18 Sunday school. Church is out -- usually out by 1. You have  
19 Sunday school, then you have church, and we're usually out by 1.  
20 I had my grandson over, so -- yeah, spent time with him.

21 Q. How old is your grandson?

22 A. He's 6.

23 Q. That's a good age.

24 A. Yeah. Yeah, they still like you then.

25 Q. Yeah. And how about the afternoon, what did you do?

1           A.    The afternoon, I probably just pretty much just take --  
2 took it easy. I don't remember going anywhere. I didn't go  
3 anywhere. Sit at home and watch TV.

4           Q.    Get to bed?

5           A.    Yeah. On Sundays, I try to get to bed early, so  
6 probably around -- early for me anyway, around 8:30.

7           Q.    How about your day before that, Saturday?

8           A.    Saturday -- you mean Friday night?

9           MR. TURPIN: Well, you can start out there.

10          BY MR. BRAGG:

11          Q.    You can start there, yeah.

12          A.    Well, Friday night I try to stay up late. It doesn't  
13 usually work. I might go to bed about 10. But yeah, Saturday I  
14 try to do the same thing, but I still go to bed probably around  
15 10:30, 11 on a Saturday.

16          Q.    Did you work on Saturday?

17          A.    No. No. I don't, no.

18          Q.    What did you do? Cut the grass, anything?

19          A.    Did I cut the grass? I don't remember. I think I cut  
20 grass the previous weekend, so I didn't -- I mean, I don't think I  
21 did much that weekend.

22          Q.    Now I'm going to ask you a set of questions, and you  
23 don't have to answer -- they're not really -- they're not intended  
24 to imply anything. It's just something we ask you. Do you  
25 consume alcohol or drink at all?

1 A. No.

2 Q. No? How about any illegal drugs?

3 A. No.

4 Q. How about a cell phone, do you own a cell phone?

5 A. Yes. I have a cell phone.

6 Q. What type of cell phone do you have?

7 A. It's an iPhone.

8 Q. It's an iPhone. And how do you use your cell phone?

9 A. I use it to text and to call basically.

10 Q. Okay. I say that -- my mother is 78. She has an  
11 iPhone, and she couldn't send a text if the governor was standing  
12 beside her asking her to. And the reason I'm asking about your  
13 cell phone is that's normally, especially with teenagers, that's a  
14 good gauge of when they're awake and when they're not, because  
15 when they're awake, they're on the phone; when they're not,  
16 they're not on the phone. So how would you describe your cell  
17 phone use? How many texts do you send a day?

18 A. Not many. Maybe three.

19 Q. How about phone calls? Do you have a home phone?

20 A. Yes, I do. I hardly ever use the home phone.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. And my cell phone, mostly I receive calls. I don't  
23 call -- the only person I hardly call -- I call often is my wife,  
24 and that's when she's not there, of course. I wouldn't call her  
25 while she's -- well, I've done it while she was there a couple of

1 times because I didn't want to holler downstairs. But for the  
2 most part, she's about all I call.

3 Q. And so with respect to your week, was this a typical  
4 week for you or anything unusual occur? Did you break down on  
5 your way to work? Something cause you to be out of the house for  
6 extended amount of time?

7 A. No.

8 MR. BRAGG: All right. That's good.

9 MR. TURPIN: Okay.

10 BY MR. TURPIN:

11 Q. Okay. So we went through -- oh. Just, did you feel  
12 rested when you went to work?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Maybe not Monday night but Tuesday.

16 Q. Once you get back in the cycle you think you felt --

17 A. I felt okay Tuesday. Monday was Monday, but --

18 Q. Yeah. Okay. And you do this 5 days a week?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. All right. Real quick on some of the Ken -- I  
21 know -- I think he asked this. Do you use anything, over-the-  
22 counter drugs, Claritin or anything like that?

23 A. Only thing I use is ibuprofen maybe for a headache or  
24 something like that.

25 Q. Okay. And were you using anything that day?

1 A. No.

2 Q. Okay. Do you wear glasses?

3 A. I have glasses, but I usually don't wear them.

4 Q. Okay. So just reading maybe?

5 A. Yeah, reading glasses.

6 Q. Okay. Let me check real quick some of this stuff.

7 Inside the car, once it laid on its side and you got  
8 ready to leave, was there any smoke or anything inside the car  
9 at --

10 A. No smoke, but I do remember smelling gasoline.

11 Q. Smelled gas?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. That's why I felt like it was urgent to try to get, you  
15 know, all the people out.

16 Q. Right.

17 A. I didn't know -- because, of course, I know it was a cab  
18 car so it wasn't coming from the cab, so had to be from something  
19 else.

20 Q. And you already said one of the passengers helped you?

21 A. Yeah. One of the passengers kind of helped me because I  
22 kind of followed him out.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And --

25 Q. Did you see the others leave as well? Could you tell --

1           A.    I saw a few of them leave.  I didn't see all of them,  
2  but --

3           Q.    They were ahead of you?

4           A.    Yeah.

5           Q.    Okay.  When you said you laid down, were you near a  
6  triage area when you laid down on the ground or near one of the  
7  tarps?

8           A.    Yeah.  I was on a tarp.

9           Q.    You were on the tarp?

10          A.    Yes.

11          Q.    Okay.  All right.  Do you know, did they open any of the  
12  side doors on the top of the car and ladders or anything like  
13  that?

14          A.    I actually opened one.

15          Q.    Yeah?

16          A.    And then I say, well, it's probably better to try to get  
17  out through the end.  I didn't realize the end was open, but --  
18  yeah, I opened the door on the -- it would be -- well, it end up  
19  being the north end, but it would have been --

20          Q.    Yeah.

21          A.    -- the south end door.

22          Q.    How did you get to that door?  It's way up in the air.

23          A.    I basically crawled, crawled up there.  Crawled up --  
24  because that's where I got down.  I crawled to that area and I  
25  used my key to cut it out.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. So I got one side open.

3 Q. I'm going to have to backtrack just for a second. Let  
4 me think about this. So you were upstairs. So you crawled  
5 forward towards the nose of the cab?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Down through the mezzanine and dropped into that  
8 handicap area, right, that's all that open seating?

9 A. No. Well, I didn't crawl through. It was like -- well,  
10 it was on the side, so --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. -- the area where the stairs would have been was like a  
13 platform area.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. So I was on that part.

16 Q. And the bicycle --

17 A. The bicycle was downstairs.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So I used that to step down.

20 Q. So now you're walking on the door, side door and the  
21 windows -- or those are solid. That's a solid wall?

22 A. Yeah, that's a wall there.

23 Q. So then you came back, and then you climbed back up  
24 again into the mezzanine? Or that was where they helped you?

25 A. Well, I was able to walk through the mezzanine area on

1 the other end, on the --

2 Q. This end?

3 A. The B end. Towards the --

4 Q. Okay. And where did you open the door? Here?

5 A. On the other end. This door was open -- should have  
6 been open.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So it was the rear.

8 MR. COVINGTON: Toward the nose of the --

9 BY MR. TURPIN:

10 Q. The door closest to the nose?

11 A. Yeah. Toward the nose.

12 Q. Okay, okay. And then all you saw was sky?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. All right.

15 A. And I wasn't going to try to climb up through there. I  
16 probably would have -- probably couldn't have done it.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. So --

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And you opened that with a key?

22 MR. COVINGTON: Well, I opened the key, and I cut it out  
23 and tried to -- and just slid it open.

24 BY MR. TURPIN:

25 Q. There wasn't any power on the car at all, right? No

1 lights?

2 A. The lights were on.

3 Q. The lights were on?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. So the battery power was on.

7 Q. Okay. The whole time you were in there and leaving, the  
8 lights were on?

9 A. Yeah. I don't remember the lights ever going out, no.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. They were on on that particular car, of course.

12 Q. Good. Very good. Did they give you any medical  
13 treatment on scene or just --

14 A. No.

15 Q. Just examined, right?

16 A. You mean --

17 Q. You said they examined you.

18 A. No. They -- what they did, they asked me what was  
19 wrong.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And I told them I hurt my back, my back was hurting. So  
22 they got me a backboard and they put me on the backboard.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And I basically waited until they were ready to take me  
25 out.

1 Q. Do you know where they took you?

2 A. Yeah. I'm trying to remember the name of the hospital  
3 now. Los Robles? Yeah. Los Robles --

4 Q. Okay. Yeah. I think that was on the list of one of the  
5 ones they used. Yeah, Los Robles.

6 All right. Now let's do some other just railroad stuff.  
7 When did you hire on?

8 A. The railroad or --

9 Q. All the way back. When did you start railroading?

10 A. 1989.

11 Q. 1989. With who?

12 A. Amtrak.

13 Q. Amtrak. First job?

14 A. I was a train attendant.

15 Q. Intercity?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Where did you go?

18 A. Everywhere.

19 Q. New Orleans?

20 A. Yeah. I was extra board, so I went to New Orleans --

21 Q. Chicago?

22 A. -- Seattle, Chicago. I didn't go to Florida. They  
23 wasn't going there then, but yeah.

24 Q. How long did you do that?

25 A. For 3 years.

1 Q. All right. So in '92 or thereabouts, what did you do  
2 then?

3 A. Assistant conductor.

4 Q. Uh-huh. Amtrak?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Intercity?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. Where did you work then?

9 A. Here. Basically, the same thing, Keeneland.

10 Q. Oh, not quite as far though, right?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. San Diego. Mostly San Diego in the yard, though, it  
14 seems like.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Mostly San Diego and the yard here.

17 Q. No seniority, switching cars?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Okay, San Diego. Then what happened next in your  
20 career?

21 A. I started -- after I was promoted in '94, I came over to  
22 Metrolink.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And I was -- you know, with seniority I was in and out  
25 for like 2 years. So I was bumped in, bumped out, bumped --

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. So about 2 years.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. In '96, I -- since '96, I stayed continuously.

5 Q. At Metrolink?

6 A. At Metrolink.

7 Q. Okay. So you've been at Metrolink since 1996 as a  
8 conductor?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay. So you ended up working for Veolia and then  
11 coming back to Amtrak?

12 A. Yes, I did.

13 Q. Okay. But the job has basically been the same since?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Okay. Have you worked most of the Metrolink territories  
16 or were you able to do the coast most of the time?

17 A. I've done all of them.

18 Q. All of them. Okay. How long have you been working on  
19 the Ventura line?

20 A. How long? About 2 years; 2 years now.

21 Q. Two years?

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. How long on this particular train?

24 A. I started last year in -- was it June? Last year on  
25 this particular train. I don't remember the exact month, but

1 probably June.

2 Q. Okay. Almost 9 months straight, then?

3 A. Probably June when --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. So I was -- no, not June. February, because they  
6 changed the job so -- and I decided to go from -- the job that I  
7 was on started going to Lancaster, and I didn't want to go to  
8 Lancaster, so I bid back to Ventura.

9 Q. Okay. So February. So you've been on almost a year  
10 or --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. -- a year, you've been working at Ventura? Cool. Very  
13 good. Any other incidences in that year? Anything similar to  
14 this?

15 A. Nothing similar to this, but yeah, I've had incidents.  
16 I had two fatalities within that time.

17 Q. Trespassers or cars?

18 A. Trespassers.

19 Q. Uh-huh. On this line?

20 A. Same line, yes.

21 Q. Okay. Any car, highway crossing accidents?

22 A. No, not on this one.

23 Q. How about in this whole time you've been working?

24 A. Oh, yes. I don't remember how many.

25 Q. Okay.

1           A.    I've had -- I think this was probably about the 13th,  
2 14th incident since I --

3           Q.    Highway crossing?

4           A.    Yeah.

5           Q.    Okay.  Any derailments?

6           A.    No.  This is the only derailment I've been in.

7           MR. TURPIN:  Okay.  All right.  I always remember  
8 something later.  But let's go around the table now.

9           Eric, do you have any questions?

10          MR. SMITH:  No.  I don't think so.  Thank you.

11          MR. TURPIN:  Mike?

12          MR. GALVANI:  No questions.

13          BY MR. BRAGG:

14          Q.    Describe your sleep habits.  I mean, how do you sleep at  
15 night?  Do you normally get up?

16          A.    How do I sleep?  I usually get up one time.  I sleep  
17 mostly all through the night, but I usually get up one time to use  
18 the restroom.

19          Q.    Okay.

20          A.    And I go right back to sleep.

21          Q.    Your wife ever told you that you snore?

22          A.    Yes.

23          Q.    Have you ever been tested for sleep apnea?

24          A.    No.

25          Q.    No.  When you're sitting around the house, do you fall

1 asleep easily?

2 A. It depends on what I'm doing. If I'm doing something  
3 boring, yeah, I can fall asleep easy. Like if I'm, say, like --  
4 what -- I don't know -- filling out paperwork or something,  
5 sitting at home, reading a book, I can fall asleep. But just for  
6 the most part, I don't.

7 Q. When's the last time you had a physical, medical  
8 physical?

9 A. A couple years ago.

10 Q. All right. When was the last time you checked your  
11 height and weight?

12 A. Oh, when I was at the hospital, last week.

13 Q. Do you remember what it was?

14 A. My weight is -- well, my height -- it's the same. It's  
15 183, and I think my height is 5'8".

16 Q. 5'8". And what size shirt do you wear?

17 A. I wear large.

18 Q. Large. How about dress shirt, neckties?

19 A. Ties, 16-3/4. A little extra room to move my neck  
20 around. I hate ties.

21 Q. Okay. That's all I have. Thank you.

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I have no questions.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No. You covered mine. Thank  
24 you.

25 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

1 Q. Just a couple, just to follow up with some of the stuff,  
2 and more just to kind of -- just the technical type stuff. Do you  
3 remember -- happen to remember the date of the last rules exam you  
4 took?

5 A. The date?

6 Q. Yeah. Just the general month --

7 A. No, I don't.

8 Q. -- month or year?

9 A. It's around -- I usually take it around March -- around  
10 March, April. I don't remember the exact date, no.

11 Q. I don't need exact date, just month. That's good.

12 Yeah, good, month. So March of -- do you know the --

13 A. Last year.

14 Q. Last year. Okay. And then do you feel like -- you kind  
15 of described been here 2 years on this territory, and do you feel  
16 comfortable with the territory?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay. Weather conditions, like was it -- I mean, it was  
19 clear, right? I mean, you didn't have any issues with fog or  
20 anything like that?

21 A. No. Not that day, no.

22 Q. Not that day. Okay. And there were no unusual track  
23 conditions or unusual delays prior to the accident, anything that  
24 you can remember? I know you talked about the ticket, you know,  
25 ticket issue. But other than that --

1 A. No.

2 Q. Okay. Electronic devices, you know, during the trip,  
3 was anybody that you were aware of around you using any type of  
4 electronic device, any passengers or yourself or otherwise?

5 A. I didn't notice.

6 Q. Didn't notice it. Okay. And then just kind of describe  
7 your feeling, like overall situation awareness right before this  
8 happened. Communication, everything was good that was going on?  
9 You felt comfortable in your environment, everything that was  
10 going on?

11 A. I did then, yes.

12 Q. Okay. Sorry. There's just a couple on the list here.  
13 You talked about the lighting. The lighting stayed on the entire  
14 time but there was -- and there was no smoke. So, I mean,  
15 everything -- visually you could kind of see. You got good visual  
16 reference and stuff like that while you were there?

17 A. Um-hum.

18 Q. As far as your egress was concerned, getting out of  
19 there?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. And then you kind of -- you talked about -- we  
22 talked about the door you went out and you went up. Now, how did  
23 you -- did they -- how did they get you out of there? Did they  
24 bring the backboard to you? Is that --

25 A. No. I walked out. So once I got -- they got me out of

1 the end door --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. -- I walked out to the triage area.

4 Q. So you didn't go out the door that was vertical, went  
5 out the end door?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Well, the end opening or -- yeah.

9 BY MR. TURPIN:

10 Q. That was a little bit of a drop to the ground. Did  
11 they --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. -- help you get to the ground there? Was somebody  
14 there --

15 A. Yes. There was someone there.

16 Q. Okay. Emergency responders?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay.

19 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

20 Q. Okay. And so you felt like overall the evacuation  
21 effort went pretty well, I mean, from your point of view?

22 A. Yes. I felt that part went well.

23 Q. Okay. And then do you remember the last time you had  
24 emergency preparedness training. Do you remember that?

25 A. Probably the last time I had rules. But I don't

1 remember exactly.

2 Q. Okay. So it's kind of lumped together, they had it  
3 together?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. And then you felt like that training helped you during  
6 this event? I mean, was that something you, like, referred back  
7 to in like muscle memory and --

8 A. I think I reacted.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. I didn't act. I reacted to the situation. I don't know  
11 if it was in -- I felt like everyone needed to get out.

12 Q. Sure. Hey, that's (indiscernible).

13 A. I don't know if it was because -- I didn't, okay, well,  
14 how -- let's see, what we did in emergency preparedness. I didn't  
15 think about that.

16 Q. Yeah. And then as far as that, too, the car you were --  
17 you felt good with the familiarization of the car? You had good  
18 training on like --

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. -- all the, you know, because you've been in those for  
21 quite a while then, right?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay. Anything in particular in that training that  
24 really helped you? Like stood out, hey, I was glad I had this  
25 piece of training?

1 A. As far as the training?

2 Q. Yeah. As far as like, you know, just being prepared for  
3 something like this. I mean, is anything that stood out in your  
4 mind --

5 A. I don't think you can really be prepared for anything  
6 like this. However, overall, overall training, you know, that's  
7 -- you know, we've been doing every year for forever, I think just  
8 all of that with experience probably helped. I don't think -- I  
9 can't think of anything in particular, no.

10 Q. Yeah, okay, (indiscernible). That is everything. I  
11 appreciate it. Thank you.

12 MR. TURPIN: Thanks.

13 BY MR. TURPIN:

14 Q. All right. I might go back just a little bit to the  
15 training. You had 242 conductor certification?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. When are you due up for that?

18 A. Probably this year.

19 Q. So 2½, 3 years ago?

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: They're all grandfathered and  
21 this is the first year that we're cycling them --

22 BY MR. TURPIN:

23 Q. Oh, this is your first?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Okay. When you talk about the training, you get the

1 rules training and you get the -- used to be called Prepare; now  
2 it's Prep?

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It's still prepare.

4 BY MR. TURPIN:

5 Q. Prepare. That's all done on 1 day, or is it a  
6 2-day training?

7 A. It's a separate training. It's not --

8 Q. Separate.

9 A. We may have, say, railroad one day, railroad rules, and  
10 we have Prepare one day.

11 Q. Okay. Was there anything that you recall from the  
12 Prepare training that you used during this?

13 A. Well, I think -- well, I really couldn't help it but,  
14 you know, one of the things that you had to get out the nearest  
15 opening, the end door.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. I know that. And end doors, if you can't get out of the  
18 regular doors. And, of course, we couldn't get out of the regular  
19 doors.

20 Q. Right. Okay. Did you call 911?

21 A. Yes, I did.

22 Q. Okay. On the train or after you --

23 A. On the train.

24 Q. Using your personal cell or is it an issued --

25 A. No, using my Metrolink phone.

1 Q. Okay. Then you have an issued, Metrolink issued cell?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. You keep that on your body?

4 A. Yes, I did.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I had it with me.

7 Q. Do you also have a personal cell?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. Where do you keep that?

10 A. It was in my bag.

11 Q. Okay. Is it on or off?

12 A. It's off.

13 Q. Off. Did you have any need or think of accessing the  
14 first aid kits, or did you consider that?

15 A. No. After smelling gasoline, I figured the best thing  
16 to do was get out of there.

17 Q. Yep. That's fine. Is there anything you think might  
18 have been missing from the Prepare training that they could help  
19 you with, or there's something more they could add to it that  
20 might help you in these kinds of circumstances?

21 A. I don't think there's anything -- like I say, if -- like  
22 I said, I reacted instead of acted. There's nothing you can teach  
23 someone to do in a situation like that.

24 Q. Right.

25 A. You know, you're going to react to the situation. And

1 as far as the training, you can't train someone to react.

2 Q. Right.

3 A. You know, you can put the knowledge in their head, but  
4 you can't train -- or you can't train me to react.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. Maybe you can train someone.

7 Q. So Metrolink issues cell phones just to the conductors  
8 or engineers too?

9 A. Just to the conductors.

10 Q. So you're the only one that had a Metrolink phone on the  
11 train?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay. And you're primary using it for?

14 A. Metrolink. For that -- I think I did -- did I call -- I  
15 usually call -- they tell us to call if the ticket vending machine  
16 is not working properly, if you're delayed more than 10 minutes,  
17 stuff like that, and in case of emergency, so --

18 Q. Okay. Do you recall the 911 call? Did they answer  
19 right away?

20 A. I don't think they answered at all.

21 Q. So you don't --

22 A. I don't remember them answering at all.

23 Q. Okay. You did that while you were on the train or did  
24 it after --

25 A. In fact, after I did it, my phone -- I had never seen

1 that before. The phone just emergency mode. I don't remember  
2 seeing that ever on the phone before. I dialed 911, and it went  
3 to emergency. And I never got an answer but it was -- one of the  
4 sheriffs took it out of emergency mode while I was in the  
5 hospital.

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Did you ever hang up the phone at  
7 any time? Is that why it was in emergency mode maybe, like you  
8 were on hold or something like that?

9 MR. COVINGTON: If I hung it up, I would have -- I don't  
10 remember hanging it up. I probably called and didn't get an  
11 answer, and I don't remember exactly what happened with my phone.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: When mine is locked, I can still  
13 call 911.

14 MR. TURPIN: Right.

15 MR. COVINGTON: Yeah. But it was --

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It just comes up as emergency  
17 number.

18 MR. COVINGTON: -- it was in -- it came up emergency  
19 mode, and that's the only number I could dial after that.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

21 MR. COVINGTON: But I don't remember --

22 BY MR. TURPIN:

23 Q. Do you recall, when you did that call, was it while you  
24 were still (indiscernible)?

25 A. I was downstairs.

1 Q. So you'd already moved downstairs?

2 A. I actually got a call from UP too. I got a call before  
3 that, and I was, you know -- and UP was asking me was there an  
4 emergency and then he was basically asking me where we were.

5 Q. Okay. Were they calling from the dispatching office or  
6 local dispatch?

7 A. Yes. It was Dispatcher 10.

8 Q. Okay.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Are you the only one who uses  
10 that phone? Do you take it home with you, or you switch?

11 MR. COVINGTON: I'm the only one that uses it.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What's that phone number?

13 MR. COVINGTON: It's --

14 MR. TURPIN: No. We'll get that later. Thanks. I'm  
15 sorry. It's all right. We'll ask you for those phone numbers  
16 later.

17 MR. COVINGTON: Okay.

18 MR. TURPIN: Okay. Anything else? We can go around the  
19 room one more time. If we have any questions, see --

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, sir.

21 MR. TURPIN: None at this time. And that concludes this  
22 interview. Thank you very much.

23 (Whereupon, 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: METROLINK GRADE CROSSING ACCIDENT  
OXNARD, CALIFORNIA  
FEBRUARY 24, 2015  
Interview of Vincent Covington

DOCKET NUMBER: HWY-15-MH-006

PLACE: Los Angeles, California

DATE: March 13, 2015

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.

---

Karen Ehatt  
Transcriber