

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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CONRAIL DERAILMENT/HAZARDOUS  
MATERIAL RELEASE  
PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY  
NOVEMBER 30, 2012

Docket No.: DCA-13-MR-002

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Interview of: STEVEN VANT

Paulsboro, New Jersey

Tuesday,  
December 4, 2012

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: TIMOTHY DEPAEPE  
Accident Investigator

## APPEARANCES:

TIMOTHY DEPAEPE, Accident Investigator  
Signal Group Chairman  
National Transportation Safety Board  
Office of Railroad, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials  
DuPage Airport



THOMAS NOON, Signal and Train Control Inspector  
Federal Railroad Administration

DAVID KILLINGBECK, Chief Engineer Structures  
Federal Railroad Administration

THOMAS BILSON, Assistant Chief Engineer  
Maintenance of Way and Structures  
Conrail

DOUG TRACY, Assistant Chief Engineer  
Communications and Signals  
Conrail

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:40 p.m.)

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2  
3 MR. DEPAEPE: It is currently 2:40 p.m. on Tuesday,  
4 December 4th. My name is Tim DePaepe, D-e-P-a-e-p-e. I'm with  
5 the National Transportation Safety Board. We're going to  
6 introduce ourselves, starting with Mr. Bilson to my right.

7 MR. BILSON: My name's Thomas Bilson, T-h-o-m-a-s,  
8 B-i-l-s-o-n, Assistant Chief Engineer, Maintenance of Way and  
9 Structures, Conrail.

10 MR. NOON: Thomas Noon, T-h-o-m-a-s, Noon, N-o-o-n,  
11 Federal Railroad Administration, Signal and Train Control,  
12 Region 1.

13 MR. TRACY: Doug Tracy, T-r-a-c-y, Assistant Chief  
14 Engineer, C&S, Conrail.

15 MR. VANT: Steven Vant, S-t-e-v-e-n, V-a-n-t. I'm an  
16 assistant supervisor in the Conrail Signal Department.

17 MR. KILLINGBECK: David Killingbeck, D-a-v-i-d,  
18 K-i-l-l-i-n-g-b-e-c-k, Chief Engineer Structures, Federal Railroad  
19 Administration.

20 MR. DEPAEPE: Thank you, gentlemen. Tim DePaepe again.

## INTERVIEW OF STEVEN VANT

21  
22 BY MR. DEPAEPE:

23 Q. I want to ask you real quickly -- can I call you Steve?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Steve, when did you hire with Conrail and what's your

1 work history been up to this point?

2 A. I hired on into the BRS as a signal maintainer in  
3 training March 17th, 2008. I became a manager and assistant  
4 supervisor on May 15th of 2011.

5 Q. All right, thank you very much.

6 We're going to be talking about some trouble tickets  
7 that we've collected that pertain to the accident bridge at the  
8 Paulsboro moveable bridge at milepost 13.7. Specifically, I would  
9 like to talk about, there's an event designated as 62587. The  
10 problem with that, associated with that event code is bridge  
11 announcing failure to operate. It occurred on  
12 November 3rd, 2012. The repairs, it says none, open and local  
13 control. And then there's a brief, under the notes: "The crew  
14 reports bridge is down and locked, and signal is displayed but  
15 announcement is reporting a closure failure; informed  
16 Supervisor Hill, informed Supervisor Vant, hold for a.m. Next  
17 train reported stop signals at bridge. Train talked by stop  
18 signal by dispatcher."

19 Can you describe to me what your experience was with  
20 that, what transpired that day and who called who? Just give me  
21 in your own words what happened in relation to that event.

22 A. When the call came in to our trouble desk, the trouble  
23 desk called me up right away because I was the supervisor on duty.  
24 They said that a green signal -- the bridge closed, the train crew  
25 approached the bridge, stopped. They requested the bridge closed,

1 the bridge closed all the way. They received a green signal to go  
2 across, but the bridge announced "failed to operate" over the  
3 radio.

4 Because there was a green signal, I was sure my  
5 equipment was working properly. So I then told the trouble desk  
6 to pass it along to the B&B Department because a fail to operate  
7 comes from their equipment.

8 Q. Was that the extent of your participation in relation to  
9 that event?

10 A. Correct. After that, I received no further phone calls.

11 Q. Okay. Were there any other trouble tickets that you  
12 were part of?

13 A. As far as the trouble tickets themselves go, no.

14 Q. You did mention that -- or, excuse me, did you do any  
15 work in relation to trouble ticket 62810 that was on October --  
16 or, excuse me, November 19th, 2012?

17 A. Are you speaking of the one November 20th, the event  
18 number 62810?

19 Q. Yeah.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, I think there were --

21 BY MR. DEPAEPE:

22 Q. Is that the wrong date?

23 A. Oh, that's the initial one reported. Okay. On the 20th  
24 was when I was involved with that. That's why I said that --

25 Q. Oh, okay, I see the clear date.

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Can you explain your participation with --

3 A. Well, on the 20th, Ryan Hill requested that I come on  
4 scene in the morning. I don't know exactly what time. It was  
5 anytime between 8 and 10 a.m. I was there.

6 I was there with my electronic specialist, Dennis  
7 Fitting, and we found that the reason they did not get a signal  
8 was because one of our prox detectors had failed. It had expired;  
9 it was no longer working so it was not sending a signal back to  
10 the -- our equipment showing that the slider rails were completely  
11 closed.

12 Q. Okay. The report here -- or in the notes it says, "The  
13 bridge announced itself closed. We got no signal." And when you  
14 went out there -- did you go out there by yourself, or were there  
15 other signal personnel with you?

16 A. No. Specialist Fitting, he's my electronic specialist.  
17 He's part of the BRS. He went out there with me and then there  
18 was Ryan Hill and I don't recall the other employees that were  
19 with Ryan Hill.

20 Q. And upon an investigation, what did you find again?

21 A. A prox detector was expired.

22 Q. And by prox detector, you mean proximity detector, and  
23 by expired you mean failing or not working anymore?

24 A. It was not working, no longer working.

25 Q. What -- do you remember which prox detector that was?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Was it on the north end or south end?

3 A. It was the south end, and it was the east rail.

4 Q. We're going to remain on the record but I just want to  
5 show you a diagram so you can point it out to me, the position.

6 MR. DEPAEPE: We're going to off the record. It is  
7 2:45, and we'll be back on record shortly.

8 (Off the record at 2:45 p.m.).

9 (On the record at 2:52 p.m.).

10 MR. DEPAEPE: Okay. It is 2:52 p.m., we're back on the  
11 record. This is Tim DePaepe, NTSB questioning Mr. -- or Steve  
12 Vant.

13 BY MR. DEPAEPE:

14 Q. Steve, I want to get back to what we were just talking  
15 about before I went off the record. You stated that Mr. Hill  
16 called you on the morning of 11/20 and asked you to come out and  
17 assist him because the bridge was locked, but it wasn't getting a  
18 signal. I want to make sure I understand you correctly. You said  
19 that the proximity detector to the south end, the east rail, was  
20 no longer detecting any -- performing its duties. You  
21 specifically said it expired and had to be replaced. Is that  
22 correct?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay, thank you. After you guys replaced out the  
25 proximity detector, did the signal system then start working



1 again?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Just one final follow-up. With that proximity detector  
4 out, until it's changed, they would never have gotten a signal?

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. All right, thank you, sir.

7 MR. DEPAEPE: There are no other incidents in the  
8 trouble tickets that you have knowledge of. What I'm going to do  
9 real briefly here, is I'm going to let -- we're going to go around  
10 the table starting with Mr. Bilson and I'm going to have him ask  
11 you any questions he may have, and we'll go around the rest of the  
12 table. Mr. Bilson?

13 BY MR. BILSON:

14 Q. Yes, Tom Bilson. I just have a couple of questions.  
15 The first instance here, 62587, on 11/3/2012, it says signal  
16 displayed a green, the train went. The next train reported a stop  
17 signal at the bridge, train walked by the stop signal. Any  
18 knowledge of that?

19 A. No.

20 Q. I think the other stuff was all cleared up. Thank you.

21 MR. DEPAEPE: Mr. Noon.

22 MR. NOON: Tom Noon, N-o-o-n. I do have a question.

23 BY MR. NOON:

24 Q. We don't know upon that one on the -- the one that  
25 happened on 11/19, 62810, we don't if the crew was delayed by that

1 or not?

2 A. No. I have no recollection of that.

3 Q. Okay. Do you go out on calls on the bridge not  
4 generated from failures by the trains? Let me put it -- in other  
5 words, if the maintainer finds something wrong, do you get called  
6 in?

7 A. I don't understand the question. Are you saying that --

8 Q. If the maintainer's doing his normal maintenance and he  
9 goes out and he finds something wrong, like loose a proximity  
10 detector or something, does he call you and tell you?

11 A. He does call me and tell me, or he'll let me know at the  
12 end of the day. And if he replaced a component and did any sort  
13 of work, typically, they will let me know or will let one of the  
14 other supervisors on duty know.

15 Q. Does that happen often?

16 A. As often as the components go bad on the bridge, expire  
17 on the bridge. So it could be, you know, depending on what fails,  
18 it could be different situations.

19 Q. This is a year's worth of events. There are 24 in 1  
20 year. Is it more or less than 24?

21 A. I've only been an assistant supervisor for about a year  
22 and a half so this is really the only year I have to go by.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. So I can't really answer that question. I can't really  
25 answer that question at all.

1 Q. So in other words, we had 24 events that were recorded,  
2 but we may have had more issues corrected without having an event  
3 recorded at the trouble desk?

4 A. That could be possible, yes, but I'm not aware of it.

5 Q. When you said the proximity detector failed or expired,  
6 did it -- which way did it go, open or close?

7 A. It actually went closed.

8 Q. It went closed.

9 A. And, well, we --

10 Q. And you had to replace it?

11 A. Yes, I had to replace it. Yeah. I had my, Specialist  
12 Fitting replaced it.

13 Q. So you replaced the proximity detector and then you  
14 tested it by?

15 A. Operating the bridge.

16 Q. Operating the bridge, okay. So a lot of these calls are  
17 -- the dispatcher never calls anybody before, or doesn't call you,  
18 before they give permission past a red signal, do they?

19 A. I'm not sure.

20 Q. Okay. So that would be unlikely that every time they  
21 ask for -- give permission past a red signal that they ask  
22 somebody in C&S or B&B is it okay?

23 A. I'm not -- I can't answer that because I'm not on the  
24 dispatch desk or the trouble desk to really know of how that  
25 information gets directed. I know how it should get directed but

1 what actually happens when the situation occurs, I can't answer  
2 that.

3 MR. NOON: That's all, thank you.

4 MR. DEPAEPE: Mr. Tracy.

5 MR. TRACY: Nothing.

6 MR. DEPAEPE: Mr. Killingbeck.

7 MR. KILLINGBECK: Yes. This is David Killingbeck,  
8 K-i-l-l-i-n-g-b-e-c-k.

9 BY MR. KILLINBECK:

10 Q. Steve, the incident 62810 you've been talking about  
11 where you said the prox switch had to be replaced because, your  
12 words, it expired; mine, I guess it had failed. Is there a reason  
13 why this trouble desk log wouldn't be updated to change the cause  
14 under investigation to "replaced prox switch"?

15 A. That would have been most likely, I guess, the blame  
16 could have been directed towards me because I was called out  
17 secondhand on that.

18 Ryan Hill was notified about the problem the night  
19 before when he first got notified of it. He then went out to the  
20 scene and handled things as best he could, and then he called me  
21 out the next morning of the 20th. And then we made the repairs,  
22 but I just never thought to notify the trouble desk after that to  
23 update the notes.

24 Q. Fair enough. You indicated that that switch had failed  
25 closed. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I imagine that if it failed

1 closed that means that that slide lock, slide rail could  
2 potentially not have been driven and a clear or green signal could  
3 have been displayed?

4 A. That, I believe, is false because of what I know of the  
5 circuitry there, and I would have to go through the plans to  
6 really -- to confirm that. But the way the circuitry works is  
7 prox 1 and prox 2 essentially talk to each other inside our  
8 equipment case, and if one failed energized or closed, as I  
9 originally said, or energized, it will not pick a stick circuit.

10 Q. Okay. So if the two prox switches at one end of the  
11 bridge are out of correspondence with each other, the signal  
12 circuitry by design says no go, red signal?

13 A. Essentially, yes.

14 MR. KILLINGBECK: Thank you.

15 MR. DEPAEPE: Okay, thank you. I've got a couple  
16 follow-up questions. Again, this is Tim DePaepe.

17 BY MR. DEPAEPE:

18 Q. On the day of the accident on November 30th, it happened  
19 around 7 a.m. in the morning. In the previous 24 hours, did you  
20 do any work there or get any reports of any issues with the  
21 bridge, any trouble calls from the dispatcher, anything of that  
22 nature?

23 A. No, not that I recall.

24 Q. We were talking about the proximity switches and how the  
25 signal circuit works, be it, for movement south bound using one

1 south signal or moving north bound using one north signal. If any  
2 of the proximity detector relays are down, according to the design  
3 of the circuit, can those signals clear if a proximity track  
4 circuit or track relay -- proximity detector relay is down?

5 A. If a prox detector relay is down, which one relay  
6 consists of either the 1-2 prox detector or the 3-4 prox  
7 detectors, so that would mean there's two relays in our central  
8 instrument location, if one of those relays is down, from my  
9 understanding of the schematics of how our equipment works, you  
10 will not get a green signal.

11 Q. Thank you. I do have one follow-up question on the  
12 event on the 20th where you followed up and you replaced the PD-2,  
13 which is the proximity detector. Do you know if there are any  
14 reports of proximity detector failures between that date and the  
15 accident date, which is approximately 10 days?

16 A. Not that I recall. Not that I was made aware of.

17 MR. DEPAEPE: All right, thank you very much. I don't  
18 have any more questions for Steve. We're going to go around the  
19 table one more time. Mr. Bilson?

20 MR. BILSON: Tom Bilson, no further questions for me.

21 MR. DEPAEPE: Mr. Noon?

22 MR. NOON: No further questions.

23 MR. DEPAEPE: Mr. Tracy?

24 MR. TRACY: No questions.

25 MR. DEPAEPE: Mr. Killingbeck?

1           MR. KILLINGBECK: No questions.

2           MR. DEPAEPE: Well, I want to thank you for your time  
3 here, Steve. I just want to give you the opportunity if there's  
4 anything you can think of, or anything that you might think is  
5 pertinent to the events that just transpired on November 30th, I  
6 just wanted to give you the opportunity to speak if you'd like to.

7           MR. VANT: No. I said everything I needed to say.

8           MR. DEPAEPE: All right. Well, thank you very much.  
9 And we're going to go off the record and conclude this interview.  
10 It is 3:03 p.m., and we are going off the record. Thank you.

11           (Whereupon, at 3:03 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:            CONRAIL DERAILMENT/HAZARDOUS  
   MATERIAL RELEASE  
   PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY  
   NOVEMBER 30, 2012  
   Interview of Steven Vant

DOCKET NUMBER:            DCA-13-MR-002

PLACE:                        Paulsboro, New Jersey

DATE:                         December 4, 2012

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.

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Christina H. Neilson  
Transcriber