

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AMTRAK TRAIN 188 DERAILMENT NEAR

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PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

* Docket No.: DCA-15-MR-010

MAY 12, 2015

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Telephone Interview of: JOSEPH CURRAN

30th Street Station
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Thursday,
May 14, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: DAVID BUCHER
Railroad Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

DAVID BUCHER, Railroad Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN JENNER, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MICHAEL BULL, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

DAVID NICHOLS, Chief Transportation Officer
Amtrak

JOHN HINES, System General Road Foreman
Amtrak

EDWARD MRUK, Assistant General Trainmaster
Amtrak

WILLIAM BATES
National Safety Team
SMART Transportation Division

CARL FIELDS
Safety Task Force
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET)

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:40 p.m.)

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2
3 MR. BUCHER: This is Dave Bucher, Rail Accident
4 Investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board. And
5 this is the interview of Joseph Curran, train dispatcher for
6 Amtrak, located in Wilmington, Delaware. It is May 14, 2015. The
7 time is approximately 2:40. And this interview is a telephone
8 interview in relation to NTSB accident number DCA-15-MR-010.

9 To my right I have?

10 MR. NICHOLS: Dave Nichols, Chief Transportation Officer
11 for Amtrak.

12 MR. BATES: William Bates, B-a-t-e-s, SMART, National
13 Transportation Safety Team.

14 MR. FIELDS: Carl Fields, F-i-e-l-d-s, Brotherhood of
15 Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, Safety Task Force.

16 MR. HINES: John Hines, System General Road Foreman,
17 Amtrak.

18 MR. MRUK: Edward Mruk, M-r-u-k, System General
19 Trainmaster with Amtrak.

20 MR. BULL: Mike Bull, B-u-l-l, FRA, Operating Practices
21 Inspector.

22 DR. JENNER: Stephen Jenner, J-e-n-n-e-r. I'm human
23 performance with the NTSB.

24 INTERVIEW OF JOSEPH CURRAN

25 BY MR. BUCHER:

1 Q. Okay. That's who we have here, Joe. Like I said
2 before, if you could just start out and give us a description of
3 your territory as a train dispatcher for Amtrak?

4 A. Sure. I control from approximately milepost 76, which
5 is just east of Holmes, to Girard interlocking.

6 Q. Okay. What's involved with that operation? How many
7 tracks do you have; you know, about how many trains you operate on
8 a shift?

9 A. Well, there's four main tracks. Also control leading
10 into the Chestnut Hill West Branch and the AC single track at
11 Shore, which is Jersey Transit. West -- Chestnut Hill West would
12 be SEPTA. And we also control up till Zoo Interlocking. And
13 that's about it. Those are the four mains: 1, 2, 3 and 4.

14 And I can't tell you exactly the amount of trains a day,
15 but I'd say on a afternoon shift probably maybe 60, 80. I mean, I
16 really couldn't tell you exact number, but I'd say 60 to 80 is
17 probably a good guess, yeah.

18 Q. Okay, that's great. We don't need an exact number.

19 Let's see here. If we could let's -- let's see here.
20 One question here before we get into the actual operation of the
21 188 on the day of the incident. What is a normal operation of 188
22 for you?

23 A. A normal operation is coming up to Girard, which would
24 be 1, River Line. He would cross 1 to 2 at Girard, and then
25 operate 2 track east of Girard through Holmes interlocking on

1 number 2 track and -- that's his normal route.

2 Q. And then he would stay on number 2 track for the balance
3 of his run through your territory?

4 A. Yes. Probably almost until Trenton.

5 Q. Okay. Okay, now I'm going to ask you to go back to the
6 day of the accident.

7 A. Okay.

8 Q. If you could, if you have to take a minute or two or if
9 you want to use any notes you have there started, that's
10 beautiful. But what I'm looking for, and I think pretty much what
11 our little group is looking for here, is if you could give us a
12 scenario of the train as it came onto your territory, basically
13 operated as -- well, as far as he went, and then just take us
14 through the notification, what you did for the response people,
15 who you talked to in the office there and, you know, anything you
16 basically can add. We're looking for as many details as possible.

17 A. Okay. I was -- displayed form normal past 30th Street
18 Station, like I said, his normal route, 1 to 2 at Girard and all
19 the way through Holmes, east of Holmes, on 2 track. As far as I
20 can remember, it was all clear signals, pulled up with them.

21 At the time, I couldn't tell you the exact time. It
22 probably happened about 5 to 10 minutes before I got the emergency
23 call. I was dealing with the SEPTA train who was just west of
24 Lehigh on 1 track. I believe it was SEPTA 746, I want to say.
25 And he just, he reported going into emergency -- or, I mean,

1 not -- he report his windshield being blown out and he said he was
2 stopped at, I want to say, around milepost 86, if my memory serves
3 me right. He said he wasn't sure what blew out his windshield.
4 His whole windshield was gone. He wasn't sure if it was a rock,
5 somebody stoned his train, or maybe even a possible gunshot. He
6 really didn't know. So I asked him if he wanted, needed medical
7 attention. My focus was on him at that moment. And he said he
8 wanted medical attention.

9 And at the same time, right around that same time, 188
10 was coming east up to his location. I vaguely remember
11 overhearing the engineer on 188 saying something along the lines
12 of, like, coming up on you or hot rail, kind of notifying that
13 engineer that he was coming east on -- coming up to him. I don't
14 know if he gave him a direction or anything.

15 And oh, excuse me, prior to that, there was an Acela
16 train that was reported was going west. I don't know his exact
17 location. I didn't speak with them, but I overheard just through
18 the office that he reported either a possible gunshot or stoning.
19 So it had to have been around the same vicinity.

20 So it was the SEPTA train that reported this, the Acela
21 train who was going westbound, I believe 2173, and my focus was on
22 that. I overheard 188 saying, you know, he was coming up on -- in
23 that area, and that was it. So my focus was still on that SEPTA
24 train who was on my territory, and I was notifying the assistant
25 chiefs that we needed to get a EMS out there for this engineer

1 because he reported glass all over his face and he wanted medical
2 attention. So that was it.

3 I'd say a couple, probably about 2 to 5 minutes later
4 after that, 188 was obviously still going east on 2 track. He
5 went past the SEPTA train's location, no problems. And all of a
6 sudden, I lost signal power, everything went red.

7 At that point I spoke with the power director, which is
8 pretty normal when we lose signal power. He was actually walking
9 towards my section before I got to him. He asked if anybody
10 reported losing signal power out there, so I was just about to
11 contact either 188 or the SEPTA train about if they lost signal
12 power out there, and just before I tried to contact them on the
13 radio, I heard -- I believe it was a handbrake or the assistant
14 conductor -- I can't remember her exact title -- but she screamed
15 emergency, emergency, emergency. And I spoke with her on the
16 radio. She said that they had derailed and that their car was on
17 their side.

18 At that point I was trying to get a location out of her
19 so we could -- and as much information as I could, but she was
20 obviously pretty shakened up and I couldn't get a location out of
21 her. She said there was multiple injuries and that we needed to
22 get emergency personnel out there as soon as possible.

23 At that point I contacted assistant chief and notified
24 that we had a derailment out there, lost signal power, and to get
25 as many emergency personnel towards -- between Shore interlocking

1 and Holmes. I wasn't sure of their location still. I just knew
2 that it was in that vicinity.

3 So after I notified them about this situation, a freight
4 crew, I believe Conrail FJ33, had contacted me. They were working
5 out there. It's not on my territory. I can't even see them. But
6 they were out there around Frankford -- I believe working with the
7 Frankford Junction yard. One of the crew members contacted me and
8 -- this is where I get probably pretty vague, but at some point
9 they said that there was a lot of passengers walking towards them,
10 towards Frankford Junction yard, and I told them, you know, you're
11 in charge now; you need to, you know, direct these people if you
12 could. You know, please go out there, direct the people, and find
13 a location for me where this derailment is, because I couldn't get
14 any -- in contact with any crew member on 188, other than this
15 flag who was in the café car, and obviously she was shaken up and
16 had no idea where they were at.

17 I also, in the middle of it, I believe I tried to get
18 ahold of engineer at the head end. There was just no response
19 from him. I tried multiple times. So at that point I, you know,
20 I didn't want to think the worst, but, you know, you hear
21 derailment; I didn't know if he was unconscious or if he was even
22 in the cab. I just, I had no idea where he was.

23 So she was the only one I could get in contact with on
24 188. So FJ33 was pretty much my eyes out there. They ended up
25 telling me where there were cars. I think they -- I believe they

1 said there was four cars in Frankford yard, and we went from
2 there. You know, I just had them, you know, give me as much
3 information as they could about wires and locations. And I
4 believe that's, you know, I -- I believe that's all I really
5 remember. I don't know if you have any other questions with that,
6 but --

7 Q. Okay. Do you want to take a break?

8 A. I'm sorry?

9 Q. Would you like to take a break or keep going?

10 A. Can you give me one minute?

11 Q. Absolutely.

12 A. All right. Thank you.

13 (Off the record.)

14 (On the record.)

15 MR. BUCHER: This is Dave Bucher and we're back after a
16 brief recess. We're going to start with a few questions for Joe
17 and we'll start off to my right with Mr. Nichols.

18 BY MR. NICHOLS:

19 Q. Hi, Joe. This is Dave Nichols. How you doing?

20 A. Hi, Dave. How are you, Dave?

21 Q. I'm doing good. I'm doing good. Thanks for talking to
22 us.

23 A. Sure.

24 Q. The SEPTA train that had gotten the broken windshield,
25 was that an eastbound or a westbound? I missed that.

1 A. That was an eastbound on 1 track.

2 Q. So he was on 1 track. You say he stopped about milepost
3 86?

4 A. Yeah, so approximately around 86.

5 Q. About a mile west of North Philly. Okay.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. Thanks. And the local freight, the FJ, the Frankford
8 Junction crew, they weren't on your board? They were in the yard
9 shifting or doing whatever they were doing in there, right?

10 A. Yeah. They were off, I believe, in the yard.

11 Q. Okay. They weren't on the O track? As far as you know,
12 they were still in the yard?

13 A. That's -- it's blurry, but I believe they were in the
14 yard.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And the O track, I would still -- you know, I control
17 the O at Holmes interlocking. If they were on the O down there, I
18 don't even know they're down there.

19 Q. Right. Because that's all their territory, right.

20 A. Right.

21 Q. Yeah, at the port end. That is all the questions I
22 have. Thank you.

23 A. Sure.

24 MR. BATES: William Bates. No questions.

25 BY MR. FIELDS:

1 Q. Carl Fields, BLET. Joe, just to be clear, you didn't --
2 did you have a student or a trainee that day in question, the
3 12th?

4 A. I'm sorry, I can barely make you out there.

5 Q. Did you have a student or a trainee on May 12th?

6 A. Did I have a student or a trainee? No, I did not.

7 Q. All right. And what were the hours you were working
8 that day?

9 A. Probably approximately 2:40 till about 10:45 or so at
10 night. I can't tell you the exact time, but I'd say between 2:40
11 p.m. and 10:40, 10:45 p.m.

12 Q. All right. Is that your normal scheduling for your
13 shift?

14 A. The normal scheduling is about, I think, 3:30 to 11:30
15 is our schedule.

16 Q. Thank you. And what days off do you have?

17 A. What days off? Sorry. Wednesday and Thursday right
18 now. I'm on a new schedule right now.

19 Q. You mentioned about hearing over the radio about
20 possible gunshot and/or stoning by the SEPTA, correct?

21 A. I heard -- the engineer really didn't know. He just
22 said that his windshield was blown out. He said he really didn't
23 know what it was. He had no idea. It sounded like it was just
24 kind of a guess, you know. So it wasn't anything factual or hard
25 evidence. All he knew was his windshield got blown out.

1 Q. All right. And then, but then the Acela stated over the
2 radio that they heard gunshot in and/or stoning in the area, is
3 that correct?

4 A. I didn't hear that because I was busy with the SEPTA
5 train, I believe 746. I overheard people in the office -- I'd say
6 he was coming into 30th Street Station when he reported it. So I
7 didn't know where, what -- I just -- that was overheard and it
8 wasn't from the radio. It was from other people in the office.

9 Q. All right. How far approximately did your computer
10 screen reflect an error or go to red from Train 188 passing SEPTA?
11 Do you know?

12 A. Well, I would say approximately -- it couldn't have been
13 more than 4 -- 3, 4, 5 minutes. That's a typical run time there
14 from Lehigh to, you know, around that area. So, you know,
15 probably about, like, 4 minutes, I'd say.

16 Q. All right. And how did the Conrail job contact you?
17 Was that by radio or telephone?

18 A. That was by radio.

19 Q. Do you hear, in the area of Frankford, a lot of train
20 crews voicing concerns over the radio over gunshots or rock
21 throwing?

22 A. I'm sorry?

23 Q. Do you hear over the radio a lot of concerns by the
24 train crews regarding gunshots and/or rock throwing?

25 A. Oh, like, on a normal day out there, what happens?

1 Q. Yeah, typically.

2 A. Yeah, there is a lot of rock throwing out there.

3 There's a lot of kids, I'd say, between, like, Lehigh and
4 Clearfield interlockings, who do throw rocks. They do put debris
5 on the tracks and it does happen fairly regularly. So yeah, it's
6 fairly common out there --

7 Q. All right. And I just have --

8 A. -- in that area.

9 Q. I appreciate it, Joe, and I just have one more. And
10 this is -- where you control, it's called Section 6?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. All right. And how long have you been a train
13 dispatcher there, at Section 6?

14 A. I'd say a little less than -- less than a year. I'd say
15 about 9 months. I've been a qualified dispatcher in this office
16 for about 4 years, but as of Section 6, I'd say about 9 months.

17 Q. All right. Thank you, Joe. I appreciate it.

18 A. Sure.

19 MR. HINES: Hi, Joe. John Hines. I have no questions
20 for you.

21 MR. CURRAN: Hi, John.

22 BY MR. MRUK:

23 Q. This is Eddie Mruk, Joe. I just have one question. You
24 talked about you losing power. Do you recall what time you lost
25 that power?

1 A. Signal power? I really can't recall the time right now.
2 I really don't have my times, exact times or even approximately.
3 So it's really hard to say.

4 Q. That's okay, Joe. I appreciate that. I have no further
5 questions.

6 BY MR. BULL:

7 Q. Hey, Joe. Mike Bull, FRA.

8 A. Hi, Mike.

9 Q. The SEPTA train that was in the area at the time and the
10 Frankford Junction crew, you said it was a Conrail crew at
11 Frankford Junction? Okay.

12 A. Yeah, I believe they're a Conrail crew, yes.

13 Q. Okay. Were they on the same radio frequency as 188?

14 A. Well, when they contacted me, yeah, they would've been
15 on the same frequency as 188. Now at the time of the accident, I
16 don't -- they might've been on a yard channel. I really don't
17 know. But when they contacted me, yeah, they had switched over to
18 my radio frequency.

19 Q. Both the SEPTA and the Frankford Junction crew?

20 A. Yeah, the SEPTA crew wouldn't be on my radio channel.

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

22 A. Sure.

23 BY DR. JENNER:

24 Q. Hi. This is Steve Jenner with the NTSB.

25 A. Hi, Steve.

1 Q. Hi. Can you just restate the location of the SEPTA
2 train when you were discussing his windshield?

3 A. He stopped at approximately 86, milepost 86. I think
4 later on in the night he got -- yeah, I think he was pretty
5 frazzled, so I think the location changed maybe a couple tenths of
6 a mile when he got more, an exact milepost. I know when he was
7 hit, when his windshield got blown out, he reported it happening
8 around Diamond Street Bridge and -- yeah, it happened around
9 Diamond Street Bridge and he came to a stop around milepost 86.

10 Q. Okay. Good. And shortly thereafter, you heard the
11 engineer of Train 188 say, "I'm coming up on him"?

12 A. Yeah, he was -- around that same -- he was coming up in
13 that area, like, right around the same time. You know, I vaguely
14 remember hearing something about coming up on him or hot rail. I
15 don't remember exactly what was said. And but, yeah, I did hear
16 something to that effect.

17 Q. Now, was that -- that was from the engineer of Train
18 188?

19 A. Yes. To my knowledge, that's what it sounded like.

20 Q. Okay. Who do you think he was broadcasting that message
21 to? Was he talking to you or was he talking to the SEPTA crew or
22 to maybe someone else?

23 A. To me it sounded like to the SEPTA crew. And like I
24 said, it was very close together. It was -- you know, I was
25 finding out this information talking to the SEPTA train as he was

1 coming up to -- or right there. So, I guess -- I guess it wasn't
2 much of a time gap there and I guess he just wanted to let them
3 know that he was coming up on them.

4 Q. Did you have any conversations directly with the train
5 engineer of 188?

6 A. I'm sorry?

7 Q. Did you talk directly to the engineer of Train 188?

8 A. No, I did not. Because like I said, my focus was on
9 this engineer who was pretty shakened up and it happened very
10 quickly, you know. But they were all in -- they were in the same
11 vicinity, fairly close there.

12 Q. All right. Do you personally know or professionally
13 know the engineer of Train 188, before --

14 A. No, I do not.

15 Q. Okay. When you heard him say, "I'm coming up on you,"
16 did it sound like -- was the person concerned or panicked or did
17 it just sound like normal communication?

18 A. It sounded normal to me. And like I said, my -- it all
19 happened very quick, and at the same time I'm talking to assistant
20 chiefs, you know, about getting emergency -- because the engineer
21 of the SEPTA train requested EMS. He requested medical attention.
22 So at the same time I'm talking to our assistant chiefs to get
23 emergency personnel out to that SEPTA train. So like I said, it
24 was -- I overheard it, but it -- you know, I really don't recall
25 exactly what was said or -- you know, it's kind of vague, but I do

1 remember hearing, saying that they were coming up into that area.

2 Q. Okay. That's fine. Thanks for the clarifications.

3 That's all I have.

4 A. Sure.

5 BY MR. BUCHER:

6 Q. Joe, one more question. Dave Bucher. And maybe

7 another. I'm going to hop around for a second.

8 The first is a follow-up to just a couple of questions
9 about the radio conversation with 188, however brief it was. Is
10 it common for train crews to notify a train they're overtaking?
11 And in this case you got 188 coming up 2 track and you got the
12 SEPTA train stopped on 1; is it common to -- for train crews to
13 talk to each other like that, hey, we're coming up on you, hot
14 rail on 2?

15 A. Oh, yeah, yeah. You do hear that from time to time.
16 You know, it's just taking the extra safety precaution, you know?
17 Just giving -- making sure everybody's on the same page there.

18 Q. Okay. Okay, I want to change gears just briefly. How
19 long have you been a train dispatcher?

20 A. I'd say about 4½ years as a train dispatcher.

21 Q. Okay. And were you an operator before that?

22 A. Yeah, I was block operator for 2 years prior to that.
23 So about 6½ years total as a railroad employee.

24 Q. Okay, great. Thanks.

25 A. Um-hum.

1 Q. Is the Section 6 position your regular position right
2 now?

3 A. It was a few weeks ago. I did take a new position in
4 the office a few weeks ago.

5 Q. Okay. So you were working it extra or filling in for
6 somebody?

7 A. Yes. I was filling in that day.

8 Q. Okay. I think that's all I have right now.

9 MR. BUCHER: Any to the right here?

10 MR. NICHOLS: No. Dave -- thanks, Joe. I have -- Dave
11 Nichols -- no more questions.

12 MR. BATES: William Bates. No questions.

13 MR. FIELDS: Carl Fields. No questions. Thank you.

14 MR. HINES: John Hines, Amtrak. No questions.

15 MR. MRUK: Eddie Mruk. No questions.

16 MR. BULL: Mike Bull. No questions.

17 DR. JENNER: This is Steve Jenner. No questions.

18 MR. BUCHER: Okay, Joe, I think that's it. We really
19 appreciate the trouble you've taken here and I understand it's a
20 big deal, so, you know, thank you again. I really appreciate it.

21 MR. CURRAN: Sure. Not a problem, guys.

22 MR. BUCHER: Have a good evening.

23 MR. CURRAN: All right. You, too.

24 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: AMTRAK TRAIN 188 DERAILMENT NEAR
 PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
 MAY 12, 2015
 Telephone Interview of Joseph Curran

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-15-MR-010

PLACE: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

DATE: May 14, 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 A. Stockhausen
Transcriber