



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
Investigative Hearing

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Metrorail train 302 that encountered heavy smoke in the tunnel between the L'Enfant Plaza Station and the Potomac River Bridge on January 12, 2015

GROUP	G
EXHIBIT	
47	

Agency / Organization

Federal Transit Administration

Title

Interview Transcript for Sean Thompson

Jones Mark

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, May 21, 2015 9:29 AM
To: Jones Mark
Cc: Hiller Michael; [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: NTSB Interview Transcript

Hi Mark,

I only have a few minor corrections for the transcript:

Page 5, Line 16 currently reads: the light rail project for tracks on the Blue Line.
Change Page 5, Line 16 to read: the light rail project for **TRAX** on the Blue Line.

Page 5, Line 17 currently reads: until FrontRunner. I went to FrontRunner commuter rail, as a –
Page 5, Line 17 improved to read: 17 until FrontRunner. I went to FrontRunner commuter rail, as a **Rail Operations Supervisor**

Page 6, Line 5 reads: 5 A. But that's more with like Kook, so -- internal FTA.
Change Page 6, Line 5 to read: 5 A. But that's more with like **COOP**, so -- internal FTA.

Page 9, Line 25 reads: the biggest vulnerability of the industry, the biggest risk?
Change Page 9, Line 25 to read: the biggest vulnerability of the industry, the biggest risk.

It was a pleasure meeting you and Michael,

Sean

Sean Thompson
Director, Office of Safety Review
Office of Transit Safety and Oversight
Federal Transit Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, E46-332
Washington, DC 20590
[REDACTED]

From: Jones Mark [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, May 15, 2015 6:29 AM
To: Thompson, Sean (FTA)
Cc: Hiller Michael; Biehl, Scott (FTA)
Subject: NTSB Interview Transcript

Dear Mr. Thompson,

Thank you again for participating in the NTSB interview. Please review the attached transcript for factual accuracy. This copy is for you to keep. If you believe that a section needs to be corrected or clarified, please write the page number and the line(s) that you are correcting with the suggested new wording. Please return corrections to me by email at [REDACTED]

If I don't receive any corrections by May 21, 2015, I will assume that you have no comments.

Thank you,

Mark Jones
Deputy Chief, Railroad Division
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, SW
Washington, DC

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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WMATA INCIDENT AT L'ENFANT PLAZA *

STATION, WASHINGTON, D.C. *

JANUARY 12, 2015 *

Docket No.: DCA-15-FR-004

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Interview of: SEAN THOMPSON

Federal Transit Administration
Washington, D.C.

Tuesday,
May 5, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: MARK JONES
Deputy Chief, Railroad Division

APPEARANCES:

MARK JONES, Deputy Chief, Railroad Division
National Transportation Safety Board

MICHAEL HILLER, Railroad Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

SCOTT BIEHL, Senior Counsel
Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. JONES: Good afternoon. It's May 5, 2015. My name
3 is Mark Jones. That's J-o-n-e-s. And we are going to interview
4 Mr. Sean Thompson now, the director of safety review at the FTA.

5 And, Sean, I'd like to thank you for agreeing to
6 participate in the interview. And this interview will be recorded
7 and transcribed and you'll have the opportunity to review the
8 transcript and offer errata as desired.

9 One of the areas of the investigative hearing that we're
10 going to have in June on the WMATA smoke incident -- arcing and
11 smoke incident, is we're going to explore the safety oversight of
12 rail transit as mandated by Title 49 Code of Federal Regulations
13 Part 659, Rail Fixed Guideway Systems, State Safety Oversight; and
14 the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, MAP-21,
15 that was signed into law on July 6, 2012.

16 Now I'll ask each person to identify themselves and
17 spell their last name, beginning with Mr. Hiller.

18 MR. HILLER: Michael Hiller. That's H-i-l-l-e-r.
19 National Transportation Safety Board.

20 MR. THOMPSON: Sean Thompson, T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n, Federal
21 Transit Administration.

22 MR. BIEHL: Scott Biehl, B-i-e-h-l, senior counsel to
23 Federal Transit.

24 MR. JONES: Okay. Thank you.

25 INTERVIEW OF SEAN THOMPSON

1 BY MR. JONES:

2 Q. And, Mr. Thompson, how long have you been in your
3 current position as director of safety review?

4 A. I joined TSO here at the FTA July of last year.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. So, I'd say 10 months.

7 Q. Okay. Could you please provide us some background
8 before you assumed your current position?

9 A. Prior to this, I worked as the deputy regional
10 administrator for the FRA in Region 7, based out of Sacramento.
11 I'd also been an OP specialist for Region 1 and also an inspector
12 in Region 1.

13 Prior to the FRA, I worked in transit. I started my
14 career off with Utah Transit Authority. I started off in 1995 as
15 a bus operator. I did dispatching for buses. Near 1999, I joined
16 the light rail project for tracks on the Blue Line. I did that up
17 until FrontRunner. I went to FrontRunner commuter rail, as a --
18 trained by Union Pacific as a conductor and diesel locomotive
19 engineer. I worked in Austin, Texas, on the Metro project down
20 there with the DMUs, the Stadler vehicles. Charlotte, North
21 Carolina. My last position in the industry was with Cleveland,
22 and I was the rail training manager.

23 Q. Okay. All right, thank you. And what is the Office of
24 Safety Review responsible for?

25 A. The Office of Safety Review is responsible for providing

1 oversight of the state oversight agencies. We do a number of
2 different things. We also do drug and alcohol, and we have some
3 internal programs, emergency management, that we handle as well.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. But that's more with like Kook, so -- internal FTA.

6 Q. Okay. How many FTA employees are in the Office of
7 Safety Review?

8 A. How many FTA employees?

9 Q. Uh-huh.

10 A. Let me see here. So, I've got Maria, Joe -- six. I
11 believe it's six.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. About seven.

14 Q. Okay. All right. Does your office use safety data to
15 support any of your programs?

16 A. We do use safety data on a case-by-case basis when we're
17 reviewing an operation such as, say, for instance, with the WMATA
18 safety inspection.

19 Q. Okay. The --

20 A. The safety management inspection. I'm sorry.

21 Q. Okay. Is that the recent inspection --

22 A. Uh-huh.

23 Q. -- you're -- okay.

24 A. So when preparing for something like that, we will
25 review past audits, safety record, things like that, to help

1 direct and inform our inspection process.

2 Q. Okay. All right. We'll probably have some more
3 questions on that audit here a little bit later, too.

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. And has your office been directly involved with transit
6 safety oversight?

7 A. You mean directly?

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. Like with --

10 Q. With transit agencies.

11 A. Well, as far as like we have with the safety management
12 inspection. Traditionally, we go through the states. The states
13 are the front line, the boots on their ground. They're to be
14 providing the direct oversight.

15 Q. Okay. All righty. Okay. I'll just wait and follow up
16 on a couple of things.

17 MR. JONES: Mr. Hiller, if you want to go ahead and --

18 MR. HILLER: Okay. Sure.

19 BY MR. HILLER:

20 Q. So, Sean, from your point of view how is your office
21 supporting the implementation of MAP-21?

22 A. Well, we're preparing the states for MAP-21 as far as
23 the SSOs, to meet the minimum requirements of MAP-21, you know,
24 the financial, legal independence, the training requirements.
25 We're also -- the FTA is providing funding for the SSOs, so it's

1 no longer unfunded mandate. We also are reaching out to the
2 industry. We conduct workshops. We've got one set up for this
3 fall, where we'll be helping work with the SSOs to bring them --
4 answer any questions they've got in helping work through their
5 certification work plans into becoming fully certified under
6 MAP-21.

7 Q. Okay. So from your perspective, what are the
8 requirements of MAP-21?

9 A. From my perspective, the requirements of MAP-21? Well,
10 I brought this along.

11 Q. Good.

12 A. So, I've got a -- (indiscernible) working here. MAP-21
13 actually, the requirement for an SSO is to have financial and
14 legal independence. Okay. Also, we want to get the SSOs involved
15 earlier on in the process, if they're a new SSO.

16 In an instance like with Oklahoma, we have a new system
17 that's coming on board there but necessarily isn't receiving
18 federal funding yet. But if they should decide to receive federal
19 funding or if they're in a scenario where they are, we want to get
20 the states involved much earlier, preferably during the design
21 phase. Also, it gives us an opportunity to provide technical
22 guidance to the state in helping them mature their program, proper
23 staffing levels, et cetera.

24 Also, each state needs to gain their own enforcement and
25 investigative authority. A lot of times they have to go back and

1 -- you know, laws and statutes.

2 Q. Uh-huh.

3 A. Also, we get over to training and qualification. As you
4 know, part of MAP-21 brings along safety management systems. So
5 part of that is the SSOs being positioned to adequately understand
6 safety management systems, and also being able to assess the
7 maturity level of those agencies once they develop them. And
8 they'll be performing audits, inspections, things like that as
9 well.

10 And then we've also been setting up the -- you know,
11 they have their triennial review. We review the states every 3
12 years under MAP-21. The safety plans, the agency safety plans,
13 things like that. Currently, we have a system safety program plan
14 and a security program plan. Okay. That can be replaced with an
15 agency safety plan. You've talked with Lynn Spencer. She's
16 heading up the SMS. And then the annual reporting that goes into
17 it.

18 You probably talked to Lynn and she's talked to you a
19 little bit about data collection. Because you've got a lot of
20 questions about that, that's more in her realm.

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. And then we'll be using data definitely in an SMS
23 fashion to inform our decisions, right down to regulatory
24 decisions as far as which ones we need to tackle first; where's
25 the biggest vulnerability of the industry, the biggest risk?

1 Q. All right. Thank you. That's very good.

2 Do you see any limitations with the current requirements
3 of MAP-21?

4 A. We don't have emergency order authority. So --

5 Q. Can you explain that a little bit, for the record?

6 A. I don't want to get into the nuts and bolts of it. I'm
7 not Scott. But over at the FRA, we could issue emergency orders.

8 Q. Okay. And what would that allow you to do?

9 A. That would allow us more ability to intervene. You
10 know, it's a directive, a safety directive, that type of thing.

11 Q. And what's an example of an emergency order that you
12 have experience with?

13 A. Like over at the FRA?

14 Q. Sure.

15 A. EO 28. Are you familiar with it?

16 Q. Please --

17 A. With the securement of freight trains.

18 Q. Oh, yes. I am.

19 A. Hazmat.

20 Q. Lac-Megantic.

21 A. Right.

22 Q. Yes. Thank you. That's very good.

23 What does safety performance criteria mean to the FTA?

24 A. I don't have -- I don't feel comfortable giving an
25 answer on that one right now. I wouldn't be able to give you a

1 clear answer on that. It does mean something to the FTA, but I
2 don't feel comfortable giving you an answer on that.

3 Q. Okay. Is that something you could come back to us on?
4 Or --

5 A. Sure.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. That would be good.

9 Can you explain specifically how the FTA plans to
10 address NTSB recommendations in its legislation or in its
11 development of --

12 A. That would be more of a question towards Tom and the
13 TSO-10, which is Lynn's group.

14 Q. Okay. Okay. Right now, does FTA contain the regulatory
15 language to engage in on-site inspections?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. We're doing one at the -- yeah.

19 Q. Okay. Can you tell us a little bit about that effort?

20 A. I can give you a little bit of the details. I don't
21 want to get into our findings because it's still an ongoing
22 investigation and we're still compiling all that data and writing
23 up the reports.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. But the WMATA safety management inspection, first of

1 all, it's clear -- I want you to understand that there's three
2 different reports on this. There's also -- there's a safety
3 management systems gap analysis that's being performed.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. That's -- Lynn Spencer is heading that up. She's
6 helping to determine the maturity levels of the different aspects
7 of their current safety system, and how -- where the gaps are,
8 going over to SMS.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Her report will be used as a tool to inform WMATA on
11 which areas they need to mature their program to fully develop an
12 SMS.

13 Q. What was -- was that sort of like a standalone sort of
14 effort?

15 A. It is. It is.

16 Q. It wasn't really tied to the initial --

17 A. Well, it's something that we use to -- we want to help
18 with SMS and explaining SMS and helping the agencies understand
19 what they need to do to get to a fully mature SMS anytime we have
20 the opportunity.

21 Q. All right. Okay.

22 A. So, I mean, it's a fundamental building block, so --

23 Q. Yeah. Yeah.

24 A. The safety management inspection is -- we spent 3 weeks,
25 from March 16th through April 3rd, on site. And we were -- I was

1 tasked with performing a management inspection of WMATA's
2 operation, bus and rail. So the rail side was focused on
3 operations. Everything was kind of divided up into a discipline
4 or department. So we looked at rail. We looked at track signal,
5 you know, traction power, vehicle maintenance, facilities. We did
6 have some focus areas. Obviously, we want to look at emergency
7 procedures, tunnel ventilation.

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. Training certification.

10 We heavily involved the Tri-state Oversight Committee.
11 They were a partner with us on this investigation, even though
12 it's -- our inspection, even though it's FTA's, they were a
13 participant. They were also able to share some of their plans for
14 audits. We looked more in detail in areas that they wanted to see
15 as well. So they were able to inform the process as well. From
16 some of their experience, if they saw something where they wanted
17 a little more detail taken --

18 Q. Sure.

19 A. -- we took that into consideration in our plans. Same
20 thing with the bus side, we looked at the operations and
21 maintenance as well.

22 And then we did exit briefings with each department, to
23 present our findings. There will be findings and recommendations
24 issued in the report too. We're looking at June. So -- and we're
25 also aware that the hearing is coming up in June.

1 Q. Uh-huh.

2 A. We don't want to blindsides you. So I think the intent
3 right now is to release that report -- if we're going to do it,
4 we're going to release it in early June and give you a little bit
5 of time with it before the hearing. Otherwise, it might be
6 released shortly after. So --

7 Q. Understanding that this docket will not be released
8 until the day of the hearing --

9 A. Okay.

10 Q. -- so would you -- are you able to share any of the
11 preliminary findings that --

12 A. I'm comfortable talking in generalities.

13 Q. In generality would be fine.

14 A. But specifically -- I mean, we looked at training.
15 Certification of employees in operations, there was some concerns.
16 There's also some concerns with the training programs. They could
17 be -- a lot of it's paper-based, so, you know, electronically
18 managing that system would be a better way to go.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. We also followed up on the de-stressing program from the
21 2012 audit. It gave us an opportunity to revisit that and see how
22 things are going there as well.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. We looked at the vehicles -- vehicle maintenance aspect.
25 We also looked at capital projects. We were able to interview top

1 management in each of the departments. We did take -- is it 1507,
2 for tunnel ventilation? The NTSB 1507?

3 Q. Oh, the recommendation?

4 A. Right. Yeah. We took that into consideration while we
5 were there as well, and we paid particular attention to the
6 tunnels. We're using this process as a way to inform what we're
7 going -- our plans to address those recommendations as well.

8 So is there anything in specific that you want to know
9 about?

10 Q. Well, when you mention or when you bring up some of the
11 industry-specific things, like de-stressing, we've got to remember
12 we're going to have a transcriptionist decode this. And so we got
13 to kind of explain what -- so, Sean, when you bring --

14 A. I am not a subject matter expert on track, but --

15 Q. -- when you bring up de-stressing, I'm pretty sure I
16 knew you were talking about track, but --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And then others will be reading this too, like the Board
19 members, so I'm just trying to help them.

20 So that's a good sort of a broad-brush approach to go at
21 and -- and I know, comparatively, after a lot of the incidents in
22 Metro-North, the FRA initiated its Deep Dive. And they bubbled
23 things up to about, I think, five categories. And so is it safe
24 to say that the categories that you've bubbled up so far or have
25 -- are really going to focus on or make recommendations on are

1 going to be more along the training aspect or --

2 A. There will be overarching problems that are present in
3 all the departments.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. But we will address each of them in a departmentalized
6 fashion as well. So you'll look at operations -- if I'm looking
7 at the operator training, the controller training, the time they
8 spend in their certification process, the training program in
9 general, the number of weeks that they spend, that will be focused
10 towards the rail operations group.

11 We also have findings in vehicle maintenance, for
12 example, or track. But there might be an overarching problem
13 where training is falling short across the agency. Maybe in
14 program development, the training program could be improved, or
15 the certifications, the way they're tracking them, that sort of
16 thing. We'll address those overarching problems, but there will
17 be -- I almost look at your categories as, you know, the
18 departments themselves.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. You know, so you'll see track, infrastructure, that sort
21 of thing, as well as vehicles.

22 Q. When you assess WMATA, what do you benchmark against?
23 Their own industry, their own in-house standards?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay. Okay.

1 A. Yeah. So we hold them to their own internal processes
2 and procedures. And we do identify when there is a lack of a
3 process and procedure as well.

4 Q. Yeah, that was my next question.

5 A. So --

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. Yeah, so --

8 Q. And did you find that that was an issue on a scale -- a
9 large scale, minimal scale, low scale?

10 A. We saw a lot of -- well, depending on where you're
11 looking, in which departments.

12 Q. Uh-huh.

13 A. Some departments are more straightforward and better off
14 than others. We also saw complicated issues where maintenance
15 activity might involve several departments. And, you know, such
16 as -- like with tunnel ventilation, there's multiple departments
17 involved. But I couldn't say that, you know -- I don't know how
18 many different procedures. I would have to go back and go through
19 all the notes and see what the final report says. But, yes, we
20 did find --

21 Q. Sure.

22 A. -- gaps, you know.

23 Q. Okay. That's --

24 A. And sometimes it wasn't a gap of a missing procedure,
25 but maybe a procedure that needs to be enhanced, modified, hasn't

1 been touched in a number of years. That sort of thing.

2 Q. Well, I appreciate you sharing. I know you're trying to
3 get --

4 A. I'm just speaking in general, so --

5 Q. Yeah, you're trying to get the final product done and
6 you'd rather not speak in front of the product. And that makes
7 sense.

8 A. That does make sense, and there's a lot of information
9 there, so --

10 Q. Yeah. And you believe that the report will be out
11 before the hearing?

12 A. Well, we're hoping -- all I know is in June. It's above
13 my pay grade as to when the report is released.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. We're going through internal vetting and review. We
16 also give -- need to give WMATA an opportunity to review the draft
17 and for factual correction.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So there's a process here. We do want to release this
20 as soon as we can, you know, but it looks like June is the target
21 right now.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. But, I mean, I can't give you a specific date.

24 MR. BIEHL: Could I just ask, will TOC do a review of
25 that also?

1 MR. THOMPSON: TOC will be --

2 MR. BIEHL: Or is that just -- be a WMATA review?

3 MR. THOMPSON: They -- no, TOC will be given an
4 opportunity to review as well. Remember, I told you there's three
5 reports. The next report is for the Tri-state Oversight
6 Committee. It's the -- our SSO audit. That will be another
7 report as well.

8 MR. BIEHL: Okay.

9 BY MR. HILLER:

10 Q. And pardon me if this is a little bit redundant. Do you
11 believe there are some situations where safety compliance could be
12 enhanced by using the traditional framework the FRA and the FAA
13 use that includes civil penalties, compliance orders, and
14 emergency orders?

15 A. I see benefits to both systems. And I see both systems
16 being able to -- that have their strengths and their weaknesses.
17 I think FTA's right now is maturing. It's new. I see the
18 positive signs with safety management systems. And then I looked
19 at the FRA regulatory framework and it's more --

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. -- down in the weeds. We're out conducting inspections
22 and -- but they could learn from the FTA model as well. So I see
23 strengths on both of them.

24 Q. Okay. That's --

25 A. So, I like the FTA in that they're establishing safety

1 management systems and it's setting that foundation for the
2 transit agencies to develop a better safety system within the
3 organization.

4 Q. Do you have the resources to implement the requirements
5 of MAP-21?

6 A. I believe we do. We do have staffing models and things,
7 and we adjust as needed, you know. So it's revisited. Yes.

8 Q. Are there any ongoing efforts at the moment to increase
9 funding to the FTA to help get MAP-21 implemented quicker?

10 A. Quicker? Well, I mean, they currently have the funding
11 right now that we're giving out to the state oversight agencies.
12 As far as establishing it quicker, I mean, we've got to put out
13 the rule and then they've got, you know, 3 years to come to meet
14 that, so -- they need to meet it immediately, but they have 3
15 years to achieve the certification.

16 Q. Okay. Now, has your office -- and, I guess, let me
17 re-characterize this. How would you characterize your
18 interactions with the Tri-state Oversight?

19 A. I think the Tri-state Oversight Committee is very
20 active.

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. When I look across the board at all the different SSOs,
23 they're very actively engage in safety at WMATA. They are very
24 unique, in that they are multijurisdictional. They have three
25 jurisdictions, so that's a challenge for them. But they're --

1 they have a roadmap to the Metro Safety Commission, which will
2 correct that. So right now the jurisdictions are working together
3 towards forming that Metro Safety Commission, and that will
4 greatly enhance things. But, by and large, as far as activity
5 goes and then day -- involved with the activities at WMATA, I
6 think they're very active.

7 Q. Yeah. Can you talk a little more about this Metro
8 Safety Commission? This is sort of the first time I'm hearing
9 about it.

10 A. For the Metro Safety Commission? The Metro Safety
11 Commission is being created to replace the Tri-state Oversight
12 Committee. The jurisdictions would be giving that over to the
13 Metro Safety Commission, that would oversee -- as the SSO, would
14 become the SSO.

15 Q. And why is that being done?

16 A. It's due to the multi-jurisdictions.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. The funding. So this will greatly enhance oversight
19 capabilities.

20 Q. Who is leading up that effort? Do you know?

21 A. I couldn't give you a name of the --

22 Q. Okay. That would be a follow-up for us, I think.

23 MR. HILLER: Mark?

24 BY MR. JONES:

25 Q. Just since we're talking about the TOC, do you believe

1 that the way the TOC is structured currently they have the
2 authority to properly oversee WMATA?

3 A. I think once they get the Metro Safety Commission in
4 place they'll have more of that authority and it will be clearer
5 for them. I think they do a good job with what they've got right
6 now.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. In comparison with the other SSOs around the country.

9 Q. All right. Okay.

10 A. Certainly, they've all got a ways to go. So --

11 Q. And at least since you've been here, other than this --
12 the audit, the recent audit, has your office had much interaction
13 with the TOC committee? Do you have any meetings with them or --

14 A. We do. On a case-by-case basis, we will meet with the
15 TOC from time to time. You know, whether -- and they brought our
16 attention to the 7000 series railcars. So they do brief us and
17 let us know what types of activities that they're involved with
18 and they do raise things to our attention.

19 Q. Okay. All right. Are you aware of the TOC leading its
20 own investigation on any WMATA safety issue?

21 A. They do lead their own investigations on WMATA safety
22 issues, yes.

23 Q. Okay. We did some research, and in 2014 WMATA
24 documentation shows there were 69 reported fires and 35 reported
25 smoke incidents. Based on your experience, would you characterize

1 this as a risk?

2 A. Certainly. I mean, anytime -- even one fire would be a
3 risk. But I can't speak to the data you -- I'd have to go and
4 verify that. But your -- what were the numbers?

5 Q. It was 69 reported fires and 35 reported smoke
6 incidents.

7 A. Okay.

8 Q. 2014. Do you know if the FTA initiated -- other than
9 the one we're discussing here, that event, do you know if the FTA
10 initiated any other actions with WMATA on any of their -- any
11 smoke incidents or any other incidents that they've recently had?
12 At least since you've been here.

13 A. Oh, since I've been here?

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. Well, this would be the first major one since I've been
16 here, in the last 10 months.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. I mean, we've done other things as far as like the --
19 when I got here, we were doing a safety security readiness review
20 of the Silver Line. So it would give us an opportunity to provide
21 technical assistance and to see that extension come under
22 operation. We conducted a review in operations -- you know,
23 determine their state of readiness for operations. It comes with
24 findings, recommendations that they address. The 7000 series
25 railcars, we were involved briefly with that. TOC asked for, you

1 know, our input. They are the oversight, so -- but they mainly
2 wanted to inform us of what was happening and the progress they
3 were making as far as that went. So --

4 Q. Do you --

5 A. And then --

6 Q. Oh, I'm sorry.

7 A. Then also, you know, an output of Chicago, with the
8 stopping distances, things like that, you know, we've worked with
9 the industry in addressing those with safety advisories and things
10 like that. WMATA was one of those. So --

11 Q. Do you think, in general, some SSO programs are more
12 robust than others? Today, you know.

13 A. Sure. California Public Utilities Commission is
14 probably the leader of the pack.

15 Q. Okay. Do you think MAP-21 has the potential to maybe
16 even that a little bit between the SSOs?

17 A. It does have the potential to even it. But, you know,
18 every state is unique. So, I mean, to say that our -- you know,
19 to say Tennessee is going to be exactly like California Public
20 Utilities Commission -- they'll be different, you know. They'll
21 have different staffing levels, different modes, different needs.
22 Yeah.

23 Q. Do you think they would have different basic
24 requirements as well? For instance, you know, how often an agency
25 inspects their track, how often they inspect their cars, or --

1 A. Well, other than, you know, we'll require that they do
2 their triennial audits and what's outlined in that. The day-to-
3 day inspections on how often they conduct, you know, this type of
4 inspection in the field or -- that's for them to determine in
5 their program. I mean, outside of what the federal requirements
6 are.

7 Q. Do you get involved with the TRACS committee in any --

8 A. I personally am not directly involved with the TRACS
9 committee, no.

10 Q. Is your office, as far as the --

11 A. We've had individuals sit-in and help out with the TRACS
12 committee from time to time. But that's a -- TRACS is handled out
13 of Lynn's office.

14 Q. Okay.

15 MR. JONES: Mike, you got some more on that?

16 MR. THOMPSON: And they do inform us when, you know,
17 they need to -- they need some input from our group, things like
18 that.

19 BY MR. JONES:

20 Q. Okay. So, you do have some --

21 A. Communication and coordination, yes.

22 Q. Yeah, communication, yeah. Great. Okay.

23 BY MR. HILLER:

24 Q. I have a follow-up, just back to this -- the
25 investigation and the authority and --

1 A. The SMI?

2 Q. No, just your --

3 A. Oh, okay.

4 Q. -- the FTA's authority to just complete an
5 investigation. You're the lead -- are you the lead investigator?

6 A. I am heading up the WMATA SMI, yes.

7 Q. Okay. Now, why was that initiated? Why was this SMI
8 initiated?

9 A. It was a result of the tunnel smoke incident at
10 L'Enfant. Yeah.

11 Q. So, is -- and you talked a little bit about sort of
12 auditing the tunnel structures and the maintenance of the tunnel.

13 A. Uh-huh. They did. We looked at the fans and the
14 ventilation. We looked at NFPA 130 requirements.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. You know, the Silver Line currently meets those
17 requirements. The other parts of the system were built prior to
18 it.

19 Q. So how is -- in general terms, what initiates an
20 investigation on FTA's part? Is there a --

21 A. Established thresholds, things like that.

22 Q. And is there a criteria and things like that? Because
23 we have criteria that -- you know, the FRA have criteria.

24 A. Right.

25 Q. We have criteria. What criteria would authorize the FTA

1 to begin --

2 A. Well, we're working right now on establishing a risk
3 assessment committee that will be reviewing things like this and
4 determining the appropriate level of response. We're developing a
5 lot of these processes and procedures with standing up the office.
6 So --

7 Q. Okay. And we learned earlier from Lynn that they've
8 just hired two other investigators.

9 A. Yes. They have two more accident investigations in the
10 group. Uh-huh.

11 Q. Okay. Okay. And then this will become another branch
12 of the FTA, as far as, you know, investigating accidents or
13 incidents?

14 A. Right. Right. So we do have the ability to go
15 independently conduct an accident investigation.

16 Q. Okay. And I would imagine this will become more part of
17 the business process of the FTA as you mature?

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. Yeah. And the outcomes of these investigations, what
20 are your expectations?

21 A. Of an accident investigation?

22 Q. Of the outcomes, yeah.

23 A. My expectations? Well, I mean, I can give you what I
24 personally would like to see. But, more of -- I think it would be
25 for Tom and Lynn to discuss that --

1 Q. I see.

2 A. -- as they're heading up the accident investigation
3 group, so --

4 Q. Okay. So that really falls in their group?

5 A. Right.

6 Q. Okay. You're just the lead investigator?

7 A. For the inspection.

8 Q. For the inspection.

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay. I'm just trying to keep that in perspective
11 because it's -- I don't want to get anybody confused. So this
12 wasn't really an investigation. It was --

13 A. This is inspection.

14 Q. -- it was an inspection?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. And I've heard it characterized both ways.

17 A. It does. So --

18 Q. So that's why it's a little confusing.

19 Okay. So the FAA and other modes at DOT have moved to
20 an SMS system safety approach, and they've only done so after
21 developing a robust set of specific safety requirements. How will
22 FTA address this need for specific standards in transit?

23 A. That would be a question for Lynn Spencer, TSO-10.

24 Q. Okay. So your office is not in any way --

25 A. We have input.

1 Q. -- assisting or --

2 A. We have input as far as developing regulations, things
3 like this, you know.

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. We provide input, but that's headed up through her
6 office.

7 Q. I see. Okay.

8 A. So it would be best for her to answer that.

9 Q. Very good. I think that might be all the questions.

10 MR. HILLER: Mark?

11 BY MR. JONES:

12 Q. Yeah. Just one more follow-up on your discussion with
13 Mike a minute ago about the investigations you conduct and the two
14 people you have now. Do you foresee a need for subject matter
15 experts in each discipline down the road, like --

16 A. Oh, I --

17 Q. -- for instance, track, a signal person, just to be able
18 to speak the language, so to speak?

19 A. Absolutely. So we do have some training provisions that
20 are going out as far as -- we even see the need for better
21 training in the SSOs. Right? So they should have an
22 understanding of track, signal, maintenance practices, periodic
23 maintenance inspections, things like this, to properly inspect a
24 system. So we're addressing that right now with our interim
25 training provisions.

1 But internally, certainly, I mean, with any office we --
2 I'm sure Lynn's group is picking folks to fill those accident
3 investigator positions from various different backgrounds, whether
4 one's a track expert, which I think Troy is, and -- or operations.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. You know, George has got some experience in dispatching
7 and -- from the control center, and that sort of thing. So, yes,
8 she is ensuring that she gets a good swath of experience from
9 transit in filling those positions.

10 Q. Okay. Is there anything else you would like to throw
11 out before we conclude the --

12 A. No, not -- I mean, not really.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Did you have any other questions? Or --

15 MR. HILLER: No.

16 MR. JONES: No. Good. Well, thank you very much. And
17 this will conclude the interview.

18 MR. THOMPSON Yeah.

19 MR. JONES: And appreciate your help, and I'll turn this
20 off.

21 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

22

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: WMATA INCIDENT AT L'ENFANT PLAZA
STATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.
JANUARY 12, 2015
Interview of Sean Thompson

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PLACE: Washington, D.C.

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Jane W. Gilliam
Transcriber