

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN

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CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK

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Docket No.: HWY-15-MH-005

FEBRUARY 3, 2015

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Interview of: RICHARD HOPE

Valhalla, New York

Thursday,

February 5, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: KENNETH BRAGG
Human Performance Investigator

APPEARANCES:

KENNETH BRAGG, Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

THOMAS BARTH, Ph.D., Survival Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ANNE KIRSCH, Chief Safety Officer
MTA Metro-North Railroad

RICHARD GREEN, Chief Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

JOHN RIZZITELLI, Detective Sergeant
MTA Police

SEAN CONNOLLY, Detective
MTA Police

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:40 a.m.)

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2
3 MR. BRAGG: Today's date is February 5th. The time is
4 11:40 a.m. My name is Kenneth Bragg. I'm a human performance
5 investigator with the NTSB. We're going to start off, do an
6 introduction. We'll start to my right.

7 Would you please state your name, spell your last name,
8 and your organization?

9 MS. KIRSCH: Anne Kirsch, K-i-r-s-c-h, with MTA Metro-
10 North Railroad. I'm the chief safety officer.

11 MR. GREEN: Richard Green, I'm a chief inspector with
12 the Federal Railroad Administration.

13 MR. BRAGG: And state your name.

14 MR. HOPE: Richard Hope. I live in Yorktown Heights.

15 MR. RIZZITELLI: John Rizzitelli, R-i-z-z-i-t-e-l-l-i.
16 detective sergeant, MTA police.

17 MR. CONNOLLY: Sean Connolly, C-o-n-n-o-l-l-y,
18 detective, MTA police.

19 DR. BARTH: Tom Barth, I'm a survival factors
20 investigator, B-a-r-t-h.

INTERVIEW OF RICHARD HOPE

21
22 BY MR. BRAGG:

23 Q. Okay. Mr. Hope, let's go ahead and start off. I'm just
24 going, go ahead and let you describe for us what you witnessed and
25 we'll begin there.

1 A. Okay. Because of the accident on the parkway, I was
2 taking a avoidance route, if you will, down, and ended up coming
3 through the cemetery. And after I crossed -- I think it was
4 Lakeview or Lakeside, to start heading down towards the train
5 crossing, and then I was going to get on the Taconic Parkway
6 northbound.

7 And as I came down, the traffic -- it seems like other
8 people were doing the same thing that I was doing, and the traffic
9 was very slow. And I got to the point -- it got slow right at
10 the -- around the bend. And I was just -- we were just inching
11 along, and before -- I'm just inching along, nothing out of the
12 ordinary, and then all -- the lights started flashing for the
13 train crossing and the arm came down on the car in front of me.
14 It was a black Mercedes. And it came down and it hit the top of
15 the car at the very back of the roof. It almost bounced off the
16 top and then slipped down a little bit so it was maybe -- I mean,
17 it's on an angle now. So on one side it was probably a foot and a
18 half down and the other side it might have been -- you know, at
19 that point, it was coming out over the top of the roof. So it
20 never went horizontal. It was still always that way.

21 So sensing what's going on, I look in my rearview
22 mirror. There's nobody behind me, so I immediately back up.
23 Because I'm assuming she's going to -- I don't know at the time it
24 was a she. I figured that car was going to back up. So I back up
25 a good car length and I'm waiting for that car to back up, and a

1 woman gets out of the car and walks to the back, looks at the arm,
2 goes to the arm, touches it, never tries to move it. It was just
3 a very soft kind of touch, almost -- I don't know, maybe to see
4 what it was or how hard was it against the truck. I don't know.
5 But she just kind of did this for a second, and then as she turned
6 back, she turned and looked at me.

7 And I'm -- and now I'm waiting like, you better do
8 something. I'm waiting, and so I go -- I went and I kind of go
9 like this, just real quick, and I -- and I was still in reverse,
10 so I went back more. While I went back, I was waving. Kind of
11 the indication was, you know, do what I'm doing; I'm going back,
12 you need to come back. And what I meant -- I wasn't thinking
13 enough, I just think -- sorry.

14 Q. It's okay. Take your time.

15 A. The worst part is looking at me. And so, you know, part
16 of me -- but I knew that she wasn't on the train tracks. I knew
17 that she -- at least from what I could see, she was parked and --
18 and she gets out and -- I know I said before that she was calm,
19 but she was probably calm because she wasn't on the tracks. The
20 front of the car seemed to me like just barely making it.

21 And I'm thinking to myself, well, just walk away from
22 the car and then, you know, get back if it's -- and so anyway,
23 back -- I wave to her. I'm backing up. She just kind of keeps
24 spinning around that way. Like she turned towards me, just kind
25 of looked at me. And then I did that, and then she turns around

1 and gets back in the car. I said, okay, she's coming back. She's
2 going to come back any minute. I'm thinking the arm's going to
3 break, and I remember in my mind, I'm saying, okay, the arm's
4 going to break and hopefully won't hit my car, but --

5 And then, there was a slight pause. She gets in the
6 car, a slight pause, and then she just moves forward. And she
7 moves forward the length of the car, and at that instant, the
8 train came and hit her.

9 And the proximity of the vision that I could see from
10 where I was, it wasn't like here comes the train. I see the
11 train, it's coming, and you're -- you know, you're running out --
12 it was just instantaneous (snaps fingers). There was no time at
13 all. And I don't know what she could see. I know what I could
14 see, and there -- it was just -- I don't even know, I didn't go
15 back to look, but something was -- all I know, you know, I see 15
16 feet of the train when it hit her car and it was just
17 instantaneous. And the car, it just took the car right away. It
18 was gone.

19 Q. So did you witness her driving onto the track?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Let me back up. Did you witness her approach the
22 crossing?

23 A. Yes, because I was behind her.

24 Q. And was there traffic directly in front of her?

25 A. Couldn't see.

1 Q. You couldn't see? Okay.

2 A. Because it's around a bend and her car was big. It was
3 a -- you know, and it was dark. It was really dark. So I didn't
4 notice that or I wasn't paying attention. I don't know. I just
5 don't know.

6 One would assume the way the car was, the cars were
7 backed up, that that light -- I'm very familiar with the light
8 because I travel that road every day. But I'm sure the car -- I
9 mean, because it was all the traffic backed up.

10 Q. So you just couldn't see what was directly in front of
11 her?

12 A. But I don't.

13 Q. Okay. And when you -- when she approached the crossing,
14 you were directly behind her; is that correct?

15 A. Correct.

16 Q. And how fast were you traveling? Were you inching
17 along, was it --

18 A. Five -- yeah, inching along.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. When she got out of the car, were you aware at that time
22 that the train was coming?

23 A. Yes. Because the gate was down.

24 Q. Okay. So you were aware that the gate was down and the
25 bells are going and the lights are going, but could you tell a

1 train was actually coming?

2 A. I can't -- I couldn't see down the tracks.

3 Q. Okay. Could you hear a train horn?

4 A. No.

5 Q. At any time, did you hear the train horn?

6 A. Um --

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm sorry, what was that answer?

8 MR. HOPE: No.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

10 MR. HOPE: But that -- to be honest with you, I don't --
11 I didn't hear the dinging either.

12 BY MR. BRAGG:

13 Q. So you didn't --

14 A. But I wasn't paying attention to that aspect of it, and
15 so --

16 Q. So at that point, you were in your car?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And I assume, because it's winter, your windows were up?

19 A. Actually, I had my window open a little bit, because I
20 remember when I started out, I was thinking that she's going to
21 turn -- I'm thinking she's going to turn and walk towards me. And
22 I remember that I was, that I -- I had to get the window open more
23 to say come here. But I didn't -- it didn't work.

24 Q. So, and it was the driver --

25 A. It was open like this much -- driver's window was open

1 this much.

2 Q. Only the driver's window?

3 A. Only the driver's.

4 Q. So when did you first become aware of the train itself?
5 Was it when it struck the car?

6 A. Yeah, right then.

7 Q. Okay. When she got out of the car, what was her
8 demeanor? Did she seem hurried, was she panicked, or was she --

9 A. She was not hurried at all.

10 Q. So, in your --

11 A. Which caught me -- like, you got to hurry up. You got
12 to hurry up because this is coming -- it's coming. I don't know
13 how long, but it's coming and, you know, and I know it's not a
14 real long time. And yeah, it was -- I didn't even have time to
15 panic, but I said -- I think part of me was that it was going
16 to go by and it was going to be really close. But I thought that
17 that -- I never in my -- thought that that would -- you know, I
18 just assumed she was going to back up. I just -- that's all I
19 did.

20 Q. Was there anything unusual about her appearance? I
21 mean, did she appear to be under an influence?

22 A. Absolutely not.

23 Q. Was she staggering, was she --

24 A. Not at all.

25 Q. -- falling down, anything like that? In your opinion,

1 was she aware of the train? Not necessarily the crossing gate
2 coming down -- I mean, we can assume she got out of the car
3 because of that, but was she aware that an actual train was
4 coming?

5 A. I don't know.

6 Q. Okay. And did she seem panicked at all?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Did she --

9 A. She didn't look -- she looked -- she turned around, she
10 looked at me, and like I said, that was that brief gesture -- no
11 gesture, just that brief contact that I made with her. And then
12 she just turned around and got right back in the car and didn't,
13 you know, look down the tracks or up the tracks. And I don't know
14 whether she -- what would -- that was -- I don't know where she
15 was looking.

16 If I can go back to where the gate, when she touched it,
17 it was almost like she was touching to see if it was on the --
18 like touching the truck kind of thing. More of a not can I move
19 it; more of a -- I don't know, is there room to back up type of --
20 you know, is it touching it; is it not touching it? That's kind
21 of the way it was --

22 Q. So did she seem maybe she was concerned with whether or
23 not the gate damaged her vehicle? Is that -- was that her focus?

24 A. I -- no, I don't know.

25 Q. You don't know, okay.

1 A. Maybe she was concerned that she didn't want to damage
2 the gate by backing up.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Because she absolutely would have broken it. And that
5 was something I'm thinking of.

6 Q. So at the -- at that point, the gate --

7 A. Of course, I had too much time to think --

8 Q. -- the gate was touching her vehicle, but it was more
9 touching the back of the --

10 A. Touching the back.

11 Q. Not the top?

12 A. Not the top.

13 Q. The back, okay.

14 A. It was against the back window.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. On an angle.

17 Q. All right. So, after -- and after the train impacted
18 the vehicle, what did you see?

19 A. The train, the train just came to a stop and -- like,
20 there was no -- well, let me back up a little bit. Like who ran
21 up to me and stuff like that?

22 Q. Yes.

23 A. When -- so the train hits the car. I'm still in my car
24 and I'm just in utter shock, and -- I know that I sat in the car
25 for, you know, a second or two, because then I got out and I

1 remember turning around because now there's cars behind me. So I
2 turn around to the cars behind me and I go like this. And I go
3 like, what did she do? She did this, you know.

4 And so, I'm just like this, and the guy's running up to me,
5 the second guy -- the first guy runs up to me and he goes, you
6 know, the same kind of disbelief. And then the third guy was --
7 he was already on his cell phone. He was calling, and I heard him
8 -- what he was doing; he was calling it in. And then he said that
9 he was an off-duty policeman, and he -- and that -- and I know he
10 was talking to people.

11 And then we were trying to converse where we were. He
12 was trying to relay where we were. He was trying to relay where
13 we were, Commerce -- we saw the sign there and we -- you know,
14 Commerce Street. And just kind of, you know, bantered back and
15 forth. And the train stopped right at the end of the -- the train
16 was right at the crossing. And the people in the car seemed
17 unaware of anything. I mean, they just --

18 Q. People in what car?

19 A. In the train car. Sorry.

20 Q. Okay.

21 DR. BARTH: When you say the end of the train car, you
22 mean the back end of the train car stopped at the crossing?

23 MR. HOPE: Right. The last car, right. It was the end
24 of the train, so, you know. Actually I walked around the back of
25 the train at one point without leaving the -- because leaving the

1 crossing, you know, where the -- where there's no third rail.

2 So he was, he was on the phone, he called it in, and
3 then the conductor stuck his head out. You know, we couldn't talk
4 to the people in the train because of the windows are sealed. And
5 then someone opened -- I guess it was the conductor -- opened --
6 there was a little window in the back. He opened, slides the
7 window open, and says, where are we? And so, we're saying,
8 Commerce Street, Commerce Street. Then I read him the ID number
9 on the crossing. I said, do you want the ID number? You want the
10 ID number? And so then he got that.

11 And then we just kind of waited then. It was nothing --
12 we commented -- I remember the guy making a comment that there was
13 no parts of the car there that we could -- you know, it was dark,
14 but we still said there's nothing -- there's not even any pieces
15 of the car here. It's just gone. The whole -- I mean, it was
16 dead center right on that car.

17 BY MR. BRAGG:

18 Q. And you didn't call -- you didn't call 911, but you were
19 aware that someone had called 911?

20 A. Absolutely.

21 Q. And how long did it take someone to respond? And
22 it's certainly understandable if you --

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. -- if you're, you know, if you're unaware.

25 A. It's hard to gauge, I mean, but, you know, 5 minutes --

1 Q. 5 minutes.

2 A. -- 3 minutes.

3 Q. And which -- from which direction did they respond? Did
4 they respond from behind you?

5 A. Yes, they came down Commerce.

6 Q. Okay.

7 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

8 Q. What were the -- can you describe what you remember
9 about first response, what type of vehicles, how they entered?

10 A. It was police cars, at least two police cars. We were
11 in the -- in our lane, our proper lane. So they came down, you
12 know, the opposite lane on the other side and they parked next to
13 where we were. And they got out, and I remember them saying to
14 each other that we can't walk down -- you know, and I -- you know,
15 we quickly said this, and they said, well, we can't -- don't walk
16 down there, there's probably -- we don't walk down there until we
17 get confirmation that the third rail is off.

18 So they just stood around with us while they were
19 waiting. Because that was when I walked around the back of the
20 train and they yelled at me for the third rail. And I said, no,
21 the third rail -- this is a crossing, there is no third rail. And
22 of course, then I -- it came to me that, oh, yeah, it can hit the
23 train rail and -- so I quickly got off. But, you know, they were
24 good in that respect.

25 Q. Do you remember any other types of emergency vehicles,

1 besides the police?

2 A. Well, then, the police were there for a little while
3 and, you know, it was more of a -- then the people -- if I can
4 just comment in what I saw? The people in the train car just were
5 kind of looking out the window at us and we're going, you know,
6 like this, why'd she go? And I'm -- she didn't have -- why did
7 she go? And we're doing this, but they can't hear anything. But
8 they're just kind of looking, and they're looking and then all of
9 a sudden, they're figuring out that there's a lot of people
10 outside and now they're paying more attention out the window.

11 And so then they made an announcement on the train that
12 some -- I couldn't make out the first announcement, but I made the
13 second one, that a policeman would be coming through the train,
14 and tell him if you're injured, or something to that effect. Tell
15 the police officer if you're injured.

16 So -- but I remember mouthing to the guy, he was kind of
17 looking out -- there was one guy, you know, on that same height
18 almost. And I said, the train hit a car. And then he goes, oh,
19 okay, like, okay. And then that's all I -- that was my -- and now
20 -- whatever time that took, I don't know, but now the fire truck
21 came, at least one fire truck -- one or two, came down and on the
22 same side of the street. And --

23 Q. They approached the same way --

24 A. Well --

25 Q. -- that the police did?

1 A. Well, let me back up one second. Before I noticed that
2 the fire trucks were there, we looked down the -- to the front of
3 the train, and now is the first time we saw fire. Because we said
4 to ourselves, that the -- look, the car is on fire. Never
5 imagining what really happened, but we just thought the car was on
6 fire, and it looked to us like a small fire. It was quite a
7 distance, and I think that maybe it was a little bend, I don't
8 know. But that's what we saw.

9 And then almost simultaneously, the fire department came
10 and they started accessing the same thing, and I remember the
11 policeman saying, we don't have confirmation that the third rail's
12 off yet. So they kind of waited and the police -- the off-duty
13 officer went to one of the police officers and said that he saw
14 everything, he's an off-duty cop, and he could do a deposition,
15 and he could do this and that, and do you want his name, and so he
16 took his name. And then I saw who he talked to, so I went over
17 and told him that I was the car right behind, do you want my name?
18 And he said, okay, I'll take your name. So, he took my name and
19 then he said there's going to be a lot of vehicles coming here, if
20 you want to get out of here, you better get out. So, we all
21 turned -- got in our cars and left.

22 Q. Did you see any passengers of the train exit the train
23 or did they all remain on?

24 A. They all remained on.

25 Q. Could you hear -- so you saw at least one fire truck

1 approach the same direction as the police. On the other side of
2 the road, could you tell anything about activity on the other side
3 of the road, other vehicles coming in from that side, or was it
4 not able to understand what was happening on that side?

5 A. No, I know that the firemen had a discussion on our side
6 saying that they had to get to the other side. So I think they
7 were thinking about either relocating the rigs that they had there
8 or they were making a call in to tell them, you know, don't come
9 down this side because it won't do you any good. And that -- but
10 I remember that logistically, you know, and I said, yeah, that
11 makes sense. So that -- I don't know what was happening over
12 there, but it wasn't like anybody arrived over there and walked
13 over to us from the other side, so --

14 Q. So the end of the train was blocking the road? You
15 couldn't get a vehicle around there, so --

16 A. They could not. That's correct. Just barely with
17 the -- you know where it ended up, but the very end of it was
18 right at the --

19 BY MR. BRAGG:

20 Q. I have a question about the point where she was standing
21 outside the vehicle and she entered the vehicle. How long did it
22 take her to move the vehicle once she entered the vehicle? I
23 mean, did she jump in and just immediately drive off?

24 A. No, there was -- it was almost like she was putting on
25 her seatbelt.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I mean, that much time. I mean, you get in and you say
3 -- and especially me, I'm a little anxious. Like okay, okay,
4 she's coming back, she's coming back, you know. And it struck me
5 that, okay, come on, come on, come on; how come you're not coming?
6 And then boom. So there was a little pause in there and -- I
7 mean, again, I think about it too much now, but putting on her
8 seatbelt, just instinct.

9 Q. Could you -- how clearly could you see her when she got
10 back in the car? I mean, could you clearly see which way she was
11 looking?

12 A. No. No, you couldn't.

13 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

14 Q. Oh, and I -- if I could ask, so you gave your name and
15 they said, look, if you want to -- you know, unless you want to be
16 stuck here, you can leave. So, you then left. Did you -- before
17 that, before you left, can you estimate the number of police cars
18 and fire or -- and other EMS or first response vehicles that you
19 saw, fire -- when you're leaving or, you know, or when you're --

20 A. If I'm estimating, I'm estimating four police officers,
21 two cars; and one fire truck, and some firemen I didn't, I don't
22 know.

23 Q. And when you were driving away from the scene, did you
24 see if there were any more vehicles coming in as you drove away,
25 or --

1 A. Yeah, but none on -- I drove up the same road I came, I
2 made a left on Lakeside or Lakeview, whatever it's called, and
3 crossed over to Taconic and went up that road. And on that road,
4 I noticed emergency vehicles going down. And what struck me was
5 -- I was actually on the phone with my wife and I said, there's
6 lots of ambulances going down the hill, I don't know why you would
7 need more than one, just in my own stupid thought that people
8 don't normally get hurt when a car -- obviously person, occupant.
9 But I said I didn't think -- I just thought it was a precautionary
10 thing, but I said, there's a lot of vehicles going down --

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. -- for one injury, is literally what I said.

13 Q. And do you remember what time it was or approximate time
14 frame between, you know, the time the accident happened and the
15 time that you left? It's hard to estimate.

16 A. It is, it's very hard. And usually I'm good at that,
17 but -- 15 minutes?

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Because it was a long time that no one was there, it was
20 just us, me and the other two guys.

21 Q. Right.

22 A. You know, and waiting, and then they came. And I -- it
23 would be interesting to know what that actual time was,
24 (indiscernible).

25 Q. Okay. Is there any -- is there anything they --

1 A. The car was not stopping any way, shape, or form. I
2 mean, you know, when she stepped -- when she went forward, the
3 tires didn't spin, nobody was stuck anywhere like that. There
4 was --

5 BY MR. BRAGG:

6 Q. And so the car was moving, actually moving forward when
7 it was struck --

8 A. Absolutely.

9 Q. -- is that correct? Okay.

10 A. It was in the process. You know, it was -- you know,
11 you can think faster. I said, she's trying to get across, you
12 know, she's trying to get across. And then right -- her car was
13 moving and it was -- had gone that 15, 16 feet, whatever that
14 distance is. And right -- it was -- you know, it's a millisecond
15 that -- but no, she was moving it and didn't hesitate. Once she
16 started moving, she went. And I was there; I saw everything, what
17 it looked like. It wasn't -- I just read that, that's why I'm
18 telling you that. She wasn't stuck on the tracks.

19 MR. BRAGG: Okay. Detectives, do you have anything you
20 want to ask?

21 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

22 Q. Just one thing. When you talk about when you saw the
23 crossing lights flash and you said you didn't hear, you know, the
24 bells, did you have the radio on in the car?

25 A. Probably.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. That's -- I just wanted to (indiscernible) --

4 A. Yeah, I don't want you to interpret that I absolutely
5 listened for them and I didn't hear it.

6 Q. No, no, that's what I'm saying, that's usually the case
7 a lot of times, people are listening to music or something, you
8 know --

9 A. I usually (indiscernible). Because those bells, the --
10 I didn't hear anything, but I don't remember any sound --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- you know, just because my mind's processing what's in
13 front of me maybe and I blocked that out, but yeah, I didn't --

14 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

15 Q. Would you recall if you heard the train horn at all
16 (indiscernible)? You don't recall that?

17 A. But I wasn't listening for that.

18 Q. Yeah.

19 A. I wasn't -- I can't even tell if the radio was on
20 because I don't remember. I -- the hearing part just didn't
21 register. But it was just -- and if I'm the engineer, as fast as
22 he was coming, I would imagine he would see the tracks clear,
23 because that's how fast she came across. She came across and then
24 he was there. It was that -- you know what I mean, it's almost
25 like if you're driving your car and somebody steps in front of

1 you, you don't have time to react. Well, he would -- if even, and
2 I know you're going to talk to him, that's the only reason I'm
3 saying, but he did not -- if he saw -- the tracks would have been
4 clear and there's a car like right on the edge.

5 And I remember looking, saying how close, and I'm sure
6 you guys measured and everything, but she -- it was so close to --
7 I think she came up -- I think we were just inching along -- and
8 you know what, I'm pretty aware of my situation. I really am. I
9 mean, I knew what kind of car that was before anybody else. You
10 know, they even printed that was a Cherokee and it wasn't. And I
11 said right away it was a Mercedes. I'm aware -- and even I wasn't
12 aware I was that close to those crossing gates. Because I'm right
13 behind -- I'm where she should have been, and it struck me as,
14 wow, I'm that close? And then, oh, yeah, you know.

15 And so, I don't know if because I was driving slow and
16 we were just inching along and -- or I didn't expect it, but it
17 was dark and that's -- that's what sticks out now, that I didn't
18 think I was that close to the tracks. So I'm thinking -- she's
19 inching along and then as she came up, then she saw the tracks and
20 she stopped. But I didn't see her stop short, I have to admit,
21 you know. But that she stopped and she -- where she stopped tells
22 me that, uh-oh, train tracks, stop. And then -- and it was like
23 at the same time that the gates are coming down, so --

24 But it could have been -- I think that could have been
25 me up in there. And I would have went through the gate, but it

1 was just that kind of situation where because you were inching
2 slow and wasn't -- I wasn't paying attention. Normally, I do. So
3 I don't know if the way it was -- it was just dark, too dark for
4 me, or --

5 BY MR. BRAGG:

6 Q. Do you -- and here's the question that I have in my
7 mind. I don't -- I'm not sure why she would have stopped where
8 she was at when the gate hit her car. I'm not sure if there was a
9 car in front of her or what caused her to stop right there?

10 A. I mean, I can't tell, because I saw -- but the cars --
11 there was absolutely cars in front of her. I mean, that's why
12 everybody was going -- that's why everybody was going slow.

13 Now, whether -- I actually -- I remember thinking for a
14 split second, when I said, oh, I'm here, and I said, is there a
15 car on the tracks? Because I didn't think she was, but I said she
16 can't go forward because there's a car in front of her. I think
17 -- I thought that to myself. And maybe she would have been
18 following along when it -- but then she -- that's what I was
19 thinking to myself, go forward. And I said, oh, maybe there's
20 somebody in front of her. Holy cow, somebody's on -- you know,
21 and then she gets out, and then all the other stuff happened.

22 Q. Is her car completely stopped when the gate hit it?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. And so it didn't hit it as she was inching forward --

25 A. No.

1 Q. -- it was completely stopped? Okay.

2 A. No, because, because what I -- I mean, at least from my
3 proximity, I mean, I guess, like I said, the way the gate hit the
4 car -- can we use this? The way the gate hit the car like this
5 and then slipped down, could she have been inching forward and
6 that's why it slipped down? I don't know. Maybe it's just the
7 way the -- maybe -- I don't know how much pressure the gate had,
8 but it was right at the edge, and then it slipped, and then it
9 almost went -- it didn't go all the way down because it was
10 rubbing against the car.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. So, I mean, that would be a speculation that I don't
13 know.

14 Q. Okay.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Do you guys have any questions?

16 MS. KIRSCH: Yes. Just a few, if you don't mind.

17 BY MS. KIRSCH:

18 Q. So when you describe that, so that was the passenger
19 side gate arm that came down on her car?

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. Okay. When you came around the corner, did you see the
22 lights flashing first and then the --

23 A. No.

24 Q. Only when you got there?

25 A. Only when I was stopped.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I'm stopped and I'm just waiting, and then all of a
3 sudden, the gate started coming down.

4 Q. But she was stopped first?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And you saw the lights and then the gates came down?

7 A. I don't know. The first thing I saw was the gate coming
8 down.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Because it has the flashing lights on it. And the gate
11 came down and hit her car. I mean, did I look up at the other
12 lights? No, I didn't look -- I didn't notice them, but I didn't
13 look for them either.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. I was too -- now I'm concentrating on the gate, holy
16 cow, it's going to hit her car. It hit her car, now what? Now, I
17 said, okay, back up. So that was just my mindset. I wasn't
18 looking for the other lights. I don't --

19 MR. BRAGG: And you didn't hear the bells either?

20 MR. HOPE: No.

21 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

22 Q. And that was -- that -- what was your very first
23 recollection of -- or acknowledgment, oh, there is -- you know,
24 that there is a train coming or the gates are coming down? Was it
25 while you were still inching forward? Like how far would you

1 estimate you were from the -- your final -- you know, from the
2 actual gates that you first noticed that something was happening
3 with the signal crossing?

4 A. How close was I --

5 Q. Like when you --

6 A. -- to her car or to where the gate --

7 Q. No, no, on the road. Where were you on the road when
8 you first noticed that the crossing's becoming active? Were you
9 already basically watching her at the intersection or were you
10 approaching the intersection?

11 A. No, I was stopped.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. I was stopped. She was stopped. In my mind, because I
14 -- yeah, I stopped and then we're just sitting, waiting for a
15 second or two and then the gate came down.

16 Q. Okay.

17 MS. KIRSCH: When she got out of the car to look at the
18 gate arm, did she go behind the car or in front of the car --

19 MR. HOPE: She got out the driver's door, walked down
20 that side of the car, and went to the back and looked at it, and
21 then that's when she spun, looked at me, turned around, and got
22 back in the car on the same side.

23 MR. BRAGG: But you guys never had any conversation,
24 correct?

25 MR. HOPE: No.

1 BY MS. KIRSCH:

2 Q. So it came down behind the car or in front of the car,
3 her gate -- the gate arm when it came down on her car?

4 A. Behind the car.

5 Q. So she was -- she was still moving when that happened
6 and the gate came down --

7 A. No.

8 Q. -- or she was stopped?

9 A. She was sitting right in the crossing.

10 Q. So she was stopped in the crossing when the gate arm
11 came down?

12 A. She was stopped in front of the arm, right.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. But in front of the tracks.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. But it's on an angle, so on her side --

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. -- when she gets out, it might look like more room than
19 what she really had. My two cents.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I just had a quick question, more
21 or less about your experience. Do you travel those roads often
22 where you cross those tracks and use those crossings?

23 MR. HOPE: No.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You don't do that on a normal
25 basis?

1 MR. HOPE: No. It was only because of the backup on the
2 parkway.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, so you -- so the reason you
4 took this route this was because you were trying an alternative
5 route instead?

6 MR. HOPE: I'm familiar with the route, but I know that
7 when the parkway's backed up, you can cut through this road.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

9 MR. HOPE: And it's not very well-known, but usually it
10 works out, you know.

11 BY MR. BRAGG:

12 Q. So how much traffic was on the road when you turned on
13 it?

14 A. On this road?

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. On Commerce?

17 Q. Yes.

18 A. Coming towards me, the other way, it was all backed up
19 from I think it's Legion Drive, pretty far back because I remember
20 how slow I was going because between the snowplows and the cars, I
21 was maneuvering very slowly to go down. But it opened up quite a
22 bit at Lakeview, Lakeside, and then going down the hill, which is
23 surprising to me now that I have -- be able to look back, that
24 there wasn't anybody behind me initially.

25 Q. Okay. And that's how you were able to back up.

1 A. You know, that I was able to back up, and I'm thankful
2 for that because I would feel guilty if I --

3 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

4 Q. So did you -- so how -- you hadn't taken this
5 alternative route very often. Like, how many times would you
6 estimate you've gone through this intersection before or drove
7 over this crossing?

8 A. Once.

9 Q. Oh, this is your first time?

10 A. You would -- normally, because the accident was at
11 Lakeview, Lakeside -- does anyone know the real name?

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Lakeview.

13 MS. KIRSCH: Lakeview.

14 MR. HOPE: Lakeview. Lakeview. At Lakeview, normally
15 that's where you would get off to make the shortcut.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

17 MR. HOPE: But because the accident was at Lakeview,
18 then -- and I didn't know when I was coming, I thought -- I've
19 always gone to Lakeview. I've never gone this way before because
20 I was able to get back on at Lakeview, so I never took that extra
21 -- this one, I looked down at Lakeview and I said, there's the
22 mess. And I said I think I can go straight, I'm pretty sure I
23 can. And so, I did, and that's -- I really do think that's the
24 only time I ever went that way on that road.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

1 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

2 Q. I'm just trying to get it clear, you were on the Bronx
3 River Parkway?

4 A. It's the -- no, I didn't get on any parkway.

5 Q. Well -- well, where was the accident that --

6 A. The Taconic Parkway.

7 Q. So --

8 A. I called -- I used to call it the Bronx River too, but
9 it's a part of the highway there --

10 Q. Well, I know that there's two.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. So you were on the Taconic?

13 A. No. All right, you want to know how I got there?

14 Q. Yeah. How did you get there?

15 A. I left work. I work in downtown White Plains.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. I got on the Bronx River Parkway going north. I got to
18 Kensico Dam and saw that it was all backed up. There's a loop
19 there, a circle there.

20 Q. Um-hum.

21 A. I went through, I started to go around the circle, I see
22 it's all backed up over there. Everything's backed up, even the
23 side roads in Valhalla. So I continued around the loop, went back
24 south on Bronx River Parkway, got off the first exit at Virginia
25 Road, made a right on Virginia Road, went up Virginia Road, merged

1 into whatever road that is, and going up by Westchester Community
2 College. Because I'll cut across -- going that way, I can go up,
3 over, and get on the Sprain over by 100 C or whatever, 100.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. So I get up there. The hill's all backed up. I turn
6 into Westchester Community College, turn around, come out, and go
7 back down, go back down, turn left on Legion Drive, make a left
8 through the cemetery.

9 Q. Right. And it was backed up on the Taconic?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. And so Lakeview was closed or it was just backed up?

12 A. Lakeview was closed.

13 Q. It was closed. Okay. So that's what forced you to go
14 through the cemetery to go into Commerce?

15 A. No. I'm on Legion. Legion is further down. Legion,
16 turn left onto Commerce, Commerce winds through, then crosses
17 Lakeview, and then merges into -- and then crosses the Taconic
18 there. And that's where I was going to go.

19 Q. Okay.

20 MR. BRAGG: Okay, well, if no one has anything else,
21 we'll end the interview.

22 All right. Thank you for talking with us.

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: METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN
CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK
FEBRUARY 3, 2015
Interview of Richard Hope

DOCKET NUMBER: HWY-15-MH-005

PLACE: Valhalla, New York

DATE: February 5, 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.

Chelsea Baranoski
Transcriber