UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *
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COLLISION OF AMTRAK TRAIN #91 AND *
A STATIONARY CSX TRANSPORTATION *
TRAIN NEAR CAYCE, SOUTH CAROLINA * Accident No.: RRD18MR003
FEBRUARY 4, 2018 *
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Interview of: ERIC BETTS

103 Trade Zone Place
West Columbia, South Carolina

Monday,
February 5, 2018

APPEARANCES:

TOMAS TORRES, Rail Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MICHAEL HOEPF, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MARY PAT McKAY, M.D., Chief Medical Officer
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SMART Transportation Division

RON WRAY, Attorney
(On behalf of CSX and Mr. Betts)

I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

MR. TORRES: Okay, this is an NTSB informal interview. My name is Tomas Torres, T-O-M-A-S, T-O-R-R-E-S. Today's date is February the 5th, 2018. We are at 103 Trade Zone Drive interviewing a trainmaster in connection with an accident that occurred at Cayce, South Carolina, on February 4, 2018. The NTSB accident number is RRD18MR003.

The purpose of the investigation is to increase safety, not to assign fault, blame or liability. NTSB cannot offer any guarantee of confidentiality or immunity from legal or certificate actions. A transcript or summary of the interview will go in the public docket.

The interviewee can have one representative of the interviewee's choice. Do you have somebody?

MR. BETTS: Yes, I have Mr. Ron Wray.

MR. TORRES: Okay. Do you understand this interview is being recorded?

MR. BETTS: Yes.

MR. TORRES: Okay. Please state your name and spell it.

MR. BETTS: Eric, E-R-I-C, Betts, B-E-T-T-S.

MR. TORRES: Thank you, and --

MR. WRAY: My name is Ron Wray, W-R-A-Y.

MR. LANDY: Marcus Landy, M-A-R-C-U-S, L-A-N-D-Y.

MR. HINES: Jonathan Hines, Amtrak. H-I-N-E-S.

MR. REAVES: Stephen Reaves, Amtrak. R-E-A-V-E-S.

MR. ALDRIDGE: Bryan Aldridge, BLET. B-R-Y-A-N, A-L-D-R-I-D-G-E.

MR. RICHARDSON: Shane Richardson, R-I-C-H-A-R-D-S-O-N, with the FRA.

MR. DRAKULIC: Gregory Drakulic, D-R-A-K-U-L-I-C, with the FRA.

MR. CAMPBELL: Matt Campbell, C-A-M-P-B-E-L-L, with SMART Transportation Division.

DR. McKAY: Mary Pat McKay, NTSB. That's M-A-R-Y, P-A-T, M-c-K-A-Y.

MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons, A-M-M-O-N-S, CSX.

DR. HOEPF: Michael Hoepf, H-O-E-P-F, NTSB.

MR. TORRES: Okay. Tomas Torres with the NTSB. What was your first name again?

MR. BETTS: Eric.

MR. TORRES: Eric. What do you like -- mind calling by your first name?

MR. BETTS: Yeah, that's fine.

MR. TORRES: Okay, Eric.

INTERVIEW OF ERIC BETTS

BY MR. TORRES:

Q. Can you give us a brief history of your railroad experience?

A. Yes. I've been with CSX for 22 years, 7 months. I started in May of 1995 as a conductor. I was promoted to engineer in April of 1996. I've held management -- well, road foreman, in

July of 2012, and I currently am a trainmaster since August of 2014.

Q. Okay. Can you explain to us what your role is as a trainmaster?

A. Yes. My duties are the responsibilities of the territory assigned to me. I manage the employees and train movement, and the customers that we work in my territory assigned to me.

Q. Okay. And how many personnel do you supervise?

A. Between 25 to 40.

Q. 25 to 40?

A. Yes.

Q. And what are your hours like? You know, were you on duty on this particular day of the incident?

A. I was not. At the current time, I was at home. But as a trainmaster you're pretty much on call 24/7.

Q. Okay. Can you explain to us, like, what takes place when the crews go on duty? You know, how they get the instructions?

A. Yes. Generally when a crew goes on duty, they receive instructions from a yardmaster or a trainmaster. They receive their train messages and work orders, if need be, off of -- off the printer that comes from -- of course, the train messages come from Jacksonville; work orders come from customer service. And they receive a job briefing between one another or a trainmaster or yardmaster on duty.

Q. So when they have a job briefing is that like in-person or --

A. It can be on the phone or in person.
Q. On the phone?
A. Because yardmasters are not centrally -- it is not located in one spot. So it can be constituted with a phone call as well.
Q. Okay. And you, as a supervisor, how do you monitor the employees? I mean, how do you know they're going out there or performing their duties?
A. We will -- we basically know by the locals. Local jobs generally have a, per se, a MRT, like a computer, that annotates the jobs that they perform at industries. We can monitor it that way, and we also do by observations by going to several sites to check to make sure that they're working.
Q. So when they log into the computer, they make an entry, is that how you know they service the customer?
A. Yes, it's like they're telling the customer what time that they will be there. And once they perform the work, they annotate that the work's been performed.
Q. So when they're in the yard, how do they get out to the main track, you know, what's the procedures?
A. There's several ways you can get to the main track: by signal indication, you know, by EC1 authority. It depends on the location that you are, that you're at.
Q. But before they go out, what's the process, you know what I mean? Who do they contact? I mean, they just don't go out there, right?

A. No, they -- you either contact the yardmaster or the train dispatcher and get authority. And the train dispatcher either grants them authority up there in EC1 territory or they will tell them proceed by signal indication.
Q. Okay. And can you describe what kind of territory it is? You know, what kind of territory, is it ABS, centralized traffic control?
A. Oh, you talking about -- are you referring to Cayce?
Q. Right. Yeah.
A. It's signal territory, ABS.
Q. ABS?
A. Yes.
Q. And what's the authority then, EC?
A. No. No, it's signal indication.
Q. Signal indication?
A. Yes.
Q. So when they go to the yard to the main track to the industry, how do they get out there?
A. By signal indication.
Q. Signal indication?
A. Yes.
Q. But they got to have EC authority, right? They got to have main line authority to go from the yard to the main track?
A. Yes, and that's either by signal indication or EC1 authority. I think I'm -- no, I think you're --

Q. Yeah, I'm trying to understand how they get from the yard to the industries.
A. Normally in Cayce, everything is signal. So they will get in contact with the -- either the yardmaster or the train dispatcher. And they will tell them, I'm going to Eastman or I'm going to the auto ramp at Dixiana. And he will say, proceed south by signal indication. And therefore he will light the train up with signals and they will proceed by signal indication.
Q. Okay. And how far is this auto ramp plant or this -- where they were working?
A. From Cayce Yard?
Q. Yeah.
A. Roughly 5 miles.
Q. Five miles?
A. Yes.
Q. So they would have to leave the yard, get on the main track and travel that way?
A. That's correct.
Q. And the direction would be east, west?
A. South.
Q. South?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. And are you familiar with that industrial area?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you describe it for us?

A. Sure. If they're traveling south, they would receive signal indications to proceed south. They would pull the train into a siding that's -- that has switches that's not -- it's not signaled. It has power operating switches. They will pull the train in the siding, cut out, run around the train, pick the train up and switch it as they spot the industry. Because you have to traverse the switches at the auto ramp south to go in. So they will pull the train south, run around it, come to the north end, pull it north, and spot the auto ramp that way.

Q. Okay. So when they pull up, they cut the locomotives off, right?

A. Correct. When they pull in.

Q. Yeah, they pull in.

A. Yes.

Q. Then they go around?

A. Yes, they come out the south end of the switch.

Q. And they go to the rear end, and then they pull and start spotting or pulling?

A. Correct. They'll go back to the north end. That's correct.

Q. Okay. And those switches, how are they operated? You said they were electric switches?

A. Yeah, power operated.

Q. Yeah, what's the process? Can you explain, you know, what the conductor has to do?

A. The conductor would drop off, take the lock off and the -- it

would go from -- once the latch comes up, it will say unlocked or it would time out. It would stay locked and time out, and then it would come unlocked, and then he would traverse it.

Q. Does he need authority to throw that switch?

A. Under signal, if it's signal indication, he would not. Because it would automatically trigger the places he's in. He would have authority between the south end of Dixiana and the north end of Nassau. And he could handle any switch in between there.

Q. So he owns that area?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. And then the -- so how frequently do they go out there? Is this an everyday operation?

A. Yes.

Q. And are you familiar with the crew members?

A. Yes.

Q. Are they regular employees? I mean, do they work this job regularly?

A. No, the employees know the -- the conductor is an extra board employee, and he works on call. When there's a vacancy, he fills it. And the engineer was assigned to the job, but he's -- he works -- I can't say that he works that job every week. He floats around. It all -- it's all based on seniority. So it changes every week.

Q. So the conductor works various jobs depending on what's

vacant for the day.
A. Yes.
Q. And the engineer is assigned to it permanently? I mean, like, that's his regular --
A. For that week.
Q. -- that's his assigned --
A. For that week.
Q. For that week?
A. Yes.
Q. He works a week at a time or --
A. No, the jobs are awarded weekly.
Q. Weekly?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And what time does he go on duty?
A. 1500.
Q. And what do they usually work? You know, what's the hours, you know, that they work?
A. It varies. It varies. What that job is assigned to do is spot and re-spot auto racks and build the train that goes to Greenwood, a Q210. And those -- what he's doing is basically getting the empties together, brake test them, and places them either in the siding or on a lead, clear the main line to be set up for the Q10 that goes on duty that morning.
Q. So there would be a whole train by itself --
A. Yes.

Q. -- or are trains going to come by and pick them up?
A. No. No, it would be a whole train by itself. That's where the crew that goes to Greenwood on Q210 would originate.
Q. So on the day of the accident, is that what they were doing? They were building a train?
A. Yes.
Q. And did they complete -- you know, did they build --
A. Yes, yes. That was the train that was supposed to go to Greenwood. They were putting the engines on that, on that train.
Q. Okay. As far as block suspension, how long has that been in effect and what are the limits?
A. The limits on the signal suspension are between the north end of the holdout at the 362.5 all the way to the north end of Woodford. And I think that's the 386 --
Q. Now what's the distance? Go ahead. I mean, like --
A. 385.1.
Q. Okay. And what was the reason for the block suspension?
A. The suspension? To -- they were replacing old signals, signal masses with new signal masses. They were getting it -- everything is -- during the signal suspension is getting everything prepared for PTC.
Q. Okay. So they were replacing the signals, new signals --
A. Yes.
Q. -- to be compatible with PTC?
A. Yes.

Q. And how long has this project, you know, in this particular area been --
A. It's been going on, on the Columbia and Hamlet Subs for quite some time. It's been going on, on several different segments of track for the past couple of years.
Q. But right here in this location?
A. In that location alone, it had just started.
Q. Oh, it just started?
A. Yes.
Q. Like days or weeks?
A. The day before.
Q. The day before?
A. Yes. And it actually started that day, effective the 3rd.
Q. Okay. So when did they put out the notice? You know, how much advanced warning?
A. The day before, we -- the notices are in effect -- at least 48 hours prior, I think the notices are in effect. The crew members have to have those notices, I think -- the notices is Notice 105 and 106, stating that signals would be down and there would be signal suspension. And it would actually tell them how that they would have to traverse.
Q. Okay. So when they suspend the signals, how do they operate? How do they go in and out of that area?
A. Okay. Once it's effective, they would have to have at -- say it's appointed at the holdout, they would actually have to have

that signal because that signal is live. If they're going south, that signal would be effective. They would either have to have that signal or permission by that signal by the dispatcher. But to pass that signal, they would also have to have the EC1 to run in that segment of track.

Q. Okay. And so once they enter the suspended signal system, what's the speed? You know, what's the requirement?

A. For freight trains, it's 49 miles an hour. That's maximum speed, depending on if that segment of track is not -- has a permanent speed that's lower than that. But the maximum speed in EC1 is 49 for freight, 59 for passenger.

Q. Okay. So when the crews are out there and they handle the switches, you know, what's required of them, you know, once they get in the clear? You know, what's the process that takes place?

A. With switches, the conductor that traversed that -- the employee that handles the switches has to annotate a time when he initially operates the switch, and he also has to report the time that he's actually restored the switch.

Q. And who does that report to or --

A. They report that to the train dispatcher.

Q. The train dispatcher?

A. Yes.

Q. So when he puts it back to normal movement, he notifies the dispatcher that the switch is back to the main track?

A. Yes, and he will annotate that on a switch position awareness

form.
Q. And the train dispatcher has a log of it too?
A. Yes. He reports the time he traversed the switch and the time he restored it back to normal, and the dispatcher generally logs those times.
Q. Okay. Have you ever observed crews out there doing switching operations?
A. Yes.
Q. And what do you look for when you're out there with them?
A. I'm making sure that they are properly lining the switch. I'm making sure that they're annotating on their switch position awareness form the times. We're making sure that they're not -- I mean, per se, we're -- during observations, we make sure that they're stopping 50 feet prior to a switch being traversed. There are several things, but the main thing is, especially in EC1, I mean, it's that they are annotating that they're traversing and restoring the switches properly.
Q. Okay. So are you required to do efficiency testing?
A. Yes.
Q. And what are those requirements? You know, like, how many per month do you have to do?
A. I would say between 75 to 100 efficiency tests. It varies on certain rules.
Q. And are those, like, structured where you set up a test or are those just strictly observation?

A. It's observation. Or we can get together with other officials and do what we call test teams, and we will look at a certain job to ensure that they are doing everything properly.
Q. And do you guys test for switches, switch operation and --
A. Yes.
Q. Do you recall the last time you tested this crew?
A. Mr. Vargo and Mr. James, I would say it's probably been close to a month that I've actually tested, but I tested -- I know I tested Mr. Vargo in the yard.
Q. And do you recall what kind of test it was?
A. It was a switch handling test.
Q. Okay. And do you log it in or, I mean --
A. Yes.
Q. -- how is that, how is that documented?
A. On the OPTS. This document.
Q. So it'd be on his record?
A. Yes.
MR. TORRES: That's all I have for now. I'll pass it on to Dr. Hoepf.
DR. HOEPF: Okay. Thanks, Tomas.
BY DR. HOEPF:
Q. Eric, so I've got a sort of hodgepodge of questions. Sorry if these are sort of redundant. You'll probably get a little bit of that, but -- so we're just kind of trying to ask similar questions from a different angle and kind of pull a couple

different things out.
A. That's fine.
Q. So you said you got about 25 to 40 employees who report to you? Is that -- did I hear you wrong?
A. Well, that's -- no, no. No, you didn't.
Q. Okay. Could you just describe who they are? I mean, not every individual person, but are we talking about -- is this just engineers and conductors? Are there different --
A. Yes.
Q. Is there a different group of people?
A. No, it's engineers and conductors. You have Cayce Yard, which has a first, second and third shift employees. We have several locals that originate out of Cayce Yard that goes to different industries. We also have two locals out of Lugoff that report to us. We also have two jobs out of Newberry that report to us, and we have several trains that go in and out of Cayce Yards, from Cayce to Florence and from Cayce to Greenwood, and several road conductors and engineers that take trains that come into Cayce, like coal trains, that we supervise as well. So all in all, Lugoff, Cayce, Newberry is roughly about 40 employees.
Q. Okay. And so they're all engineers and conductors?
A. Yes.
Q. And so, I mean, how often do you face-to-face interact with --
A. Face-to-face, Cayce, daily that we're there. We also try to

manage to go to Lugoff and Newberry to do a face-to-face at least once a week.

Q. Okay. And okay, so who do you report to?

A. I report to Assistant Superintendent Rodney Brown.

Q. Okay. And he's your direct -- your supervisor. Do you talk to him very often?

A. Yes. Daily. Yes.

Q. Okay. Okay. I got you. Just trying to get a little better idea there. Okay, so pertaining to the crew that was there when this accident occurred, you said the conductor was an extra board employee?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Can you just describe a little bit more about what exactly that means?

A. The extra board is a board that, basically, they're on call and they will receive a 2-hour call to report to work when there is a vacancy.

Q. Okay. So are they full-time employees?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. And so this engineer and conductor, you know, had they -- did they work together a lot or not very often? How do those pairings work? I mean, is it a team? Is it --

A. It's a team. I would say that they -- I can't initially say that they worked -- they don't work together often. I can't say that they have not worked together. I'm quite sure they have.

But as I was saying before with Mr. James, Mr. James is really not the regular assigned engineer; he just received that job for that week, and he would be on it for the week. And Mr. Vargo is off the extra board, which there was a vacancy for that.

Q. Okay. I got you. I'm just trying to get a better idea. So this is not these two guys show up, work together every day and this is their everyday job. This is more of somebody coming in, and Mr. Vargo does a variety of different jobs --

A. Yes.

Q. -- across different territories? Or only --

A. Well, he's -- for this week, he's in Cayce and there's a lot of jobs in Cayce that he's -- they have to protect as an extra board employee.

Q. Okay. Again, I'm not trying to stump you or anything here. I'm just trying to get an idea. I mean, would you expect that these two had worked together doing this exact same job maybe a month ago, 2 months ago? Or is it a possibility that they had never worked together in this particular combination before?

A. I would say that they've worked together. I could -- that's something that I would have to look up, but I'm quite sure that they have worked together. They know their responsibilities.

Q. Okay. But you're not necessarily sure if they had done this exact or similar job in this area?

A. They would have -- I would have to look that up.

Q. Okay, okay. Fair enough. Fair enough. Okay, so what's your

-- do you have an assessment -- I mean, so if you're -- would it be fair to say that you are Mr. Vargo and Mr. James' supervisor?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. So what's your evaluation of the performance of Mr. Vargo?
A. Mr. Vargo, he's -- every observation I've seen for the past couple of months has been in compliance. There was an instance where we did take exception to one of his performances. It was probably about 2 years ago and he came close to -- too close to a switch. And we have stopped it and addressed it, and we told him that there would be an assessment and we got his commitment not to do it again. And so far, that's -- he's been in compliance with that.
Q. Okay. You said he came too close to a switch. Can you describe what that --
A. Yes, it's a -- in a shoving movement you have to stop 50 feet prior to an improperly lined switch, and he came too close. It was more like 17 feet.
Q. Okay. Would you describe that as a serious issue, or is that --
A. I can't, I can't -- I don't make the assumption of serious or -- that's with field administration. We do the observation, we -- they're either in compliance or they're not.
Q. Okay. Got you. I got you. How about your assessment of the engineer?

A. Engineer, Mr. James, I have observed him on several occasions, and I have not taken any exceptions to anything. He has been in compliance with all my observations.
Q. Okay. Great. Thanks. Okay, just to switch gears a little bit, can you talk about -- well, let's talk a little about the job that they were doing. So both of these individuals, the engineer and conductor, they went on duty at 3:00 p.m.?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And it's a 12-hour shift?
A. It's when they're finished. It's not -- they can work up to 12 hours, but it's generally an 8-hour shift unless they have more to do, then they just continue.
Q. I got you. I got you. And so how about yourself? When did you go on duty?
A. I was not on duty that day.
Q. You were not on duty?
A. No.
Q. Okay. So can you just walk through your work schedule for the week and when your -- I mean, you -- so you were not on --
A. I did not brief the F777, if that's what you're referring to.
Q. And again, I apologize if you already kind of went over this, but --
A. That's okay.
Q. Okay. So when did you go on duty?
A. I was not on duty on Saturday. My first encounter was when I

got the call to respond.
Q. Okay, you were just called in to respond. Okay.
A. Correct.
Q. Do you know who the trainmaster was who was on duty?
A. Yes, it was Trainmaster Kirk Kelsey.
Q. Trainmaster -- I'm sorry. One more time?
A. Kirk.
Q. Kirk?
A. Yes. Kelsey.
Q. Kelsey. Okay. Okay, thank you. Okay. So I guess he would probably be the person to talk to a little bit more about the specific work that they were doing?
A. I can -- I would say. I wasn't there, but --
Q. And again, I'm not trying to, like, trip you up or anything. It's just I'm not super familiar with this specific railroad operation.
A. Um-hum. I --
Q. So you're not the one who planned the work that they were doing, this engineer and the conductor?
A. No, but their responsibilities is basically the same every day.
Q. Okay. So there is an understanding of what their responsibilities are going to be, but --
A. Absolutely.
Q. So you weren't involved in the planning of the specific train

movement or anything like that?
A. No.
Q. Okay. And you wouldn't expect -- you would expect that Kirk would be -- well, we can talk to him, so I don't need to go there.
Okay. Can I talk -- let's talk a little bit about the signal suspension.
A. Okay.
Q. Okay. So you said that that had started the day before or that day, Saturday?
A. Effective Saturday.
Q. Effective Saturday?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. Do you know what time on Saturday?
A. 0800.
Q. Okay. So who -- do you know who set that up? Do you know who initiated the signal outage? I mean, who is -- are you responsible for initiating the signal outage or is that somebody else?
A. No, that would be someone else.
Q. That'd be someone else. Okay.
A. I am a local trainmaster that briefs crews that goes through the signal suspension when I'm on duty.
Q. Okay. So you're not the one who starts the signal suspension. You're not the one who plans that, okay. Okay. And do you know who would? I mean, does somebody just -- does your

supervisor just tell you there's going to be a signal outage?
A. Well, we generally get emails from the VP. I think his name is Gary Gore.
Q. Gary Gore?
A. Um-hum.
Q. Okay. Okay, so you just get -- is this like an email that you get that's saying there's going to be a signal outage?
A. Yes. And we get prepared from there.
Q. Okay. So Gary Gore sends you an email, says there's going to be a signal outage, and then you relay that information to your train crews, or does -- that email goes to the train crew and you and everybody?
A. Yeah, it goes to the dispatchers, it goes to myself. And we initiate the -- what needs to be actually placed into crew rooms to crews that go on duty.
Q. Okay. Okay. All right. And so you said when there's a signal outage the train speed is 49 miles per hour for freight and 59 for passenger?
A. That's maximum, yes.
Q. Okay. And just for comparison, what is it usually? What is the usual speed limit through the, through the area? Is it -- okay, is there a speed restriction when signals are suspended?
A. Yes. When signals are suspended, they're only -- the maximum speed is 49 for freight and 59 for passenger. That's the maximum. There is no -- you trying to say average speed?

Q. I'm trying to see -- okay. So you've got a given territory. There is a usual speed limit, providing normal operating conditions. Is this -- is there a slower speed that's being mandated because of the signal suspension or is it the same operating speed that you would normally expect?
A. No, it's a different speed for signal suspension. Say, for instance, passengers could be 79, but now it's 59.
Q. Okay, okay. So it is slower. Okay. Do you know what the speed limit is for passenger and freight normally?
A. Seventy-nine.
Q. Seventy-nine for both freight and passenger?
A. No. No. It's all -- it's the track speed. It's the track speed, and I think it's 70 on the Columbia Sub.
Q. Seventy?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And we can check that later.
A. Yeah, it's --
Q. I'm just trying to get an idea of, you know, does that change. So you get an email. Gary Gore -- what's his title again?
A. I would have to look that up.
Q. Okay, that's okay. He sends out an email or sends out a notification there's going to be a signal suspension. The train speed is reduced -- there's a reduction in train speed. What other precautions are taking place when the signals are going

down?
A. There would either be -- in between the -- from point A where there's -- you have to have the signal and the EC1 to the point B where the signal or the end of signal suspension is, that signal would be live. Either you would have to have that signal to leave signal suspension or permission by the stop signal. In between there, you either have -- would have switch tenders that operate switches and would contact the crews that come through, or you would manually operate those switches in between. And that's where the switch position awareness form is --
Q. The switch position awareness form?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. Okay. So is this -- is the signal outage, is that -- how often does that happen? Is that a very common thing? Is that an uncommon thing?
A. It's common. It's common on all segments of signal track due to maintenance. We're very familiar with it.
Q. You're very -- okay.
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And again, I'm just trying to get an idea of, kind of, the work tempo. Is this a normal thing? All right, you're going out there, signal suspension, so you kind of switch from normal operating procedures to, okay, signals are are out.
A. Exactly.
Q. So we got reduced speed. We're going to use these -- I'm

sorry -- what was the name of the form again?
A. Switch position awareness form.
Q. Switch position awareness form. Okay. Are there any other precautions or controls in place to sort of mitigate the risk associated with the signal outage?
A. No, just constant communication and letting -- that's where the briefings come into play.
Q. But the -- oh, okay. The job briefing?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And I'm sorry. You said who does -- who did the job briefing for this crew?
A. That was Kirk Kelsey.
Q. Oh, that was Kirk Kelsey. Okay.
DR. HOEPF: Okay, that's enough from me for now, so --
MR. AMMONS: This is Steve Ammons, CSX.
BY MR. AMMONS:
Q. Good morning, Eric.
A. Good morning.
Q. Just to clarify a few things there that Mr. Torres and --
MR. AMMONS: I'm sorry, what was your name?
DR. HOEPF: Mike.
MR. AMMONS: Mike.
BY MR. AMMONS:
Q. That Mike asked you. Regarding the authorized speed versus the signal suspension, so where do you find -- where would the

crew find authorized speeds at? Whether it's the CSX crew or the Amtrak crew on the Columbia Subdivision, where would they find what the everyday authorized speed is at?

A. That would be in the timetable.

Q. And in some locations where the authorized speed is -- for freight is, say, 40 or 45, something less than what you said earlier, 49 being the authorized speed for a signal suspension, which one would govern?

A. The slowest speed would govern.

Q. So in this case, where a crew was working at -- if the speed was -- the timetable speed was 40, and there was a signal suspension going on, they wouldn't be allowed to increase their speed to 49, right?

A. No.

Q. It would still be 40?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. So if it was a passenger train and the authorized speed was 60, what would then be their speed for a signal suspension?

A. Fifty-nine.

Q. So they would have to reduce their speed by only 1 mile per hour?

A. Correct.

Q. Right. Okay. I just wanted to clarify that for Mike and how that works there. Are you familiar with any of the -- any kind of

training or qualifications that the engineer or the conductor there, James or Vargo -- was it Vargo?
A. Yes.
Q. Would have to take or go through to be qualified to work in this area?
A. Yes. They would definitely have to -- they are both qualified. They would have to qualify on the -- on all assignments associated with Cayce Yard, Cayce locals.
Q. So is there any doubt in your mind that they would have worked this job prior to that, then, whether it was qualifying or working the job regular?
A. Yes.
Q. There is doubt in your mind or --
A. No, no, no. You said doubt. I'm sorry. No, no, I'm -- they are, they are qualified on all assignments.
Q. A little bit about the signal suspension. So when there is a signal suspension going on like the one that you talked about that happened over the weekend here, you mentioned earlier, I think to Mr. Torres, that they have to have EC1 authority or the dispatcher's written authority to occupy the main track; is that correct?
A. Yes. Yes.
Q. Are there any locations that either one of these employees would have worked prior to this that they have to have EC1 type of authority, even when there's not signals in place?

A. Yes.
Q. Can you talk a little bit about that?
A. Yes. We also have a job, F768. We also have a yard job, Y101, that goes on the Eastover Subdivision that is not signaled. Excuse me. And to traverse that territory, they would definitely have to have EC1 and permissions on switches.
Q. So this is not -- for this type of -- for this crew specifically, this would not be something unusual they have to work with, as far as EC1s and permissions on switches?
A. That's correct. They are very familiar with EC1 authority.
Q. What type of training material would the conductor, if any, be provided while learning this job that worked down in Dixiana?
A. When there are new employees that come to Cayce to qualify, we provide them with several training aids. We actually have a book of Cayce Terminal and all the jobs associated, all the industries associated, that we provide the employees.
Q. Do these -- have these employees taken annual rules classes over the years?
A. Yes, they have.
Q. Okay. Do they receive safety alerts, safety briefings --
A. They do.
Q. Who would, who would provide that to them?
A. Either myself or Mr. Kelsey.
Q. You said that you weren't on duty on Saturday the 3rd; is that correct?

A. That is correct.
Q. And so you became involved in this whenever you took a call to respond?
A. I took -- I got a call around 2:30, 2:40 from Mr. Kelsey. Because he was notified and he called me and told me the situation.
Q. Did you respond?
A. Yes.
Q. Were you the first one there as far as management or --
A. Yes, I was the first to be there. Yes.
Q. Did you come in contact with the crew, CSX crew --
A. Yes.
Q. -- James and Vargo? Can you talk a little bit about what you saw, what you investigated, what you discovered?
A. Yes. When I arrived at the scene, I came from the Dixiana auto ramp, I came in, because emergency response -- everything was blocked on the Tank Farm Road that comes into the place where we generally pick up crews. So that was blocked. I went through the auto ramp and walked up the tracks.

Once I got there, I observed CSX C36. I saw where Amtrak had -- the engine was on the side. I walked and looked to see if anything was derailed with the engine. I didn't -- I couldn't actually see the CSXT 130, the lead locomotive. I went to -- on that side to see if I could assess anything on that side, and that's when I stopped because I saw the bodies, and I just

immediately walked on the other side to see if I could find our crew.

Once I got on the other side, there was a lot of emergency response personnel assisting passengers. As I looked, I saw my -- the CSX crew actually around police officers and an EMS vehicle. I walked to them and I asked were they okay. The engineer responded, said he was fine, he just witnessed the most horrific thing he ever saw. I asked the conductor was he okay. All he could do was shake his head; he really was unresponsive.

I went back to the engineer. I asked him what happened. And he said, I was walking towards the switch to see if it was lined and I saw the Amtrak come in, and I just ran up the hill. And once again, once he stated that, I asked the conductor again what happened, and he was just shaking his head. He never did say anything.

So once he told me that, I said, are you okay to walk? And they said they were. I said, well, let me get you to my car on the other side. Once I walked to the -- I walked to the other side. That's where I met with Mr. Kelsey. Mr. Kelsey had responded. And I think he saw the same thing that I saw, because the first thing he said was, do you know -- it was kind of like it shocked him, because he saw the crew members on Amtrak.

And from that point, I told him I was going to take the crew members to my truck to get them away from the scene. And he said, I'll just take them back to the office. And at that time I was

asking who was in command, and they were actually looking for someone who was in charge on the other side. And they finally found someone, and they wanted myself and Mr. Kelsey to come, but I told them, I'll come; he's taking the crew members to the yard office. But eventually, they went to the hospital.

MR. AMMONS: That's all I've got for now. Thank you.

DR. McKAY: Hang in there. You're doing great. It is a long process.

MR. BETTS: No, no, I'm fine.

BY DR. McKAY:

Q. So I just have a couple of questions. It's Mary Pat McKay. And it sounds like you've been working with these guys, supervising them, for some time now. You became a trainmaster in 2014.

A. Yes.

Q. Were these guys your colleagues as engineer/conductor before that or had they come on to this area, this territory since then?

A. They came on to the territory since then.

Q. Okay. So how long have you been supervising them?

A. I would say between 2 to 3 years.

Q. Okay. So plenty of time?

A. Yes.

Q. And you have another 40 or so people, and they get all mixed up and work together and separately on all kinds of jobs.

A. Yes.

Q. Like any other group of people, there are going to be some folks that get along better than others.
A. Absolutely.
Q. Can you talk a little bit about anything you might have noticed or recognized about the relationship between these two particular people, either their interactions with each other or their interactions with the rest of the group?
A. I have no knowledge of them having any other than normal relationships with any of the employees. There's no instances that I -- that came to my attention that there was any type of conflicts or anything of that nature. Everything has been positive in the briefings. Everything has been positive when it comes to their work performance. The only exception, as I stated, is with Mr. Vargo violating the rule of 50 feet close to the switch, which we've -- did follow up, so he was in compliance.
Q. Okay. And one of the things that you said is that the engineer was walking back towards the switch.
A. Yes, he stated that he asked the conductor did he get the switch. And he had asked him twice, and he was going to check the switch, and that's when he saw the Amtrak was in -- was coming. And he said, well, at least I can watch them by. But once he saw that they traversed in the siding, he ran up the hill. So I, not being there, just asked him -- when he said he ran up the hill, I'm thinking that he was on the other side of the overpass and ran up the hill.

Q. Would it be normal for the engineer to go check the switch in this fashion?
A. No.
Q. And am I correct in understanding that typically it's the conductor that manages the switches?
A. I would say yes.
Q. Okay. I mean, if somebody has a sore foot, I guess you make a deal, but --
A. (indiscernible).
DR. McKAY: Okay. All right. I think that's all my questions for now. Thank you.
MR. RICHARDSON: All right. Shane Richardson, FRA.
BY MR. RICHARDSON:
Q. I just have a few questions, because you pretty much answered a lot. First thing I'd have to ask you is the SPAF forms that they fill out when they're in EC1 territory, how long do they have to keep copies of those after they've completed their duty that day?
A. No, it's -- I think it's 7 days.
Q. Seven days?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And do you ever audit that with your employees? Like if you know employees worked in EC1 territory all week, would you see if he had all week's worth of their SPAF forms?
A. Yes, we check, we monitor --

Q. There's a code you put in the computer when you check that?
A. Yes.
Q. So we would see checks showing that you've reviewed SPAF forms in the past?
A. I don't think that's necessarily in the OPTS.
Q. So there wouldn't be an efficiency test number assigned to it to put into the system?
A. Correct. Correct.
Q. Okay. And you've never caught this particular crew, conductor without -- failing that test?
A. No.
Q. Okay. All right, I guess the next thing -- when this conductor would have first come on this territory, he just showed up, whether he was hired here or transferred here due to being kicked or et cetera --
A. Correct.
Q. Can you explain how many trips would he have got to be qualified, let's say? Let's say he just shows up on your property. Does that -- what would he go through before he would be allowed to go out by himself?
A. As a qualified conductor?
Q. As a qualified conductor.
A. As a --
Q. Whether he transferred or however -- I mean, new hires, I know, go through tons of training.

A. Exactly.
Q. But when he first came to this territory, or anybody, what would they go through before you say you're by yourself now?
A. They would generally go through three trips on a current -- on assignments. Say, for instance, in the yard, we may give him one or two because he knows how to switch. In industries, we generally give them three on each assignment, and that's annotated through CrewWeb.
Q. Now is that three trips on -- for instance, that would be three trips on job such-and-such, or would it be three trips where you know he went to that specific industry?
A. Yes, that'd be three specific trips on that industry, like --
Q. So he could be called on, say, an E77 and not work a certain industry for a week. Because maybe they're out of product, et cetera.
A. Right, right.
Q. But would it show that he was qualified on that territory now?
A. Yes. It would. Say, for instance, like, 777. 777 does the same thing as 776; it's just two different shifts. So he would be familiarized with three trips on that particular segment of territory because they're doing the same thing. You're pulling and shipping racks. As you were referring to, like, 768, it works several industries, like, six to seven, and he would have to have three trips on that if --

Q. On all six or seven industries, or on that job?
A. No. No. On that job. On that job, because that's the only job that works that industry.
Q. Okay. And before he would mark up, I guess, you would have to discuss with him, make sure he's happy with -- he --
A. Yes.
Q. Make sure he feels comfortable with each location, et cetera.
A. Yes. That's correct.
Q. Okay. Good. Let's do one more thing. I guess I'm having trouble understanding what took place when this engineer walked back to the switch. Who gave up the track? Was it the engineer or the conductor? Do you know that?
A. I don't know that.
Q. You don't know which one gave it up?
A. No, I don't.
Q. Because I'm assuming the track had already been released when he's asking the conductor if the switch is still aligned.
A. I was not there, and for the -- I don't want to assume anything. I have not --
Q. Yeah. I guess the big question is, when he said he was walking to check the switch, did you ask him why?
A. No. I want to see -- once I asked that question and he told me what he'd done, and based on where we were and the shape that they were in at the time, I wasn't going to get into that right there.

Q. Yeah, yeah. No. Okay.

MR. RICHARDSON: That's really all I've got now.

BY MR. CAMPBELL:

Q. Mr. Betts, I'm Matt Campbell, SMART Transportation. Just a couple questions. Do you know when the last time there was a signal suspension on that territory, Columbia Sub or near Cayce Yard, where these employees might have interacted more or were working together?

A. I don't think it would be that particular group, but the last signal suspension was in the last -- the third week of January, and on the Columbia Sub. And that was between, I would say, Denmark and -- I don't want to, I don't want to tell you anything different -- and the south end of Nassau.

Q. You said Trainmaster Kirk Kelsey was -- who was on duty when they arrived on duty at 1500?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Like I know for efficiency testing there's logs. You log when you do an efficiency test. Is there something similar when a crew is job briefed? Like I go on duty today on 800, 900. The trainmaster job briefs me --

A. And there's a log? No.

Q. Is there any type of -- so what about with something like a signal suspension? Is there a specific or is there a special job briefing that's done with crews when they come on duty?

A. There's a -- that's where the training aids that comes out,

and we make sure that they have the 105 and the Rule 106, and we also have the training aids that's on -- that's in the crew room. And we -- they go over it as we job brief with them to ensure that they know exactly what they need to do in reference to what -- like, where we are now in signal suspension, which signals are hot, what you need to get by that signal, what do you need to -- what EC1 authority, what switches that you're going to be -- associated with you, what you're going to do with them. So the training aid is there to go over as they're being briefed.

Q. And is this training aid in that particular briefing for those rules, is that something done every shift during a signal suspension or one time --

A. Yeah, every job -- every job that's associated with --

Q. Should get that same briefing?

A. Yes.

Q. And when that briefing is given, is that documented?

A. No, it's not.

Q. No. Not logged? So I guess I could -- Trainmaster Kelsey would know if he briefed them or not. I'm just -- just want to ensure that they -- find out if they were briefed or not, but you didn't have anything to do with -- anything that happened on this, you know, just the facts.

Let's see. As far as the qualifications on territory, you said, like, such as three trips per job. Is that a local as far as Cayce Yard or Columbia Sub designation, or is that something on

CSX as a whole?
A. No, that's local.
Q. That's local. So it could be different for different areas?
A. For different areas. Yes.
MR. CAMPBELL: Okay. That's all I have at this time.
MR. ALDRIDGE: You took all mine, so I'll defer.
MR. REAVES: Okay. Good morning, Eric.
MR. BETTS: Good morning.
MR. REAVES: Stephen Reaves with Amtrak.
MR. BETTS: Yes, sir.
BY MR. REAVES:
Q. Just a few questions. Who on the crew is responsible for filling out the switch position awareness form?
A. Both the engineer and conductor.
Q. So they both should have -- there should be two forms, one the conductor fills out and then the engineer fills out his separate form?
A. Yes.
Q. And you had mentioned earlier about the process for operating a switch in a signal suspension. Could you just kind of -- as far as the steps of that -- so if a crew clears up and the conductor is at the switch, kind of what's the process? Does the conductor line the switch, tell the engineer? Or how does that go?
A. Generally the conductor aligns the switch and he'll -- and he will call the engineer by radio: Switch at specific location

lined for normal use at such a time.
Q. And will the conductor fill out his form right there?
A. Yes.
Q. And then once that's done, then if they were clearing up on authority, they would call the dispatcher and they tell the dispatcher the times --
A. The times.
Q. -- the times as well?
A. That's right. They would have to let the dispatcher know all the switches that they handled, and that would be annotated before the authority is given up.
Q. Okay. Say the crew was clearing up there and they make up or they build Q210?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. They build -- do they do the brake test Class 1, hang the EOT, and everything on that train and have it ready to go?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. So that train that night, that you know of, was brake tested, EOT hung, and was ready to go out for --
A. Yes.
Q. Under, I guess, normal conditions, if they shove back in there and clear up, then at that point is when they would do the brake test, or would they do the brake test --
A. They could do the brake test prior.
Q. Prior to --

A. I would -- not being there, I'm quite sure that the brake test was done prior, cut away from and spotted, re-spotted loads. Because generally, you have to pull empties out of the ramp, do the brake test, get that out of the way, and then finish with the loads that's on the main line, get them clear, spotted, and then bring the engines back to where the empties are. And that's just me.

Q. Got you. Yeah.

A. Not to say that -- I wasn't there to see what happened. That's the normal procedure.

Q. So the crew makes this train up. Do they order their own ride to go back to the yard office, or do they do it via the dispatcher? Call the dispatcher up --

A. Yardmaster.

Q. Yardmaster?

A. Yes.

Q. They would call the yardmaster and say, we're done with work, ready to get picked up?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Do you know this night if the ride had already been called?

A. I'm not sure.

Q. Not sure. Okay. And last question. So we're talking about the crew qualifying on assignments. You mentioned three trips on the assignment. Is there an evaluation? Does anybody ride with

them to say, you know, you're good on it? Or the crew just says, hey, I'm good to go and --

A. There can be observations. Normally the -- with the amount of assignments, if there is an instance where the crew does not get it, we generally would know that.

Q. But I guess for the most part, it's the crew gets their three rides, and if they don't have any, I guess, issues as far as them coming, you know, saying, hey, I need another ride, you say, okay, you know, you got your three rides; you feel good?

A. Yes.

MR. REAVES: Okay. That was all I had. Thank you.

BY MR. HINES:

Q. Eric, how're you doing? I'm Jon Hines. Need a break?

A. No. No, I'm fine.

Q. You good?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay. So I just want to touch base on the qualifications Steve --

MR. TORRES: State your name.

MR. HINES: Jon Hines, Amtrak. Sorry, Tomas.

BY MR. HINES:

Q. If I'm a new engineer -- just treat me like I'm a new engineer and I'm awarded a position in your crew base at Cayce Yard, and I show up. Take me through that qualification process.

A. You're a qualified engineer?

Q. I'm an engineer or a conductor, either one. And I'm awarded the position and awarded a job in Cayce Yard.
A. Well, first, if you're awarded a position, you're brand new, you're not qualified in my territory. So therefore, we would have to get you qualified.
Q. And how do you do that?
A. We would align you, just as stated. Let you know the job assignments, and we would get you set up in a training schedule. Just set you up a training schedule -- we'll set you up a training schedule through CrewWeb. Every job that's on -- in Cayce has an assignment. We would allot you at least 30 days to qualify on the assignments. And as you work these assignments, we'd either suspend or promote. So once your -- once you've completed all assignments, all three rides, you're either qualified or we'll give you additional training.
Q. Who does the rides? Is there a monitoring ride that's done? Is there a supervisor that oversees this ride?
A. No, that's -- if you were a trainee, you would be monitored. As a qualified engineer or a qualified conductor, you would be observed.
Q. And who does that observation?
A. The trainmaster.
Q. The trainmaster does.
A. Yes.
Q. For the physical characteristics qualification, are there any

training aids, maps --
A. Yes, yes. We have training, we have training aids. We have a book of Cayce Terminal, and it has in it all the industries and the capacities and everything that an industry has. It's a book of everything.
Q. Are there any tests? Paper, computerized testing for knowledge, for PC knowledge?
A. Yes. That's an annual physical characteristics test that we do.
Q. Okay. And is there one specific for qualification for me, the new person, that just came? So do I take a test?
A. No.
Q. That qualification for that either route or area?
A. No.
Q. No written? Okay. And I heard you -- I think you said, and correct me if I'm wrong, the three ride is a local policy?
A. Yes.
Q. And who sets that policy?
A. That would be the trainmasters.
Q. And that's based on complexity --
A. Capacity, the number of the industries.
Q. Sure. Okay. And I heard Stephen mention their annual training. Could you take me through what annual training the conductor or -- excuse me -- the conductor or the engineer would receive?

A. He would receive -- every year we have what we call PODS training. And that's associated -- everything through annual operation rules testing, physical characteristics testing on the area that they are -- that they work on. We also give face-to-face rules testing, that they actually would go through a day of -- how do you say it? You get a lot of video, you get a lot of rules that we go over, and then you take a test after we go through everything.

Q. Okay. Who does that training?

A. That's the trainmasters as well.

Q. And do the trainmasters do the annual training as well? Or is that done -- or the trainmaster does it all: the PODS training, the face-to-face --

A. The PODS training, the PODS training is individual. Sometimes if there is a recertification involved every 3 years, they are proctored by a trainmaster.

Q. Okay. So it sounds to me like you got a lot of responsibilities there.

A. Yes.

MR. HINES: That's all I have. Thank you.

BY MR. LANDY:

Q. Hey, Eric. It's Marcus Landy here, Office of Regulatory Staff, Operating Practice Inspector. One quick question. On that segment of industry you worked the ramp job, has there been a history of concerns from -- as it relates to compliance with

switching that switch there on the main line or either Silica Siding switch? Any exceptions taken there by you or Mr. Kelsey that you know of?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. Okay. And has there ever been a history of having any derailments there related to any switches improperly lined?

A. We have had a situation where -- I think it was 2 years ago, where there was a derailment at the runaround switch. One of the switches -- there was a runaround switch and then you have a siding switch. They're relatively close together. And the switch was run through and caused a derailment. And since that point, we have been doing observations, and there have not been any exceptions to my knowledge since that derailment.

Q. So it's confident to say that you guys know that area and the potential there, and you're out testing, you and Mr. Kelsey, to ensure that this type of incident wouldn't occur.

A. Correct.

MR. LANDY: That's all I have, sir.

MR. DRAKULIC: Just one question. This is Greg Drakulic, FRA.

BY MR. DRAKULIC:

Q. How many switches would they handle when they're switching the plant? Just those two on north end there or --

A. You have two switches on the north end; you have two switches south. If they're going south, you have the south end at Silica,

and coming back you have the south end runaround, if you're putting cars in it. If not, then you come back to the north end and you have the siding at Silica and you have the north end of the runaround.

Q. So when they called the dispatcher, they only had to give him --

A. They had to -- they would have to give him --

Q. -- clear up the two switches?

A. Yes. All switches involved.

Q. All switches. Okay.

A. Yes, sir.

MR. DRAKULIC: All right. Thank you.

MR. TORRES: Tomas Torres with the NTSB.

BY MR. TORRES:

Q. You mentioned that the signal suspension started on Saturday?

A. Yes.

Q. Was a signal group out there actually doing something or --

A. I'm not sure.

Q. You're not sure. Well, what was the duration of the signal suspension? Like how long was it supposed to last?

A. Until suspended.

Q. Yeah, but like how many days or -- I mean, was there a time frame? You know, Saturday to Monday or --

A. It could -- I would say it was -- generally in signal suspension, it's generally a day or two, but it's really until

suspended. So I can't give you a --
Q. So they don't have a specific date when it's going to end?
A. Correct. When they're finished, they will give it up and we will suspend.
Q. And then it's voided?
A. They will state that it's suspended. We'll get a call from the chief dispatcher saying the signal groups, they have given back the signals because they're back in operation.
Q. Okay. You also mentioned that the trainmaster that was on duty called you.
A. Yes.
Q. Was there a reason for it or --
A. Because he was called first.
Q. He was called first?
A. Yes.
Q. And then are you his supervisor or --
A. No, no. We work hand in hand together. And generally in a situation when there is a derailment or a serious situation, all trainmasters are on deck. So everybody gets involved.
Q. Right. Okay. And how is it that you arrived first? Were you closer or what?
A. I'm probably closer. I can't say that I was there first.
Q. Okay. Another question now. You said the engineer said he asked the conductor twice?
A. Yes.

Q. And how did that come about?
A. I can't say. I don't know. All I know is he said, I asked him twice. And once he stated that, then, like I say, we -- at the time of what was going on, I didn't ask any more questions. I wanted to get them either attention or get them in a place where they could be okay, as long as they didn't need medical attention. But we eventually took the conductor, because of the situation that he was in, because he was kind of unresponsive when I asked a question.
Q. So you asked him about the switch or he just voluntarily --
A. Well, when I asked what happened, he -- all he could do was shake his head. And once again, at the situation, him covered in diesel fuel and everything, it wasn't the time.
Q. No, no, but the engineer, though.
A. The engineer was fine. I mean, he --
Q. I mean, he volunteered to say that the switch -- he asked him if the switch was lined twice?
A. Yes. Yes.
Q. Do you know what their moves were? Did you get familiar with what kind of moves they made there towards the end?
A. Once, upon me getting the download, it was determined that they were engine light when they came into the siding. So that's as far as I've -- my observation that I saw. I was trying to figure did they shove the whole train in or did they come in engine light. And based on the movement, it was determined that

they were engine light when they cut the --
Q. But when they came back to the siding with locomotives, did they come up from the industry track or from the main track?
A. No, they came engine light.
Q. No, I know, but --
A. The cars were already in the siding.
Q. No, I know they were in there. But, you know, what were they coming from? Were they coming from the auto rack facility or --
A. Yeah, they were coming from the -- yes.
Q. -- or were they coming from the main track?
A. They were coming from the auto rack facility out. They had spotted, they had spotted B lot of the industry.
Q. And that track is also off the main track?
A. Yes. On the -- off the east side, yes.
Q. And it's further north or south? Where is that switch?
A. It's south.
Q. South?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. So they came out from that industry, the auto rack plant?
A. Correct.
Q. And then came out to the main, and then shoved back into the siding?
A. Correct.
Q. Did you ask him about the derail?
A. No.

Q. Did you inspect it or --
A. No, I never went that far, I never went that far north. I saw that the train was -- the passenger train was blocking the west side. And once again, when I got to the east side, it was -- they were really getting passengers out, so I never went to the switch. I never went to the switch. I never went to the derail. I stayed in that vicinity of the -- where the locomotives were. I never inspected the whole -- investigated anything prior to where I was at. And once again, I was -- I got the downloads and, you know, all of that. So I didn't inspect the whole thing.
Q. How did you get the downloads? How did you get a download?
A. With my laptop.
Q. Do you have it on you or --
A. Excuse me?
Q. Do you have it on your laptop?
A. Do I have what on my --
Q. The event recorder download or what?
A. Yes, I do.
Q. Did you provide a copy?
A. Yes, yes. I pulled the event recorder, I pulled the DVR, and I presented that to the NTSB and FBI.
Q. Okay. On the event recorder, so what did you see on the event recorder? Can you describe, you know, what you saw on the event recorder?
A. Once again, I looked and I saw where they backed up roughly

800 feet to a coupling. That's how I determined that they came -- without interviewing the crew, that they backed up 800 feet. That lets me -- that let me know that they were engine light with their last move.

Q. So from the switch, from the main track switch to the time they came to a stop, that was 800 feet?

A. Yes, sir.

MR. TORRES: Okay, thank you.

Mike?

DR. HOEPF: Thanks, Tomas.

BY DR. HOEPF:

Q. Still doing all right?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay, great. Thanks. I don't have a lot of questions. I just want to just real quickly revisit this signal suspension. So the signals are out. You said it's pretty common practice, you kind of go to a plan B. You've got restricted speed. You've got a switch position awareness form, and that's something you normally don't have to do or that is something you normally do? I'm just trying to, I'm just trying to -- all I'm trying to do is -- maybe you could just talk a little bit about -- rather than me ask specific questions, maybe you could just talk a little bit again about differences between normal operations and then when the signal's out. What's different?

A. Where we are in Cayce, you have several signals. You have

signal track and you also have dark territory which requires EC1. We do both. So when there is a signal suspension, it's different on that segment of track, but there's nothing different than -- that we don't normally operate. So when it comes to signal suspension, when it comes to getting an EC1, when it comes to preparing the switch position awareness form, there's nothing different than we do every day.

Q. Okay. Okay. And I'm just -- and obviously, you know, I mean, not to belabor the point but, okay, you know, obviously something went wrong somewhere in the system and I'm just trying to get an idea of, you know, what went wrong. You know, were the controls in place not really adequate, you know? Was there something else that -- it seems to me there kind of, you know -- it kind of seems like a single point of failure. I'm not sure if you've heard that phrase used before, but it seems like it's kind of just -- everything is based on this conductor making an accurate assessment of the switch being in the right position.

Is there some kind of safeguard in place to make sure that, you know, if he gets caught snoozing, you know, that something like this doesn't happen? So he's supposed to check with the dispatcher, the engineer is supposed to verify; those are just verbal confirmations. Can you just explain to me, I mean, is there some kind of safeguard in place to make sure that if somebody forgets to realign a switch, that an accident doesn't happen?

A. I think I understand what you're trying to say. When a conductor lines a switch, he tells the engineer, switch is lined at this time. Engineer states what he stated and annotates it. When the switch is restored by the employee, when the switch is lined, the employee states, switch is lined, is restored at this time. Engineer repeats it, annotates it on switch position awareness form.

Q. Okay. And so that's the communication between the conductor and the engineer.

A. Correct.

Q. Okay, so --

A. They report it to the dispatcher.

Q. Okay. And when you say they, you mean the engineer reports it to the dispatcher?

A. The engineer can report it or the conductor. Generally the conductor comes up, reports everything. And once he's reported the switches have been handled, that's when he gives up the authority.

Q. Okay. So if the conductor were to report inaccurate information about the position of the switch, there's no way to verify that? So if I'm the conductor and I say that the switch is aligned, you know, has been aligned such that trains can go by on the B track, but in actuality, the switch has not been, has not been realigned, is there any system in place to verify that?

A. Other than actually watching it, actually seeing it, that's

your verification.
Q. Okay, okay. I'm just trying to verify it.
A. Especially in dark territory.
Q. Okay. Okay.
DR. HOEPF: Steve?
BY MR. AMMONS:
Q. Just one question, Eric. Steve Ammons, CSX. How many switches on the north end of Silica and the runaround track, how many main line switches did the conductor have to handle and restore for main track and report clear to the dispatcher?
A. Two.
Q. And can you name those switches?
A. The north end of Silica Siding and the north end of the runaround.
Q. When you were out -- the second question. I'm sorry. I told you one, but this is just a follow-up to that one. When you were out there, did you notice that the north end of the runaround switch had been restored for the main?
A. I did not see. I never went past the accident with the two engines. I never saw it.
Q. The switch in question, though, that was not restored is the north end of Silica Siding?
A. Correct. And that's the north end of --
Q. Which switch would Amtrak have encountered first?
A. The north end of Silica.

Q. Okay, thank you.

DR. McKAY: No more questions from me. Mary Pat McKay.

BY MR. RICHARDSON:

Q. I don't know if this has been asked yet, but back to the SPAF form. Was the one from the incident ever recovered?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. But each member should have one, correct?

A. Yes.

Q. Conductor and engineer should have the SPAF forms --

A. Yes.

Q. -- from that night?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. And did you ever find out where the conductor was when the impact occurred? Where was he at?

A. The conductor was -- based on his, based on his statement, he was in the cab of the locomotive and ran out the back when he realized what was occurring.

Q. Okay. Was there any radio communication --

A. I don't know.

Q. -- between the time that the engineer seen the Amtrak going into the siding? You didn't hear anybody scream over the --

A. I don't, I don't know. No.

Q. Okay. I didn't know if you all reviewed the tape or anything.

A. I haven't.

MR. RICHARDSON: Okay. That's all I have.

BY MR. CAMPBELL:

Q. I was going to ask about the SPAF form, but one question on that SPAF form is that -- is anywhere on there, is a derail? Do you verify the derail is in position? You verify it on the switch, but is there a block on there to check off that the derail was also reactivated?

A. No, sir.

Q. Okay. So it's just a rule and common practice to put the derailer back on when they're -- okay.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And far as -- just have one more question about that qualifying like local model, whatever you want to call it, three trips. Is that the same for someone who comes to, say, Cayce or another place to work that's qualifying on their own time? In other words, so a lot of times you have like, say, an engineer or conductor that works in Florence, South Carolina that does not have enough seniority to work there anymore, so he goes to Charleston or maybe comes to Columbia, you know, forced there. And which at that time, he would be paid by the carrier, by CSX, to qualify so that he could work.

A separate example which is, I think, what Mr. Vargo falls under, if I'm understanding correctly, he was like a conductor in Spartanburg, South Carolina, chose to come work in Cayce, which, you know, it would be up to him to qualify, you know, without pay,

you know, on your own time.
A. Correct.
Q. Would someone qualifying on their own time, you know, such as Vargo, would he fall under that three -- is it the same practice for -- it doesn't matter if it's on your own or not?
A. It's the same practice for all. It's the same practice for all because, once again, Cayce has so many industries outside of the yard that requires not only -- signal indication is signal indication, but when it comes to EC1 authority and working across town in several different industries that you won't see every day, we have to keep that requirement.
Q. I see. The complexity of the work you do here.
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And was -- do we know or do you know if Conductor Vargo, was he a qualified engineer --
A. No.
Q. -- or is he strictly a conductor? I know some are engineers and are cut back, and so --
A. No, Mr. Vargo was -- he's not been to engineer school.
MR. CAMPBELL: Okay. That's all I have.
MR. ALDRIDGE: Bryan Aldridge, BLET. And this may come out later. Do we know which employee gave up the authority?
MR. BETTS: I don't know.
MR. ALDRIDGE: Okay.
MR. REAVES: Stephen Reaves, Amtrak again. Just a few more

quick questions.

BY MR. REAVES:

Q. You mentioned you got the download off the locomotive and that there was -- there was two locomotives, right?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Do you know which one -- which one was the controlling locomotive when they went back into the siding? Was that the --

A. CSXT 130.

Q. 130.

A. Yes.

Q. Would that have been, would that have been facing --

A. North.

Q. -- north? Facing north. So they had the engineer shove back into there?

A. Correct.

Q. There's two locomotives shoving back. Did you see where -- so it shoved back 800 feet. Was there a safety stop, then a coupling? Or how do you know that there was actually a coupling?

A. There was a stop. There was a stop in between, and then there was a shove back roughly about 200-some feet to a coupling.

Q. Okay. And do you know -- I know you don't have the download in front of you, but roughly what time that coupling or that move stopped?

A. 1:48.

Q. 1:48?

A. Yes.

MR. REAVES: That's all I have. Thank you.

MR. HINES: Jon Hines, Amtrak. No questions.

MR. LANDY: Marcus Landy. No questions.

MR. TORRES: Tomas Torres with the NTSB.

BY MR. TORRES:

Q. On the event recorder, when you viewed it, were you able to determine how many times they went, you know, back and forth in the siding?

A. I didn't review the whole incident. I wanted to -- mine basically was to find out what happened at the incident. And that's when I determined that they were engine light when they came in. I didn't review the whole, the whole sequence of events from the time they went on duty until now. That's --

Q. Yeah, but during the switching operation right there, you didn't, you didn't look at it?

A. What do you mean?

Q. Like how many switching moves they made in that industry?

A. No. No, I didn't. I didn't go that far. No.

MR. TORRES: Okay, is that all for everybody?

DR. HOEPF: Just a couple concluding questions. And we ask these, you know, just for everybody. We just ask everybody.

BY DR. HOEPF:

Q. Do you have anything, any suggestions at all, whether pertaining to, you know, recent events or otherwise to improve

safety? Anything, just suggestions. You know, anything that could do to make a safer work environment.

A. No, sir. Not at this time.

Q. Okay. And if you think of something, you can always just let us know.

A. Okay. I will.

Q. And just, is there any questions that we should have asked you that we didn't? You know, anything that just didn't come up that might be relevant?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. Okay.

DR. HOEPF: Well, thank you so much. We really appreciate your time. Thank you for coming to talk to us.

I'm sorry, just --

MR. WRAY: I just wanted to -- I know I'm not allowed to ask any questions, but I wanted to ask you. He mentioned the download. There were two engines. Do you want to clarify for your record which one he took the download of?

MR. AMMONS: I was going to talk to him about the download --

MR. WRAY: Okay.

MR. AMMONS: -- all the download questions after this, unless you want to do that on the record, I mean. This is Ammons.

MR. TORRES: Yeah, we'll discuss the event recorder, you know.

MR. AMMONS: Yeah, we can do that as soon as, as soon as this

is over with, if you want.

MR. TORRES: Yeah, because the event recorder for the lead locomotive was sent to the lab.

MR. AMMONS: And we don't have ours yet. Not yet. I'll update you on that. I got some info on it.

MR. TORRES: Oh, okay.

BY MR. TORRES:

Q. Okay. Before we conclude, some of these questions were already asked and some of them probably don't pertain to you, but what was the train ID or job number?

A. F777-03.

Q. Okay, and your work history, like 72-hour work history? Like how many -- what kind of rest did you have in the last 3 days or so?

A. Me?

Q. Yeah.

A. I was out Saturday.

Q. Okay. So what's your hire date again?

A. May 14, 1995.

Q. Oh, okay, yeah. Your last time, last certification -- you're still a certified engineer --

A. Yes, I am.

Q. -- conductor? What's that?

A. '16. 2016.

Q. Okay. Did your training prepare you for the requirements of

the job?
A. Yes.
Q. Is this a safe place to work?
A. Yes.
Q. And again, you've been asked this: Is there anything you want to add?
A. Not at this time.
MR. TORRES: Okay. No more questions?
Okay, this will conclude the interview. Thank you. Appreciate it.
(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	COLLISION OF AMTRAK TRAIN #91 AND A STATIONARY CSX TRANSPORTATION TRAIN NEAR CAYCE, SOUTH CAROLINA FEBRUARY 4, 2018 Interview of Eric Betts
ACCIDENT NUMBER:	RRD18MR003
PLACE:	West Columbia, South Carolina
DATE:	February 5, 2018

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.

Transcriber