UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*	
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NEW JERSEY TRANSIT TRAIN #1614	*	
ACCIDENT AT HOBOKEN TERMINAL	*	Accident No.: DCA16MR011
AT HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY	*	
ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2016	*	
	*	

Interview of: STEPHEN HAMER

Weehawken, New Jersey

Sunday,
October 2, 2016

APPEARANCES:

DAVID BUCHER, Railroad Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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

NICHOLAS WEBSTER, M.D., Medical Officer
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PATRICK VEDDER, Inspector
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Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLET)

WILLIAM BATES
SMART, Transportation Division

I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

(12:30 p.m.)

MR. BUCHER: Okay. This is Dave Bucher, rail accident investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board and this is the interview of Steve Hamer, engineer on New Jersey Transit. The interview is in relation to the accident that occurred in Hoboken, New Jersey on September 29, 2016, and the accident number is DCA16MR011.

As I said, Steve, here is a little preface for the transcriptionist. 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 this interview will go into the public docket.

The interviewee can have one representative of the interviewee's choice. That representative may be an attorney, but is not required to be an attorney. The representative may not testify for the interviewee.

We'll go around the table and introduce ourselves. To my right I have?

DR. JENNER: Stephen Jenner, S-t-e-p-h-e-n, J-e-n-n-e-r, with the NTSB.

MR. VEDDER: Patrick Vedder, P-a-t-r-i-c-k, V-e-d-d-e-r, inspector, FRA.

MR. PARKIN: Bruce Parkin, B-r-u-c-e, P-a-r-k-i-n, safety

inspector, Federal Railroad Administration.

DR. WEBSTER: Nicholas Webster, N-i-c-h-o-l-a-s, W-e-b-s-t-e-r, medical officer, NTSB.

MR. FANNON: Randy Fannon, R-a-n-d-y, F-a-n-n-o-n, BLET Safety Task Force.

MR. BATES: William Bates, W-i-l-l-i-a-m, B-a-t-e-s, SMART UTU, National Transportation Safety Team.

MR. MATTISON: Fred Mattison, F-r-e-d, M-a-t-t-i-s-o-n, New Jersey Transit.

MR. HAMER: Stephen Hamer, S-t-e-p-h-e-n, H-a-m-e-r, New Jersey Transit, locomotive engineer.

MR. BUCHER: Thank you, Steve. This interview is to gather background information relative to the accident. Mr. Hamer is an engineer on the line on which the accident occurred.

INTERVIEW OF STEPHEN HAMER

BY MR. BUCHER:

Q. Steve, if you could for our group, go through the process of taking a train from Spring Valley to Hoboken, and any conditions, any special conditions that you can tell us about, appreciate it.

A. Report for duty. Do you want my specific job or you want --

Q. However is easiest for you to relate, you know, the trip.

A. In my job, in my case, report for duty at 7:22, walk out to the yard. My specific train is actually on West Yard 3 in Woodbine Yard, which is Spring Valley, New York. It's actually also known as the pedestal track. We go out there, do the full

brake tests without the EP on. Then we do a brake test with the EP on. Once that is done, the conductor gives a signal to pull up to the sign-up location to pick up the conductor.

At leaving time, about 6:54, we leave the yard -- not, I'm sorry, not 6:54 -- 7:54 -- no, 8:54, sorry. No, 7:54, we leave the yard, head into Spring Valley Station. It's basically yard limits up until you reach CP Spring. There are two switches there, two hand-throw switches. One is a sand track and then the other is the switch that controls movement on the north lead -- excuse me -- the main track and the south lead past CP Spring, which is your first controlled signal into the Pascack Valley Line territory, and enter Spring Valley Station.

Q. Okay.

A. Our particular job, we are express, a New York Express. We make the first three stops: Spring Valley, Nanuet, Pearl River, and after Pearl River we are express to Secaucus.

Leaving Spring Valley, we have a restriction. It's 30 miles an hour. East of the station there's a speed limit resume reminder board. And right after the first crossing there, which is Dutch Lane, there is a resume speed limit board. That track is 40 miles an hour to almost about Nanuet.

You get to Nanuet and make your station stops. Pearl River, station stop. The majority of the line is 50 miles an hour down to New Bridge Landing, which there is a interlocking at West Cole, it turns to 40 miles an hour. West Cole to milepost 12, which is

just west of Teterboro, it goes from 40 miles an hour to 60 miles an hour, 60 miles an hour all the way to just east of Sport interlocking, which is between -- excuse me -- Sport interlocking, and then you have Pascack Junction, which makes the New Jersey Transit Bergen County Line. Just before Pascack Junction, the speed gets you down to 45 miles an hour.

New Jersey Transit, to comply with new rules through the curves that are 30 miles an hour -- how can I say this? Where there's a 30-mile-an-hour difference from the curve to the main line or the maximum authorized speed of the track, New Jersey Transit has just reduced those speeds by changing the signaling. So, in a nutshell, Pascack Junction is about 6½, 7 miles from Hoboken. So from Pascack Junction, you are literally doing now 45 miles an hour, for the most part, all the way to Hoboken, which is your maximum speed, basically, except for one spot where there, if you can get up to 60, you can do 60 just before Secaucus Station.

East of Pascack Junction, even though it's 70-mile-an-hour track, it's 45 miles an hour. You have another restriction at HX Bridge, which is currently 15 miles an hour; otherwise, the bridge is 30. There's a curve east of HX Bridge. It is 40 miles an hour. It leads to another curve, which leads to a private crossing, which is a 25-mile-an-hour restriction head-end only for the crossing, as it's unprotected. And that leads you into Secaucus Station.

My specific train, normally we go into Track 3 at Secaucus,

detrain and entrain people, continue on into West End, also on Track 3. And once we get to the curve at West End, where it's 15 miles an hour, it's the dispatcher's discretion which way we actually go, but there's no set planned route that we take at that point. We normally go into Track 11 in Hoboken Terminal.

Sometimes we'll cross over at West End to line us up for an easy ingress, I guess that's the right word, into Track 11. There's times we cross over at East End, which is east of the Bergen Tunnels, and sometimes he brings us all the way down Track 3 to Terminal, crosses over to Track 11.

Q. Could you elaborate a little bit what the normal procedure is when you arrive at the station with the doors and --

A. Which station?

Q. Hoboken.

A. When we arrive at the station, stop the train. I put the train -- excuse me -- the brake valve and handle off, and at that point, when the train is stopped, conductors open up the doors. There are low-level platforms, so the traps for the doorways are up, in the up position. And as the people are detraining, I am in the process of cutting out, but I cannot cut out until I know there are at least two hand brakes on the train.

Q. All right. So you stay in the cab for --

A. Yes, I do.

Q. Okay. Okay. Remain in the cab.

MR. BUCHER: Okay. That's all I have for now. I'll pass it

off.

BY DR. JENNER:

Q. Yeah, thanks, Steve. If you can give an account, a detailed account about how you approach, I mean, the last couple hundred yards going into the station, so when you have to reduce the speed from 15 miles per hour to 10 miles per hour to make a safe stop.

A. Sure.

Q. Walk us through.

A. Normally once I hit the home signal at East End, which is I will guesstimate about a quarter mile from the shed, maybe a little less, that's where the signal gets you down to -- or excuse me, the cab signal will get you down to restrict. Once I get down to 15, because it's interlocking rules, that's where I put the bell on, because generally that's where some crews tend to be walking among -- around the tracks because they put their trains in the yard or what have you.

Depending on what track we're on, I'll cross over whichever direction from the track you're sending me, to Track 11. The depot, from the beginning of the shed and to the block is around 800 feet. I generally start braking about four or five cars away from the block, and it's -- I hate to say it this way, but it's all by feel. I do look at the gauges to see what's going on.

As I hit terminal interlocking, I'm constantly scanning the signals. And I'll be honest with you, the reason I do that is because when I started here 28 years ago, there were steam lines

in the ground and you couldn't see half the dwarf signals that were on the property, so you had to really be cognizant of where you were. So ever since then I learned, I'm always just scanning the signals and looking.

So when I enter the depot, doing 10 miles an hour, looking at the track, looking at what's around, on platforms around, and as I said, about four or five cars, I start my braking.

Q. Okay.

A. I ride it out, because it's really by feel, and bring it up to the block. And you just go -- you don't go in an EP hold, but that's what makes it a little more challenging, because you want to get as close as you can to -- not to the block -- not as close as you can to the block, but you want to get the people up to where they want to be.

Q. Can you discuss about what manipulations you're making, in terms of the accelerating and when you're braking and what --

A. The throttle's not --

Q. -- what not --

A. In my case, and I don't use the throttle at all, because once you hit -- well, generally once you hit East End, it's relatively downhill. You don't need throttle unless the dispatcher has stopped you at a signal. Especially once you hit terminal interlocking, you can coast all the way in, as long as he doesn't stop you. The only time you would need to throttle out one or two notches is because maybe somebody was walking in front of you,

they, maybe they didn't know you were coming or something, didn't look right or, you know, and you might've had to put the brake on and just a tad.

Q. Okay. And in your braking manipulations, how are you handling the braking?

A. It's hard to explain. Little applications. Everybody brakes differently. I tend, because when I started out, we had PS-68 brake valves and they were just, if you ask me, the best brake valves we had. But you had to just make little reductions. You couldn't make big reductions. At least that's the way I learned.

Q. Okay.

A. So when I brake, when I take reductions, I do little bits at a time.

Q. And can you give a notch number associated with that?

A. There are no notches. It's just once --

Q. Okay. From --

A. It's an application and back. There's no notches.

Q. Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: From what, I'm sorry, what position on the --

MR. HAMER: From -- well, all right, you're talking about -- okay, so you got release, electric hold, and your service position.

BY DR. JENNER:

Q. Right.

A. But there's no notches, like, first service notch.
Q. Okay.
A. So you go the service and then back to electrical -- or excuse me, back to Lap. I missed Lap.
Q. Service to Lap, one back and --
A. Service to Lap, service to Lap if I'm going to take another. So it's release, electric hold, Lap, service, handle off emergency.
Q. Okay. Do you have any idea if your strategy is applied by other engineers?
A. The way I brake?
Q. Um-hum.
A. People who came out in that general time frame, yeah, some. Others don't. It's a personal thing how people -- it's just like when you stop at a station, you know, some people stop at point A at one station and some people stop at point B at one station. You know, it's really personal choice.
Q. Okay.
A. Although you're supposed to make a 12-pound initial reduction.
Q. Okay. And where does that occur, the 12-pound initial reduction?
A. Coming into the station?
Q. Yeah. About what --
A. About four or five cars away.

Q. Okay.
A. But it -- you know, it's interesting. Every car is different. You know, if you make a 12-pound reduction on one car, it'll give you, you know, what, 15 pounds, 12 pounds brake cylinder. You do the same reduction on a different car it'll give you way more. I don't know if that's a thing with the brake valve or just the timing, how much you put it there.
Q. Okay. And you --
A. They are finicky, if that's -- if I can use that word.
Q. Okay. You typically operate five passenger car train?
A. 1618, my train in the morning is a four-car train normally. For the past 2 weeks we've been using a three-car set.
Q. Okay. Do you -- that final 800 yards, do you alter your stopping operations if it's between three-car and four-car?
A. No.
Q. So the -- where you start initiating braking four or five car lengths is the same for both trains?
A. Um-hum, generally. I'm not going to say it's the exact point.
Q. Okay.
A. I mean, there's some individuals out there who pride themselves in stopping and braking at the same point. You know, actually, when they -- when you come out, they teach you put down braking points, and I don't do that because your braking point depends on your speed. And yeah, I understand the terminal is 10

miles an hour, and generally you're going to be around the same area. But basically, what I'm saying is I don't -- when I'm coming into the terminal, I don't look for that one pole that's holding up the roof and say, okay, that's my braking point, that's where I put it on. That's not -- you know, generally I'll be in that four or five-car area.

Q. Okay. You talked about entering Track 11, I think. Have you ever entered Track 5?

A. Yes.

Q. Is there any difference between the two, in terms of strategy?

A. No. The only difference would be outside the shed, where the switches are in different locations. So when you're coming into Track 11, depending on your lineup, you might have a longer straight shot into 11, whereas the switches outside 5 and 6 are not too far outside the shed.

Q. Okay. But in terms of where you --

A. Speed-wise, you wouldn't have to adjust, no.

Q. Okay. And the distance where you initiate the braking --

A. Wouldn't change.

Q. Okay. Is there anything particular about Track 5 that's more challenging than other tracks?

A. No. Just at certain times of the year, the sun is right behind you. And the way the roof is built -- so the terminal was built in 1907, so steam trains. So the way the roof was built was

to let the steam exhaust out. So right above the train are -- it's an open canopy. So at certain times of the year, it just allows the sun to come right down in your face.

So during those times of the year, you really can't see the end of the block, or the end of the track. So you have to come in slower. And it's interesting, because about a quarter of the car away, that's when the sun is out of your eyes, because the rest of the terminal roof and all, and that's when you can see the block.

Q. Okay.

A. That's the only thing that would be challenging in coming into these terminal tracks.

Q. Okay. Have you heard of any co-workers, colleagues, fellow engineers who have had issues with that terminal, coming in and safely stopping?

A. Yeah, it's happened -- in hitting the block or --

Q. Yeah, hitting the block to some --

A. Things like that have happened in the past.

Q. All right.

A. I mean, not to this extent. Sure.

Q. Right. Do you have any insight about the circumstances and why it may have happened?

A. Well, sometime -- one time I know about, the conductor was on the wrong track and the engineer was on a different track and --

Q. Okay.

A. It's usually, it's happened to a couple passenger trains in

the past 28 years. You know, just a bump. But the biggest times it's happened were yard moves, I think.

Q. Okay. Have you found the equipment that you operate reliable?

A. Mechanically?

Q. Um-hum.

A. Not always.

Q. Okay. What are some of the issues that you're suggesting?

A. You have something, what they used to call DCILA (ph.) stats. I don't know what they call them now, but they're part of the slip-side system of the -- basically it's an antilock brake system. Technically it turns out to be a bad sensor.

So to give you an indication, you're coming down the track, you're making a station stop, and when you get to down about 5 miles an hour, for some reason the sensor will kick in. And it's -- when it does this, it's standard. I don't know why it does it. It really behooves me. But the sensor will kick in, meaning the antilock brake system comes on. Your brake cylinder gauge will be down to zero. And sometimes it does that for 2 seconds, sometimes it does it for a second.

But the reason it annoys me is because jostles the train around and it makes you look like you don't know what the heck you're doing, you know, you're a poor engineer, you know, train-handling wise. And I actually take pride in what I do and I don't want that person getting off in Hoboken looking at me saying that

guy doesn't know what he's doing.
Q. Okay.
A. And in that situation, those trains, when they do that -- and they're quite rapid around the property, they do that at every stop. So --
Q. Okay.
A. Now, do I know if it's just the wheel set underneath me or other -- I know it's the wheel set underneath me because the brake cylinder gauge is going to zero in that case. But I'm not sure if it's also in other sets as well, in that consist.
Q. Okay. Do you ever experience or heard of situations where trains accelerate unexpectedly?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you talk about those, please?
A. I don't know the specifics, but we had at least one incident in the past where the engine was actually shoving and the throttle was not -- or the throttle was in idle. Ask me what the actual reason for that was at that time, I don't know.
Q. Okay.
A. But it has happened in the past.
Q. Great. Okay. Thank you.
BY MR. VEDDER:
Q. Patrick Vedder, FRA. Steve, when you leave the yard, what type of brake test are you doing, class-wise?
A. It was a Class IA.

Q. You guys do a full Class IA really?
A. Oh, I'm sorry. We do an on/off.
Q. Oh, so a Class II. Okay. So mechanical does the one, they do --
A. Yes. I'm sorry.
Q. All right. No problem. Just curious.
After you make your initial 12-pound reduction when you're taking those bites, those little reductions, do you have an estimate of how many pounds you're making of those reductions? Are they, like, 3 pounds, 5 pounds, 6 pounds? Do you know? Do you have any idea?
A. To get to the 12?
Q. No, no, no. Once you're at your 12 and you're coming in, you're talking about making those little reductions. How much of -- do you have any idea of pound-wise what those little reductions are? Just a ballpark guess.
A. Two, 3, 4 pounds. I don't know.
Q. Okay. So you're making --
A. Because I'll be honest with you, I do use the gauges, but I run by feel.
Q. Sure. Okay. Yeah, just -- and then the other question I had was the track speed we discussed is 10 miles an hour coming into the terminal, into the shed.
A. Right.
Q. Are you usually at 10 or are you usually around, like, 7 or 8

or 6 or 5? I mean, what's the actual speed you're usually coming in at?

A. Ten, 11.

Q. Ten, 11? Okay.

A. I mean, you got to understand, we have some speedometers -- these are electronic speedometers based on a sensor on the wheel, and a lot of them don't necessarily maintain a steady 10 or steady 9.

Q. Okay.

A. You know, sometimes they'll go from 9 to 12, from -- so I mean, generally, the cab cars are pretty good. They're steady. Most of the times you'll see -- I'll call it a wavering speedometer -- is GP40s and possible other, you know, other engines. It's usually the engines.

Q. Okay. Thank you.

BY MR. PARKIN:

Q. Bruce Parkin, P-a-r-k-i-n, FRA. Hi, Steve.

A. Hi.

Q. You've been an engineer, a locomotive engineer for 28 years?

A. I actually started out as a conductor.

Q. Oh, okay.

A. So I was a qualified conductor and then I transferred to the engineer training program.

Q. Okay.

A. I've been with the company for 28 years.

Q. Twenty-eight years. And you're very familiar with Hoboken Terminal?
A. I'd like to think so.
Q. Okay. On an overcast day, such as what occurred on Thursday, the 29th, on a day similar to that, if you were coming into Track 5, at what point coming into the shed would you be able to see the bumping block and then there's a dwarf signal that --
A. On an overcast day?
Q. Yes.
A. Or, like, just like the day on Thursday?
Q. Yes. Yes.
A. Immediately.
Q. Okay. So and that's -- I forgot what you said. It's --
A. Well, actually, if you're coming into Track 5, once you basically clear the switches and you're just about to hit the train shed, you can see the block.
Q. Okay.
A. Unless it's a little bright out and there might be a little shadow. But once you get into the train shed, you can see the block.
Q. And I think you said that's somewhere around 800 feet, you thought?
A. Yeah, because you can fit six cars and an engine under the shed, so each car is about 110.
Q. Okay. And you stated you typically start to brake about

four --
A. Four to five cars.
Q. -- four to five car lengths away. And that's, according to New Jersey Transit rules, you're supposed to come in not power-braking; is that correct?
A. Correct.
Q. And just using straight air, not using the EP brake at all?
A. You're not allowed -- correct. You're not allowed to use the EP coming up to a stop signal or the block. I'm sorry, what was the, before that you said?
Q. Oh, you're, so you're not using --
A. Power-braking.
Q. -- you're not power-braking and you're not using the EP brake, so it's basically what we would consider straight air you're coming in on?
A. Right. And to be honest with you, the only equipment we can now only power-brake physically on now is if you have a GP40 on the back. The rest of the equipment we have, if you take -- I believe it's about 10 pounds of brake cylinder, it's -- power cut out.
Q. Okay. And that's the -- so when you were initially went through training, that's the way you're trained to approach Hoboken Station and the bumping block; is that inaccurate?
A. Without EP, yes.
Q. Yes. Okay. Now, what would happen if an engineer was

approaching Hoboken Terminal and waited until two car lengths at 10 miles an hour, waited until they got approximately two car lengths from the bumping block and then started to apply their brakes? In your estimation, with your experience --

A. In my estimation, you would have to take a bigger application. I brake earlier to try to guarantee better train handling. I'm not one that flies into stations, as they call it out here, stand them up/sit them down kind of thing. I do not run a train that way. And to be honest with you, the way the time schedule is, there's no need to fly into stations and brake late and stop. So if the longer you wait to make a reduction, the bigger application you're going to have to make.

That didn't come out right. The longer you wait to get to the block, the bigger application you're going to have to make.

Q. On the brakes?

A. Yes.

Q. For the brake? Okay. That would typically be felt by the crew members in the back and, I would imagine, the passengers would feel that more than an engineer like yourself, who brakes four to five cars prior?

A. Yeah. To give you a good explanation, I think, of what I'm talking about, if you make a good 8 to 10 to 12-pound reduction -- not reduction, excuse me -- brake cylinder application, because it's easier for me to say it that way, that's enough to put the brakes on without really jostling people around in the train.

Really anything more than that, anything more than 10 to 12 pounds of brake cylinder on the train, you're going to kind of startle -- I don't know how to say it -- you're going to jostle the train just a bit.

Q. So if an engineer was to come in at 10 miles an hour and waited two car lengths from the bumping block to start to apply the brakes, would that be considered coming in heavy?

A. I think so. But you know, you also got to understand, all the -- this stuff out here is just like a car. Cars aren't the same. Everything's different. So my three-car train or four-car train is not going to operate the same as that three or four-car train. You got two different engines. You know, this one might have tread brakes, that engine, this one's going to have tread brakes or maybe disc brakes, or the cars -- it's just, it's just like cars. They don't operate the same. So it takes you a good three station stops to figure out how your train actually operates, in my experience.

Q. In order to give the passengers --

A. A smoother ride, in my case.

Q. -- a smoother ride, the braking at four to five car lengths would be typically the better technique to use coming into the station?

A. I can't say it's a better technique. It's the technique I use.

Q. Okay.

A. What works for me doesn't necessarily work for somebody else.
Q. Okay.
A. Sorry.
Q. Now you said earlier about conditions that might cause the brakes to release, and you mentioned DCILA stat sensors?
A. Um-hum.
Q. In a situation like that, where the sensor did trip, would the brakes release momentarily and come back on or would they release and stay released?
A. No. They release and come back on.
Q. Okay. And that -- go ahead.
A. No, go ahead.
Q. And that happens very quickly?
A. One, 2 seconds. They're not -- it's not a standard faux pas. So it's one, 2 seconds --
Q. Okay.
A. -- where the brake cylinder goes to zero and then the cylinder comes back up.
Q. Okay. I have no other questions right now. Thank you.
BY DR. WEBSTER:
Q. This is Dr. Nicholas Webster. As we were thinking about this, the operator of the train, the accident train, we talked to him and the -- his last recollection is performing some actions at, I believe, the entry into the train, into the --
A. Terminal?

Q. -- into the terminal. Could you estimate how long a train entering the terminal at a normal speed would take to stop?
A. Three, 4, 5 seconds.
Q. Okay.
A. I don't know. Maybe 5, 10 seconds.
Q. Okay.
A. I'm not a good judge of time and -- I was never Einstein.
Q. Okay. Assuming that he's done -- everything he said he did, if he takes no action on the brakes from -- no additional action on the brakes, what is going to happen to that train?
A. No additional action after what? Or no action?
Q. No -- after he entered -- no action. He's entered, he's not touching -- he stopped touching anything.
A. Okay.
Q. What will happen if he moves no levers at that time?
A. If he's coming into the terminal at 10 miles an hour, he's going to hit the block, if that's what you're asking.
Q. What's going to happen to the -- is this train going to speed up? Is it going to continue to slow down? What's going to happen to the motion of that train?
A. Oh. It's fairly level, but slightly downgrade because, you know, the terminal is built right above the river. So there is a very slight downgrade. In other words, if the train was sitting there and somebody did not put a hand brake on after everybody got off, and for some reason the brakes bled off, that train would

roll back and hit the block. So it is a slight downgrade at some point.

But what would happen if he didn't put the brakes on, the inertia of the engine and the weight of the engine behind would keep pushing the train. It wouldn't increase the speed, generally, it would just keep rolling.

Q. Okay. That's -- yeah, that's all I have. Thank you.

A. Thanks.

BY MR. FANNON:

Q. Randy Fannon, BLET. When we interviewed the engineer yesterday, he said that he operated with the controls with both hands. Do you operate with both hands, one hand?

A. You're going to laugh at this. I actually use two hands. My hand is on the throttle, and because there are a lot of crossings on my Pascack Valley Line that I operate, I actually have my two fingers on the horn and I keep my thumb on the reverser lever because it is so long, the handle itself on the lever, that it is possible where you can just almost inadvertently grab it and move it. So I actually keep my hand, my thumb, on the reverser lever, and it just became a habit, so that's how I do it now.

Q. Okay. Speaking of inadvertently, after some discussion -- can you accidently cut the locomotive or the control, the brake controls out? I think it was brought up that the cut-in and cut-out is right beside the brake?

A. Yes. When the train is stopped you can, because I've done

it. I actually went to hit the -- oh, I forget what I was -- oh, sander or something. But we were stopped in Pearl River Station -- and this was a few years back -- but I don't know what the heck I was thinking at the time, but I went and went to hit the button and stupidly I hit the out button and put the train in emergency.

Q. Do you know if it can be done while in motion?

A. I do not know.

Q. Okay. You kind of referenced this, but does all the brake applications apply the same? Today's a cab car, tomorrow's locomotive, a different cab car the next day --

A. No. I mean, you have different brake valves and -- are you talking all the equipment we have here?

Q. Well, just some of the differences. Highlight some of the differences is what I'm going at. Because if you put a little spurt on today, you might get 4 pounds on this equipment. You put a little, like you said, a little blast on and you might get 8?

A. Yeah. It's my opinion that they are different, yes, that there is a difference. That, in other words, I'll say if you put 1 second of application on cab car 6036, you might get 8 pound, but if you put 1 second of reduction on cab car 6057, you might get a different reduction.

Q. And with the trains being different sizes, I think you -- on the story that you've portrayed today, you're on a fast express and you normally had four cars and you're now with three in the locomotive. Does that change -- when you're coasting into the

station, extra passenger weight, locomotive weight, does any of that change the velocity?
A. If it does, there's no great indication to me, no.
Q. Okay.
A. In other words, like I think I mentioned before, I don't see really a big difference in where I'm going to start braking the train with a car difference.
Q. Okay.
A. Now, I'm not --
Q. And with the passengers being -- like on Thursday, if the magnitude of the passengers were in the first two cars, on a downhill grade, will that weight change --
A. In my opinion, no.
Q. Okay.
A. But I was never good at physics.
Q. Last question, when you're coming into the station --
A. Hoboken?
Q. Yes, at Hoboken Terminal, you're coming into the platform, you're at the end, is there anything there that could distract you?
A. Sure. There's people walking around, there's mechanical, there's -- it's the world. It's --
Q. So there's a lot of action going on?
A. Yes.
Q. Especially at rush hour?

A. Oh, certainly.
Q. And then could there be distractions behind you?
A. There could be. If somebody banging on the door, that doesn't really distract me. But people could bang on the door or inadvertently knock into the door, but --
Q. Rail buffs standing, looking over your shoulder?
A. Yeah, that doesn't easily distract me. But if they're standing over your shoulder, they're standing next to you because the door is closed and there's usually something on the window, or it's shaded or blacked out.
Q. Okay. Thank you.
BY MR. BATES:
Q. William Bates, SMART UTU. I only have one question. Has anything changed on the line that you work from Spring Valley to Hoboken, have they had any speed changes recently?
A. Yeah. I mentioned that earlier. So from Pascack Junction, they -- Pascack Junction in, because of a couple curves, 30-mile-an-hour difference to the maximum speed, they lowered the -- they changed the signals to comply with the new rules.
So basically from Pascack Junction in, once you get on the Bergen County line, it's a 70-mile-an-hour track. You've now lowered it to 45 miles an hour. So effectively, from Pascack Junction to Hoboken Terminal, your speed is no greater than 45 miles an hour, unless, once you get east of the private crossing by West Secaucus, and if you can get up to 60 at that point before

you get to Secaucus, you're doing pretty good.
Q. So the speed used to be 70 and now it's 45 in those areas?
A. Yes. So you went from a train to basically the Toonerville Trolley, yes.
MR. BATES: Okay. All right. That's all the questions I had.
BY MR. MATTISON:
Q. Okay. This is Fred Mattison, Jersey Transit. Steve, when -- you talked about when you go to depart the yard, you do a standing brake test, the Class II brake test?
A. Um-hum.
Q. You went into detail that you do it with your EP off and the EP on?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you explain why?
A. Because the rule specifies you're supposed to without the EP.
Q. Do you know the theory behind the rule or do you just know that that's what the rule says to do?
A. Well, EP is using electric.
Q. Yeah.
A. So you don't know exactly what your electric system is doing.
Q. Okay.
A. So you got to see what your straight air is doing.
Q. Okay. Is there another brake test you do after --
A. Do the running brake test.

Q. Can you explain that process to us, please?
A. Um-hum. A 12-pound reduction, at least, to get down at least 3 miles an hour.
Q. Okay. Do you do that with the locomotive traction power applied or in idle?
A. Depends on --
Q. What you do.
A. It depends -- well, it depends on what engine you have.
Q. Okay. Let's say you had four Comets and a GP40 on the hind end. What would be your process for that?
A. I'd do it with the traction applied.
Q. Okay. The process that Jersey Transit has in place for the running brake test, would you be able to significantly tell if your brakes are functional or not through that running brake test?
A. Sure.
Q. Okay. And if you didn't, what would you do? What would you do?
A. If I didn't what?
Q. If your brake --
A. If I determined that the brakes weren't working properly?
Q. If your brakes weren't as effective as you think they should be, what would you do?
A. I'd inspect the train.
Q. Okay.
A. Depending on where I was. If I'm still in the yard, I'm

going to notify the mechanical.
Q. Okay. All right. Let's get to the end of the line in Hoboken. We talked about the braking process. Coming in, you put your -- you apply your brakes and you feel it out as you're coming in towards the bumping block. You said you don't use EP?
A. Um-um.
Q. What happens if you make a misjudgment and you have a little too much brake on and you're going to stop shorter than you wanted to from the bumping block, what would your process be?
A. Depending on where I am in the depot?
Q. Yes.
A. So if I'm at the six-car mark or five-car mark in the depot, I would probably release it and go after it again. And I'd do it right away. If I was any sooner than that, I'd let her sit where she is, where she stops.
Q. Okay. You would just stop short?
A. Uh-huh.
Q. Okay. Do you have a break on your job at all? Do you have, like, a --
A. Sure.
Q. -- you work one round trip, or one train in and then you sit for one?
A. Yes, I do.
Q. Okay. I'm not (indiscernible). Someday I'll have your seniority. It'll be a long time until then.

Do you sit in the break room and talk about train handling with other engineers at all?
A. The locker room lawyers? No, I try not to get into brake -- train handling with the locker room lawyers, no.
Q. What if an engineer junior to you came up and he said, hey, I have a question about train handling. Have you ever had --
A. Sure, I would discuss it with him. Sure.
Q. Have you ever had a conversation with an engineer, like, say a junior man, a new engineer, about how to approach the bumping block?
A. I don't know if we've ever had that specific conversation, no.
Q. Or about train handling general?
A. My biggest lesson to people, if I'm teaching something or if I'm trying to explain something -- it kind of doesn't apply now, but when we had our Comet I's where we didn't have disc brakes -- and I really still think it applies now, but when I was instructing, I would have them cut out the -- excuse me -- the dynamic brake to show them what it really means to have to stop a train. Because the more gizmos and gadgets they give us to help us stop, it takes away the engineer in all of us. It makes people complacent. So I tell people, you know, you should really learn how to stop a train without all the gizmos and stuff so you know what it's really like, especially this time of year in the fall, because fall is crunch time when the leaves come out, and it's not

a fun situation.
Q. In your experience, and you've been here a long time, but most recently, let's say within the past 5 years, have you observed or participated in other engineers' discussing train handling process, either in Hoboken or outside of the terminal on various parts of the Hoboken --
A. That specific process?
Q. Or just in general, talking about train handling, what they do or how they handle certain situations?
A. If it is, it's usually after something happened or somebody was caught doing something or -- because at that point it's usually something that's contentious and everybody is debating the merits on whether it's right or wrong.
Q. But in general, without an incident, engineers usually don't discuss different train handling techniques as casual conversation?
A. No, not normally. We're beyond that.
Q. Do you have any idea why? It is your craft. Do you have any idea why engineers don't talk train handling a whole lot?
A. Because it's your job. You do it all day long and -- I mean, some people want to talk that all day. That's fine. I mean, do we sit there and spend 20 minutes talking something? Like I said, only if there was a situation and there's contention or it's contentious of what the issue is, we'll sit there and discuss it. As normal daily activity, do you sit there and discuss railroad?

No. It's not that we hate it, it's just we've been there, done it.
Q. Do you think that's a safe assessment to say that about all the seniority brackets of the engineers, new engineers, senior engineers, middle-of-the-road engineer, basically, just in general?
A. That they don't discuss it?
Q. Yeah. Yes.
A. I generally see where if you get a newer employee, a newer engineer, they might discuss it, but they don't sit there and have an actual debate about it. I mean, it's not -- it doesn't become a debate. You know, somebody might ask a question and it'll just go back and forth maybe for a minute.
Q. Okay. All right. Have you ever ridden the head end of another train into Hoboken that power-braking is occurring, just as -- talking with an engineer? Have you ever observed it while another engineer is doing it?
A. Technically, I'm not -- or truthfully, I'm not sitting there watching what the guy is doing. I'm watching out front, watching the signals. Do people do it? I would assume some do.
Q. Okay. Do you have -- can you explain to us, even though you said you don't do it, what you think power-braking into Hoboken Terminal would be?
A. What do you mean what it would be?
Q. Like, what an engineer who is power-braking, explain to us

what a locomotive engineer who is power-braking into Hoboken is doing.
A. In my theory, he probably took too much air and now he's just trying to push himself up a little.
Q. Okay.
A. But at one time, power-braking used to be legal.
Q. Okay.
A. It was in the airbrake book that you were allowed to power-brake.
Q. If an engineer is power-braking, how much power from the locomotive is he applying to the train? How much -- what throttle position is --
A. That's up to the engineer.
Q. All right. So it would be completely --
A. That's up to the situation I guess he's doing.
Q. All right.
A. There's no set power. I mean, that's -- if the guy's doing it, he's doing it to do what he wants to do, so -- maybe he's in throttle 1, maybe he's in throttle 2. I don't know.
Q. Okay. Do you think an engineer would ever be in the full power coming into a bumper by power-braking?
A. Hell, no.
Q. Okay. Very good. If you have a defect with your train, can you --
A. What kind of defect?

Q. A defect. Just what would be the reporting process for that? Minor or major, either one.
A. Conductor needs to put it on his form, but generally I like to call the mechanical desk.
Q. Now, do you think it's -- when you report a defect, how fast do you think New Jersey Transit takes into account that defect and repairs it? In your experience, if you had a defect that you reported?
A. It depends on where you are and what it is, if you really want to know the truth.
Q. That's kind of why we're here.
A. Well, I understand that. No, things don't always get fixed.
Q. Do you ever write anything on a record or whatever to report a defect?
A. No, that's the conductor's job.
Q. Okay. Do you ever report anything to conductor?
A. Sure I do.
Q. Okay. Have you ever reported the same defect on a piece of equipment multiple days in a row?
A. I believe I have, and there's a couple times where I've reported it multiple weeks in a row.
Q. Okay. That's all I have.
MR. BUCHER: We'll go around one last time. I have no more myself.
BY DR. JENNER:

Q. Yeah, if -- this is Steve Jenner. I heard that you were with, you mentioned, New Jersey Transit 28 years, started off as a qualified conductor, started off --
A. Well, I learned to be a qualified conductor, yes.
Q. You became a qualified conductor?
A. Yes.
Q. How long were you a conductor?
A. Three years.
Q. From what year to what year?
A. Oh, God. I got married in 1988, so I was here in 1989.
Q. I'm sorry?
A. February '89; 1989.
Q. Feb. '89 until?
A. As a conductor?
Q. Yes.
A. Well, 3 years, so I guess about '92.
Q. '92? And as a qualified engineer?
A. I'm not sure about the exact qualification date, but after '92.
Q. And until present?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Great. Thanks.
BY MR. VEDDER:
Q. Patrick Vedder, FRA. What type of engine do you typically have on your 1618?

A. It varies. It's a rotating pool. To be specific, what consist Train 1616 has today, 9 times out of 10 I have tomorrow.
Q. Okay.
A. So in other words, that's how that specific --
Q. And you said earlier the engine type doesn't usually dictate your braking into the station?
A. No, not generally.
Q. Okay.
A. I don't think it affects anything that much. I really don't.
BY MR. PARKIN:
Q. Bruce Parkin, FRA. Steve, are you now or have you ever been an instructor for student trainees?
A. Yes, I have.
Q. Okay. Are you currently --
A. No.
Q. -- used as a trainer?
A. No. We were -- I won't get into that.
Q. So in the past as a OJT, on-the-job training instructor for student engineers, the techniques that you described earlier of braking coming into Hoboken, like, four to five cars prior, is that what you generally teach students when they're with you?
A. I would say yes, but I also tell -- I also used to tell students, listen, this is the way I do it, but guess what? When you get promoted and when you start train handling, you're going to do it the way you do it. Because what happens is an engineer

trainee goes with a variety of engineers. We're not all the same. We teach different ways. And you tell the student, listen, I'm going to teach you this way, the way I do it. This guy is going to teach you this way. He's going to teach you that way. And you're, unfortunately, going to have to sit there and learn, mesh, figure out how you want to do it, as long as it's within the rules and regulations. So do I teach my method? Yeah, I do.

Q. Okay. Thank you. And then in the years that you've worked for NJT, do you know of or have you heard of situations where an engineer who applied the brakes and either the brakes did not apply or they took a longer time than normal to apply, with using the Comet control cars?

A. Well, that's a very vague question, because every car we've had were Comet cars. So the Comet I's we had are Comet cars, but they're totally different braking system, for all intents and purposes, than what we have now.

Q. On the Comet V. Let me correct that.

A. Okay.

Q. On the Comet V control cars?

A. Okay. So difficulty getting air brakes onto the --

Q. Yes.

A. -- the wheels, the --

Q. Yes. Difficulty with when you applied the brakes, that either they didn't apply or they applied late? That --

A. Yeah, I know what you're saying. I'm just thinking. I'm

sorry. I'd have to say generally, no, I don't think so.

MR. PARKIN: Okay. Thank you. That's all I have.

BY MR. FANNON:

Q. Just a couple, Steve. Randy Fannon. Indicators on the outside of the cars, what -- what do they tell, either the employees or the people? What do the lights --

A. Depends on which indicators you're looking at. So in the front, by the engineer's cab, you'll have a brake light, which is blue, and then you'll have a white light, which indicates that the cab's single system is activated, it's on.

Q. And if the brakes are applied?

A. There's another indicator back by the west, by the B end of the coach, of each coach, there's a red light. Means the door is -- or a door is open somewhere on that vehicle. There is a orange light, or sometimes it looks yellow, might look yellow, which indicates that the brakes are applied to some extent on that car. And there's a green light, which indicates that the brakes are released.

Q. Okay. And --

MR. BUCHER: I'm going to take a break.

(Off the record.)

(On the record.)

MR. BUCHER: Back on. We're back on. Okay. This is Dave Bucher. We're back. And --

MR. FANNON: Randy Fannon. No more questions.

MR. BATES: Oh, Will Bates. No questions.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I have no more questions.
MR. BUCHER: Okay. Unless I see --
DR. WEBSTER: This is --
MR. BUCHER: You have one more question?
BY DR. WEBSTER:
Q. Yeah. This is Dr. Nicholas Webster. If I was to fall over --
A. If you were to fall over? Is that what you said?
Q. Fall over. I'm sitting forward and I become unresponsive, I've got my hand on the brake lever and I pull it back, what's going to happen to the train?
A. You pull the brake lever back?
Q. Yeah. It's just -- it comes back towards me.
A. Depends on how far you go. If you go all the way to release.
Q. Into release?
A. Uh-huh.
Q. And if I fall all the way forward and --
A. Once again, depending on how far you go, either handle off, which will draw the brakes all the way down and make you stop --
Q. Okay.
A. -- or if you go to emergency, which is the furthest you can go, it's going to instantly make you stop.
Q. Okay. Thank you. That's all I wanted to know.
A. You're welcome.

MR. BUCHER: Okay. No more questions, concludes the interview of Mr. Hamer.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	NEW JERSEY TRANSIT TRAIN #1614 ACCIDENT AT HOBOKEN TERMINAL AT HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2016 Interview of Stephen Hamer
DOCKET NUMBER:	DCA16MR011
PLACE:	Weehawken, New Jersey
DATE:	October 2, 2016

was held according to the record, and that this is the original, complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed to the best of my skill and ability.

_____
Karen A. Stockhausen
Transcriber