

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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NEW JERSEY TRANSIT TRAIN #1614

ACCIDENT AT HOBOKEN TERMINAL

AT HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2016

Accident No.: DCA16MR011

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Interview of: RYAN HOLMGREN and
MICHAEL WILSON

South Kearny, New Jersey

Tuesday,
October 4, 2016

APPEARANCES:

DAVID BUCHER, Railroad Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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

PATRICK VEDDER, Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

BRUCE PARKIN, Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

FRED MATTISON
New Jersey Transit

RANDY FANNON
Safety Taskforce
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLET)

WILLIAM BATES
SMART, Transportation Division

STEPHEN HAMER
SMART, Transportation Division

MICHAEL KNAPP
General Chairman, American Train Dispatchers Association
(Representative on behalf of interviewees)

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:00 p.m.)

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3 MR. BUCHER: Okay. This is Dave Bucher, Rail Accident
4 Investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, and
5 this is the interview of Ryan Holmgren and Michael Wilson. They
6 are both main line train dispatchers for New Jersey Transit at
7 South Kearny, New Jersey.

8 Their interview is relative to NTSB's accident investigation,
9 the accident at Hoboken, New Jersey, on September 29, 2016. The
10 Accident Number is DCA16MR011.

11 The time is approximately 2 p.m. on October 4th.

12 Okay. Guys, the purpose of this investigation is to increase
13 safety, not assign fault, blame or liability. However, NTSB
14 cannot guarantee full confidentiality or immunity from certificate
15 action.

16 A transcript of this or a summary will -- of the interview
17 will go into the public docket, and the interviewee can have one
18 representative of his choice, and that's Mr. Knapp today.

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

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

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

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

1 Safety Taskforce.

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

4 MR. PARKIN: Bruce Parkin, B-r-u-c-e, P-a-r-k-i-n, FRA
5 Inspector.

6 MR. BATES: William Bates, SMART TD.

7 MR. HAMER: Stephen Hamer, S-t-e-p-h-e-n, H-a-m-e-r, SMART
8 Transportation Division.

9 MR. KNAPP: Michael Knapp, M-i-c-h-a-e-l, K-n-a-p-p, General
10 Chairman, American Train Dispatchers Association.

11 MR. WILSON: Michael Wilson, M-i-c-h-a-e-l, W-i-l-s-o-n, main
12 line train dispatcher for New Jersey Transit.

13 MR. HOLMGREN: Ryan Holmgren, R-y-a-n, H-o-l-m-g-r-e-n, main
14 line train dispatcher, New Jersey Transit.

15 MR. BUCHER: Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today. We
16 appreciate it.

17 INTERVIEW OF RYAN HOLMGREN and MICHAEL WILSON

18 MR. BUCHER: As I said before, we'll just take turns and you
19 guys can relate your story from the time that you interacted, if
20 you did, with the train crew of 1614 and your actions in getting
21 the train across the system from, I guess, Spring Valley to
22 Hoboken Terminal. How about we start with Ryan, and then we'll
23 switch to Michael.

24 MR. HOLMGREN: All right. At some point during the morning,
25 I don't know the exact time offhand, the conductor would have

1 called and marked up the train to find out if there's any
2 pertinent information other than the regular paperwork that the
3 train would go with, Form D's and whatnot. There was no
4 additional paperwork that was needed for his trip. At that point
5 he was just given signals from where he left in Woodbine Yard, all
6 the way down through Secaucus and West End. There was no
7 situations that would have come about that needed to be recorded
8 or even talked about. We had zero communication to the best of my
9 knowledge from when the train was marked up to when it had left
10 Secaucus off of our territory.

11 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Dave Bucher again. Would you have
12 observed him on any boards, his transition across any of your
13 displays?

14 MR. HOLMGREN: Do you want me to say my name?

15 MR. BUCHER: Yeah.

16 MR. HOLMGREN: Ryan. Yes, we have the TMAC system that tells
17 us where the trains are at. We aren't given any particular
18 speeds. We do have -- there's a way that the computer can,
19 through time, tell us whether they're on time or they're late.
20 There was nothing that went along with the trip of the train that
21 was out of the ordinary that would have caused any reason to, you
22 know, look further into their movement.

23 MR. BUCHER: Okay. And the screen maintains a train ID as it
24 moves across?

25 MR. HOLMGREN: Yes.

1 MR. WILSON: Yes.

2 MR. BUCHER: Okay. I mean, were there any -- was there
3 anything unusual occurring the morning of the 29th? I mean, any
4 unusual conditions that might have affected the train movement?

5 MR. HOLMGREN: There were -- to the best of my knowledge,
6 there was nothing that was reported, nothing out of the ordinary
7 at all. It really seemed to be going as a normal day.

8 MR. BUCHER: Okay.

9 MR. HOLMGREN: Nothing out of the ordinary.

10 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Thanks, Ryan.

11 I'm going to go right to Michael, and if you could just
12 relate your interaction with the 1614?

13 MR. WILSON: I can't recall interacting with them. I may
14 have. Both of us work together. So when the phone rings, one of
15 us will answer. And if I spoke to him, it would have been like
16 Ryan said, we would have told them the pertinent information that
17 he would need, the paperwork, and tell them they are okay to leave
18 on schedule, and we'll watch the board, if he pops up. And he had
19 signals all the way through Secaucus where he would transition
20 onto terminal, which is the next dispatching district.

21 MR. BUCHER: Okay.

22 MR. WILSON: There was nothing unusual, untoward or that
23 stood out about 1614 that morning that would have been -- needed
24 any kind of special attention or anything.

25 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Do you remember any track changes? Did

1 he transition from 2 to 3 or 1 that you remember?

2 MR. HOLMGREN: How so? Anything other than what's typically
3 scheduled?

4 MR. BUCHER: Typically, right.

5 MR. HOLMGREN: He ran his normal route.

6 MR. WILSON: Yeah.

7 MR. HOLMGREN: His normal route, there's -- the PVL is a
8 single track, so nothing would come out of the norm there. You go
9 from one end to the other without changing the track. It
10 transitions from Pascack Junction onto Track 1 on the Bergen
11 County. Which at that point, he would go through to Secaucus on
12 Track 3 with -- you know, unless there's a situation of some type,
13 that's the same route that he runs every morning.

14 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Thank you, Ryan.

15 So just to be clear, you handle him from Spring Valley to
16 Secaucus and then the terminal takes over from him -- for him.
17 Sorry.

18 MR. HOLMGREN: Yes.

19 MR. WILSON: Yes.

20 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Great.

21 Okay. I'm going to pass it off. We're going to go around
22 the table for follow-up questions. Dr. Jenner.

23 DR. JENNER: Okay. Thank you. Can you explain -- I usually
24 don't see two dispatchers working side by side -- how you work
25 together?

1 MR. WILSON: Okay. This is Michael Wilson. The line or
2 territory is divided into two sections and technically he's,
3 Ryan's in charge of a certain section and then I'm in charge of
4 the rest of it. Well, the way we work, if Ryan is busy and
5 something comes up on his section, I -- I'll pitch in and vice
6 versa. If there's something going on where I'm, you know, busier
7 than normal, he will pitch in. We are all -- we are both
8 qualified on the entire line but our job description will split
9 the territory into two, but that doesn't prevent us from, you
10 know, working the whole board, as we say.

11 DR. JENNER: Okay. So was one of you responsible for Spring
12 Valley and to a certain point? Can you just describe that?

13 MR. HOLMGREN: Yeah, that would be me.

14 DR. JENNER: And --

15 MR. HOLMGREN: That portion of -- Ryan speaking. I'm sorry.
16 Yeah. Sorry about that. Ryan speaking. The Pascack Valley Line
17 is part of the territory that I control, in terms of like we said,
18 trains marking up, you know.

19 MR. WILSON: If a phone call --

20 MR. HOLMGREN: Yeah, the phone rings so much that you pick
21 up, whoever's got their finger closest to the keyboard and, you
22 know, we both know what information is pertinent for different
23 sections of the main line, which consists of multiple, you know,
24 territories all connected to one another.

25 DR. JENNER: Okay. You described a very ordinary type day,

1 normal day for this train. How often is there something that's
2 out of the ordinary?

3 MR. WILSON: It's --

4 MR. HOLMGREN: I don't know. It runs in clusters maybe.
5 Nothing lately out of the ordinary. You might have bad batches of
6 weather that might affect things at certain periods and time, but
7 over the last, knock on wood, couple weeks, we haven't had really
8 anything out of the ordinary that would bring any physical changes
9 to, you know, the ordinary, I guess you'd say.

10 MR. WILSON: And the only thing that I can recall would be
11 like if there's equipment problems in terms of equipment --
12 disabled equipment. So they would probably -- another train, and
13 then you have to, you know. But nothing -- that's the main thing
14 I can think of, like a train being out, you know what I mean, and
15 that train didn't run so you have to cover the schedule somehow.

16 DR. JENNER: Right. In the last couple of weeks, we've come
17 to learn that a lot of standard five-car trains are now four cars
18 where this engineer was operating. Does that affect your
19 operations at all?

20 MR. WILSON: Not really.

21 MR. HOLMGREN: It doesn't affect our operations. And
22 especially something like the Pascack Valley, it's a single track,
23 and in terms of rush hour, all the traffic is going in one
24 direction. That's why the PVL, the Pascack Valley Line, can be so
25 uneventful.

1 MR. WILSON: Yeah.

2 MR. HOLMGREN: The whole thing is just -- you know, they're
3 all going in one direction and there's only one track.

4 DR. JENNER: Okay. You mentioned there was no communications
5 between you and the engineer.

6 MR. HOLMGREN: Yeah.

7 DR. JENNER: Under what circumstances might an engineer reach
8 out to you?

9 MR. WILSON: If he, for instance, has a cab signal flip, I
10 mean, he's going on a clear and it goes onto restricted, he'll let
11 us know that. You know, if there is -- if he sees a trespasser or
12 something like that, but --

13 MR. HOLMGREN: Debris on the tracks.

14 MR. WILSON: Yeah, debris.

15 MR. HOLMGREN: If they're picking up time for particular
16 time, if you have heavy travel, any number of things. Anything
17 out of the ordinary --

18 MR. WILSON: Ordinary, right.

19 MR. HOLMGREN: -- which in the middle of the week, you don't
20 really catch too much out of the ordinary on a typical day.

21 DR. JENNER: Okay. Did you know the engineer that was
22 involved in this accident, either one of you?

23 MR. WILSON: I've known the name for quite a while, but not
24 personally, no.

25 DR. JENNER: Do you --

1 MR. WILSON: I recognized the name. When they said the name,
2 I recognized it from way back, but that's about it.

3 DR. JENNER: Right. So do you ever recall dispatching his
4 train or having any communications while he was operating his
5 train in the past?

6 MR. WILSON: I only, I only knew that he was the engineer
7 because of this incident. So I may have spoken to him but not
8 knowing that it was, you know, this person.

9 DR. JENNER: Right.

10 MR. WILSON: But I'm sure there were times when we could have
11 spoken to him, but as I said, from his voice, I could not have
12 told that it was him, you know.

13 DR. JENNER: Okay. Great. Thank you.

14 MR. WILSON: It was just the engineer 1614.

15 DR. JENNER: Great. Thank you.

16 MR. MATTISON: Fred Mattison, New Jersey Transit. One of the
17 things that has come out through the course of our investigation
18 is that 1614 was about 6 minutes late at Secaucus, when they
19 arrived there, because they were short cars and they had heavy
20 travel. And you said through this trip there was no communication
21 with that train. Is that typical? And at what point if a train
22 is losing time because of heavy travel would you reach out to
23 contact them as to their tardiness?

24 MR. HOLMGREN: The train has to go over 6 minutes and 59
25 seconds before it shows late in our system.

1 MR. MATTISON: Okay.

2 MR. HOLMGREN: Which even something like that, 7 minutes
3 during rush hour isn't completely alarming. We may be more likely
4 to reach out to them if possibly the train behind them is starting
5 to get, you know, close enough that they're going to start, you
6 know, impeding on their time. But in terms of 6 minutes, unless
7 they were getting in the way or they were going to ruin a meet
8 somehow, then it's not something we would typically reach out to
9 them for. And usually if they're pretty overloaded, if they had
10 one less car than they needed and they were getting to the point
11 where they couldn't fit any more passengers, then they would reach
12 out to us. So they might have been getting to that breaking
13 point, but it was never reported to us.

14 MR. WILSON: Yes, as Ryan said, usually they are the ones who
15 call us to let us know that they are overcrowded.

16 MR. MATTISON: Were there -- let's say in the last week or
17 so, have there been trains that have been reporting overcrowded
18 conditions to you often or not really?

19 MR. WILSON: No, no, no. We had one situation where a train
20 -- but this was not Pascack Valley Line. A train was annulled,
21 and so the train behind it had to do his passengers plus the train
22 -- the passengers prior to that, and they reported that they were.
23 But we were expecting that anyway because obviously, you know,
24 with -- they had the same equipment but they had like probably
25 twice the people, so -- at some point. But that was expected. So

1 we weren't surprised when they called to say that they were
2 overloaded. We were just waiting for when they would say that.

3 MR. MATTISON: So it's safe to say that even though the train
4 was starting to lose time, it's still normal operation and there
5 was nothing extraordinary about that?

6 MR. WILSON: No.

7 MR. HOLMGREN: Yeah, 5 to 6 minutes is, you know, well within
8 the time period to consider a train on time.

9 MR. MATTISON: That's all I have. Thank you.

10 MR. FANNON: Randy Fannon, no questions.

11 MR. VEDDER: Patrick Vedder. To follow along with Fred's
12 questions, 1614's schedule, how was that in terms of perfections
13 or imperfections? Does it run on a good schedule as far as -- you
14 know, are there times where it ends up being late and then makes
15 it up later or is it generally a pretty well laid-out schedule for
16 it?

17 MR. HOLMGREN: We do have some problematic trains where
18 scheduling does seem to get in the way with them finishing on
19 time. That train in particular, I would say that that's not a
20 normal late train.

21 MR. WILSON: That's not one of them.

22 MR. VEDDER: Okay.

23 MR. HOLMGREN: Yeah, we do have, you know, a couple of them,
24 but he would not fall into that grouping.

25 MR. VEDDER: Okay. Thank you.

1 MR. PARKIN: Bruce Parkin. Do either one of you recall
2 hearing any conversation between the crew members at all during
3 that trip?

4 MR. WILSON: No, I -- no. Me personally, no. Unless they
5 identify -- sometimes engineer -- a conductor will speak to an
6 engineer on the radio, but unless they identify, you know, what
7 train it is, or whatever, you know, it's just like chatter between
8 two, you know, a conductor and an engineer, so -- but that day,
9 with regard to 1614, I didn't -- I don't remember hearing any
10 conversation between the crews.

11 MR. PARKIN: Okay. Thank you. No further questions.

12 MR. BATES: William Bates, no questions.

13 MR. HAMER: Stephen Hamer, SMART TD. Signal reliability,
14 have we had -- did we have any issues anywhere in between Spring
15 Valley and Hoboken that day?

16 MR. WILSON: Not that I can recall.

17 MR. HAMER: Okay. This one's probably stretching it. Would
18 you guys have any percentages as to signal reliability --

19 MR. WILSON: No, I don't.

20 MR. HAMER: -- on a daily basis?

21 MR. HOLMGREN: I would -- not that I would -- overall, the
22 Pascack Valley is pretty new signal-wise, and I'd say that overall
23 Pascack Valley is pretty reliable when it comes to the signal
24 system as opposed to other portions of the main line.

25 MR. HAMER: Okay. So using the Pascack Valley Line as the

1 example, you would say that the Hoboken Terminal area is probably
2 more susceptible to issues than the main line?

3 MR. WILSON: I'm not qualified on terminals. So I --

4 MR. HOLMGREN: Yeah, he's not qualified on --

5 MR. WILSON: I don't know.

6 MR. HOLMGREN: I don't know if I would say it's more
7 susceptible. You have a lot more signals and you have a lot more
8 switches. I can say that. So, you know --

9 MR. HAMER: It's more intricate. I understand that.

10 MR. HOLMGREN: Yeah, it's a lot more intricate. I -- I'm
11 qualified there. I haven't worked constant there in a while, so I
12 can't really give you any information as to how it is now.

13 MR. HAMER: Okay. The last question on signals. When TMAC
14 does fail, is it normally a software issue or is it a switch in
15 the box or is it a hardware issue somewhere?

16 MR. HOLMGREN: That I couldn't answer.

17 MR. HAMER: That doesn't go past you guys?

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Most of the, most of the TMAC issues
19 that --

20 MR. BUCHER: We have to stop.

21 (Off the record.)

22 (On the record.)

23 MR. BUCHER: Okay. This is Dave Bucher. We're back. In
24 fact, we're ready to go around the table again.

25 You have one more? Steve.

1 MR. HAMER: All right. Steve Hamer, SMART TD. Last question
2 as to overcrowding. At what level is the final decision as to
3 whether you change a train schedule en route as to overcrowding,
4 as to whether that train continues to make local stops? Where --
5 what decision making -- what level is that decision making?

6 MR. WILSON: We usually depends on the crews because they're
7 the ones out there, the conductor specifically, and if they call
8 and say, you know, we're overcrowded and it's not safe to take on
9 any other passengers, usually that is enough to say, okay, no more
10 local stops, you know.

11 MR. HAMER: I totally understand when the crew calls up. I
12 understand. But at what level is the decision making at New
13 Jersey Transit? Is that at the dispatcher level? Is it at the
14 STO level, or is that the chief dispatcher's level or higher?

15 MR. HOLMGREN: I think that would go within reason. If it's
16 packed to the gills where you can't fit another passenger,
17 physically no one else can get on there, it's unsafe, it doesn't
18 need to make its way all the way up the totem pole up to
19 management --

20 MR. WILSON: Yeah.

21 MR. HOLMGREN: -- because at that point it's discharge as
22 needed and continue without making local stops. Usually
23 management's okay with us giving the okay for something like that.

24 MR. HAMER: No, I understand it's the train calling up's
25 issue. I just wanted to know which level that fell at?

1 MR. WILSON: Yeah, it usually doesn't go past the STO. And
2 usually the dispatcher is telling the STO that this train can't
3 make any more stops because, according to the crew, you know, it's
4 overcrowded and it's not safe to admit any more passengers.

5 MR. HAMER: Okay.

6 MR. WILSON: So it's not -- yes, usually, yeah, you relay the
7 information to them and let them know. There's usually no kind of
8 friction with that decision because if he says it's not safe,
9 usually that covers it.

10 MR. HOLMGREN: Once safety, once safety comes into
11 question nobody's --

12 MR. WILSON: It's usually --

13 MR. HOLMGREN: -- yeah, there's no pushback at that point.

14 MR. WILSON: Yeah, it's going to override that, yeah.

15 MR. HAMER: All right. Thank you.

16 MR. BUCHER: Thanks. Dave Bucher. I don't have any more
17 questions. We'll go around the table one more time.

18 DR. JENNER: No questions.

19 MR. MATTISON: I have no questions.

20 MR. FANNON: No questions.

21 MR. VEDDER: No questions.

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

23 MR. BUCHER: Great. And this concludes the interview of Ryan
24 Holmgren and Michael Wilson.

25 (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
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Interview of Ryan Holmgren and
Michael Wilson

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA16MR011

PLACE: South Kearny, New Jersey

DATE: October 4, 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.

Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber