

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES

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Investigation of: *
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HEAD-ON COLLISION OF A METROLINK *
COMMUTER TRAIN WITH A UNION *
PACIFIC FREIGHT TRAIN, * Docket No.: DCA-08-MR-009
September 12, 2008 *
Los Angeles, California *
*
* * * * *

Interview of: STEVEN D. COUSINO

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center
8700 Beverly Boulevard
Los Angeles, California

Tuesday,
September 23, 2008

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to
notice.

BEFORE: TED TURPIN

APPEARANCES:

TED TURPIN, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
(310) 380-5481

RANDY SAUNDERS, Local Chairman
L.A. Division 5

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. TURPIN: This interview is in connection with the
3 Metrolink Train No. 111 collision with Union Pacific Railroad
4 Leesdale Local, at Chatsworth, California, September 12th, 2008.
5 Today is September 23rd, 2008. The interview is being conducted
6 at the Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles, California, at 2:00
7 p.m., with the engineer, UP engineer, from the Leesdale Local.

8 All right. We're here at Cedars-Sinai. My name is
9 Ted Turpin, with the NTSB.

10 And do you understand that this interview will be
11 recorded?

12 MR. COUSINO: Yes, I understand that.

13 INVESTIGATOR TURPIN: Will you please state your name
14 and spell your name?

15 MR. COUSINO: Steven D. Cousino, C-o-u-s-i-n-o.

16 INVESTIGATOR TURPIN: Okay. And my name is Ted Turpin,
17 T-u-r-p-i-n. And in the room also is?

18 MR. SAUNDERS: Randy Saunders, S-a-u-n-d-e-r-s, chairman
19 of the L.A. Division 5.

20 INVESTIGATOR TURPIN: All right. Thank you.

INTERVIEW OF STEVE D. COUSINO

21
22 BY INVESTIGATOR TURPIN:

23 Q. And, if you would, Steve, just start with telling us
24 what happened.

25 A. We were proceeding eastward towards Chatsworth on an

1 advanced approach signal, and we saw a freight train -- excuse me,
2 a passenger train approaching, and we struck that passenger train.

3 Q. Okay. Did you apply the brakes?

4 A. I applied the emergency brakes, yes.

5 Q. Was it you or the conductor that saw the train first?

6 A. I can't answer that. All I know is what I saw. But I
7 did hear an epithet mentioned from the conductor.

8 Q. Okay. So he did observe that (indiscernible) --

9 A. Oh, yes.

10 Q. Okay. All right. Would you characterize the -- his
11 call-out and your applying the emergency, basically,
12 simultaneously?

13 A. Yes, that's a fair evaluation.

14 Q. Okay. All right. Thank you. Now, the approach
15 diverging, what's the actual aspect on that?

16 A. I'm a dinosaur. All I know is double yellow.

17 Q. What's the color on the (indiscernible)?

18 A. Yellow over yellow.

19 Q. All right. And what was the signal you had at CP Davis?

20 A. Clear, green.

21 Q. Okay. Normally, where do you meet No. 111?

22 A. Considering the timeframe, it should have been at CP
23 Davis.

24 Q. When is the last time you recall meeting them at
25 Chatsworth?

1 A. I don't specifically recall that. Pull a figure out of
2 the air, a month prior --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. And, I mean, that's just a supposition.

5 Q. Would you characterize that as often or seldom, or --

6 A. Seldom would be an operative word.

7 Q. Okay. Where do you normally, or often, meet 111?

8 A. Depending on how our day is unfolding, it's either Davis
9 or we're already back to Van Nuys before his arrival at Van Nuys.

10 Q. Okay. Do you recall after you applied the emergency
11 what you did, physically?

12 A. In all candor, I just stood there and watched it happen
13 in disbelief.

14 Q. You stayed in your seat?

15 A. No, I was standing.

16 Q. You did stand? Straight up or did you step out from the
17 control stand?

18 A. Away from the control stand -- had initially run towards
19 the back door and thought this is not a viable choice. Our train
20 is going to be down here with us, so plugged it and basically
21 stood in the center of the cab and said take your best shot.

22 Q. All right. Do you remember where the conductor was?

23 A. He was also on his feet, but absolutely, specifically, I
24 don't know.

25 Q. This is -- I know this is really tough because this is

1 right in the heart of it, but after it was over, do you remember
2 where you ended up in the cab?

3 A. Yes, I do remember.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Since the locomotive turned over on its side, I'd like
6 to attempt to characterize it as ending up in the bottom left-hand
7 corner under the conductor's desk-like structure.

8 Q. Um-hum.

9 A. So I was sort of down in that location, sort of in a
10 ball.

11 Q. Okay. Okay. Do you remember the windows being broken
12 out?

13 A. You're asking about the side windows?

14 Q. Either that or the front windows, or the fireman
15 recovery unit?

16 A. The front windows were not broken out.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. The position of the side windows on the engineer side, I
19 have no idea. On the fireman's side, they were open probably --
20 almost totally.

21 Q. I guess -- how did you get out of the cab?

22 A. We were extracted by fire personnel.

23 Q. Through?

24 A. The left front window of the locomotive.

25 Q. Okay. And that would be after they broke that window?

1 A. Oh, yes.

2 Q. Okay. You were unable to break or attempt to break the
3 window?

4 A. Neither one of the personnel in the cab, the conductor
5 or myself, I don't believe was -- either was physically capable of
6 even attempting that.

7 Q. Okay. Had you heard anything on the radio giving you an
8 idea of where No. 111 was, or anything from No. 111?

9 A. We heard him call out CP Garden Center (ph.), the east
10 end Chatsworth site, and that was the last we heard from him.

11 Q. Okay. Where were you when you heard that?

12 A. Probably somewhere around mile post 440, and that is
13 just an approximation.

14 Q. So that would be prior to Davis or right around CP
15 Davis?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Okay. And then did you ever hear the detector call No.
18 111, the one right after (indiscernible)? And after the flashing
19 yellow, did you hear anything else --

20 A. Excuse me --

21 Q. -- from --

22 A. Excuse me. If I mis-answered before, we were working on
23 a double yellow signal.

24 Q. Right.

25 A. Just to clarify that --

1 Q. No, no, no. Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, 111, you heard 111
2 call out the flashing yellow?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Did you hear any more?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Okay. Thanks. As you probably know, there's quite a
7 bit of discussion now about cell phones and the use of cell phones
8 and the like, and stuff. But I'm curious, as far as within the
9 UP, what's the restriction for the UP for using cell phones?

10 A. It's my understanding this is not to be used while the
11 train is moving, if that's correct. I don't know the exact
12 restriction.

13 Q. Okay. We're going to take just a moment of break.

14 (Off the record.)

15 (On the record.)

16 INVESTIGATOR TURPIN: All right. We had a short break,
17 and we'll continue now.

18 BY INVESTIGATOR TURPIN:

19 Q. UP has a process in place, when you get, like, the
20 yellow over yellow, they call it -- there is a special thing they
21 call it in the cab?

22 A. Cab red zone.

23 Q. Cab red zone? Do you call that out loud for the
24 conductor, or does he call it out loud, or how does that normally
25 work?

1 A. Normally, no, we do not.

2 Q. Okay. But it is understood that that's what --

3 A. Oh, it is implied, yes.

4 Q. Okay. All right. And that restriction does what when
5 you're in a cab red zone?

6 A. The conversation will cease and we'll focus on the job
7 at hand in compliance with the signals.

8 Q. Okay. Did you know the conductor well, Conductor Squire
9 (ph.)?

10 A. Sure. He was a young extra (indiscernible).

11 Q. Okay. You had worked with him before?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. And the brakeman?

14 A. Dominic Travola (ph.)?

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. Okay. He's regular on the job, right?

18 A. Yes, that's correct.

19 Q. Okay. Had you ever had any problems with the signals
20 around the Chatsworth area in the past?

21 A. I can recall no incidents of any problems.

22 Q. Okay. Had you heard anybody say in the register room or
23 (indiscernible) talk about any signal problems around Chatsworth?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Now, you had worked there before Metrolink made all the

1 upgrades to the signal system, correct?

2 A. I honestly don't know when -- what timeframe you're
3 referring to.

4 Q. Well, you'd worked there when it was ABS all the way
5 back to Train (indiscernible)?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Just since is been CPC?

8 A. I initially went on that job in April of 2001.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And if you would correlate that to your question.

11 Q. Yup. Well, that's seven years. You've been working
12 through that territory for seven years, and you can't recall the
13 signal (indiscernible)?

14 A. Okay. No, I cannot.

15 Q. That's good. That's very good. Have you ever noticed
16 your conductor or brakeman using a cell phone?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. The conductor during the course of our tour of duty used
20 it twice, both times to call the Metrolink dispatcher. And that's
21 the only time that I observed him utilizing it.

22 Q. Okay. The other issue about cell phones now that we're
23 looking at also is texting, you know, where they type?

24 A. Um-hum. Yes.

25 Q. Did you notice if he was typing on his phone at all?

1 A. I would say he was not at any time.

2 Q. Okay. All right. Well, let's kind of change gears.
3 First, I want to ask you, in general, just a question that if you
4 could improve safety out there, if there is anything that -- from
5 this accident or something in general that you could summarize
6 that would make it safer to operate?

7 A. Pardon me. I'm at the lowest level of this operation,
8 but, no, I cannot specify one specific thing. I mean, PTS,
9 whatever they call it, the automatic -- well, I'm fumbling here.

10 Q. Automatic train stop --

11 A. And --

12 Q. CAP signals? There's also a PTC, private train control?

13 A. Yes, thank you. That's what I was seeking.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. But, no, I cannot --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- specifically assist you.

18 Q. What would you feel if they, say, held the local one
19 (indiscernible) away? I mean, this was going to be a nice
20 (indiscernible) right there at Chatsworth and post two, you know?
21 What if they made sure meets were one station away from --

22 A. It's their railroad.

23 Q. Right.

24 A. I think that's more unfair.

25 Q. That they can make a meet wherever they want?

1 A. Indeed.

2 Q. Okay. All right. So now I need to start some of the
3 human performance questions, which the individuals in D.C., now,
4 have already sent me some things to ask. And you'd mentioned when
5 I walked in the room you had some of it. Now, we have
6 documentation from the railroad. We know when you went on duty
7 and off duty, okay? And we can give you that. I don't need your
8 tedium here to tell me when you went on and off duty because you
9 turned in a time slip, right? You got to sign up and everything
10 else.

11 What they're most concerned with, and it works around
12 that time, though, is what you did in your off time. So if we
13 could back up to, say, Wednesday or Tuesday, and if you can
14 picture -- well, you have a five-day-a-week job.

15 You could even -- maybe even Monday if you can recall.
16 Basically, you got off Monday, and what did you do that evening?
17 Was there anything special during the week, and what is your
18 normal sleep/rest cycle to work the job?

19 A. I (indiscernible) sort of summarize a very mundane
20 existence. I wake up 6:00, 6:30 every day, depending on how many
21 cats want to jump on the bed, go out and run for a half hour or an
22 hour, come back, have a pot of coffee, go off to work, and
23 immediately go home and go on e-Bay and pretend I have money and
24 spend it profusely, and retire by 11:30 at the absolute latest,
25 only to repeat the cycle over and over again, as I live by myself.

1 There are no other considerations other than the
2 (indiscernible) of the animals and (indiscernible) my wallet after
3 being on e-Bay, and that is the pattern that exists every day.

4 Q. Okay. And you don't recall anything of this week that
5 would have changed that sequence or that pattern?

6 A. No, nothing at all, sir.

7 Q. Okay. Well, the only -- well, may I -- I'll interject
8 here -- would be the time you actually got off each day varied
9 just slightly during the week, right?

10 A. It's very close to between 6:30 and 7:00 p.m.

11 Q. Okay. Yeah, I understand that when you get done, even
12 if you make a quick trip to Oxnard, you spend quite a bit of time
13 working in the -- in GemCo (ph.) yard?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. All right. How far do you commute to work?

16 A. Twenty-five miles.

17 Q. From?

18 A. East 12, from Sierra Madre.

19 Q. Sierra Madre? Okay. And what time are you on duty?

20 A. 11:30 a.m.

21 Q. All right. So you leave the house generally each day --

22 A. 10:30.

23 Q. 10:30? Do you have prescription glasses?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. And you wear those --

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. -- while you operate the train?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Were you taking any prescription drugs?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Okay. No blood pressure, cholesterol?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay. Anything over-the-counter? Any --

9 A. No. I'm sorry. There's a perverse pride, and other
10 than taking One-A-Day vitamins, there's nothing else that goes
11 down the hatch.

12 Q. Okay. Anything in your personal life that's changed in
13 the last month or two? You know, they always list those things
14 that are stressful to people, like: did you get married or was
15 there a death in the family, or, you know, did anything happen in
16 the last month or so?

17 A. No, nothing (indiscernible).

18 Q. Okay. I think we're almost done here. Do you smoke?

19 A. No.

20 Q. You ever had a sleep problem?

21 A. No, sir. I mean, not for years.

22 Q. Okay. Do you feel you're well-rested, then, from --

23 A. I would hope seven hours of sleep a night would be
24 sufficient.

25 Q. I mean, we can access company records. We can, you

1 know, obviously see how long you've been around (indiscernible)
2 when you were promoted, and so on. Do you know when you were next
3 due for your next skills test or when you expected to
4 (indiscernible) come drive with you?

5 A. I was told it would be that week, or, excuse me, that
6 week or the previous week, I had been contacted that someone would
7 be there for (indiscernible).

8 Q. Okay. When do you think the last time you may have
9 (indiscernible) the efficiency test by a company officer?

10 A. Approximately the Wednesday of the week previous to the
11 occurrence in question.

12 Q. And then how often do you have a supervisor or how often
13 do they come out and observe or do you see one?

14 A. Once a month.

15 Q. Once a month? That's okay. It's a ballpark figure.
16 All right. Okay. I think that's just about it unless you have
17 something you might want to add. You work every day of the week,
18 the whole week?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. I think your brakeman told us he was actually
21 kind of surprised when you got the green at CP Davis. Had you
22 kind of figured when you would meet number 111 or did you have a
23 feel for it?

24 A. Backing up a little bit, the signal -- two signals from
25 CP Davis, at mile post 437.3, we received a green signal at that

1 point, indicating we were going to go beyond CP Davis, and, yes,
2 and I was surprised this was going to be the situation.

3 Q. Um-hum. Did you comment with your conductor, or
4 anything, and say, like, "Number 111 must be late today," or
5 whatever --

6 A. Yes, precisely, yeah.

7 Q. Okay. I'm not putting words in people's mouths
8 (indiscernible).

9 MR. TURPIN: Anything you want to put in, Randy?

10 MR. SAUNDERS: No.

11 MR. TURPIN: All right. That concludes our interview. Thank
12 you very much.

13 MR. COUSINO: Thank you.

14 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled matter
15 was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: HEAD-ON COLLISION OF A METROLINK
 COMMUTER TRAIN WITH A UNION
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PLACE: Los Angeles, California

DATE: September 23, 2007

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been compared to
the recording accomplished at the hearing.

Danielle VanRiper
Transcriber