

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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In the Matter of: *
* Docket No.
DERAILMENT AND SUBSEQUENT * DCA-05-MR--009
COLLISION OF TWO METROLINK *
COMMUTER TRAINS IN *
GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA *
-----*

Thursday,
January 27, 2005

INTERVIEW OF: MELVIN LAWSON

PRESENT: MIKE FLANAGAN
STEPHEN JENNER

P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 MR. FLANAGAN: *It is Mike Flanagan with NTSB.*
3 *It is January 27, 2005 about 9:00 a.m. and we are*
4 *interviewing Metrolink Train Dispatcher.*

5 *If I could ask you to just state your name?*

6 MR. LAWSON: *My name is Melvin Lawson.*

7 MR. FLANAGAN: *L--A--W --*

8 MR. LAWSON: *L-A-W-S-O-N.*

9 MR. FLANAGAN: *S--O--N, okay. Great.*

10 *And I wanted to just verify that I have your*
11 *permission to tape record the interview.*

12 MR. LAWSON: *Yes, you have my permission.*

13 MR. FLANAGAN: *Okay. Great.*

14 *Let me start in a general way, if I could and*
15 *ask you just to tell us in your own words what happened*
16 *regarding this accident?*

17 MR. LAWSON: *Well, I got a call about 6:00*
18 *o'clock, 6:01, I heard the emergency call go out, when*
19 *I replied, and that is when the engineer on Train 901*
20 *told me that he believed they are on the ground, that*
21 *his train has derailed and yelling she is on the*
22 *ground. He was requesting emergency, emergency*
23 *assistance at the scene. He told me believed, well, I*
24 *talked to him, after that initial call, he wanted to*
25 *get the emergency personnel going because he knew I*

1 *guess, I didn't know it was that bad, but he knew they*
2 *were on the ground and he said we need emergency*
3 *people. So, I, you know, turned to my chief and let*
4 *him know that 901 said they were on the ground. And*
5 *they need emergency assistance, so we can get the*
6 *emergency vehicles out there. And then when I talked*
7 *him to a few minutes later, that is when he explained*
8 *to me that he believed they were hit by Train 100, that*
9 *derailed them, he said he could see sparks underneath*
10 *Train 100 as it was approaching him and he believed*
11 *they are the ones who hit him and knocked them off,*
12 *caused them to derail.*

13 *MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. Now what happened next,*
14 *what happens after that from your perspective in terms*
15 *of what you do and --*

16 *MR. LAWSON: Well, I secured the area, the*
17 *area with the incident, blocked off all access to the*
18 *tracks for the area.*

19 *MR. FLANAGAN: You mean in terms of other on*
20 *rail movement.*

21 *MR. LAWSON: Yes, on rail movement, yeah.*

22 *MR. FLANAGAN: Okay.*

23 *MR. LAWSON: And I confirmed his location, so*
24 *we can get emergency people to the, you know, closest*
25 *to the scene, you know, before they, you know, head*

1 *straight to the scene, whatever.*

2 *MR. FLANAGAN: Okay.*

3 *MR. LAWSON: Communicate to my other trains,*
4 *let them know what was going on, what was going on.*

5 *MR. FLANAGAN: Okay.*

6 *MR. LAWSON: And what they had to do.*

7 *MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. Can you explain to all of*
8 *us how the, how the information flow works when you get*
9 *a call like that and that has got to translate into*
10 *information and then going to various emergency*
11 *response agencies, or whoever has got to come out, how*
12 *does that work? How do you get it from you to them?*

13 *MR. LAWSON: To who, to them in the --*

14 *MR. FLANAGAN: No, when you get a call --*

15 *MR. LAWSON: Oh, the emergency people.*

16 *MR. FLANAGAN: Yes. So, in other words, how*
17 *does the fire department, how does it get from you to*
18 *the fire department or police department or whoever?*

19 *MR. LAWSON: Well, this particular time, my*
20 *chief notified the fire department.*

21 *MR. FLANAGAN: Okay.*

22 *MR. LAWSON: You know, you know, law*
23 *enforcement.*

24 *MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. So once you notified the*
25 *chief, then the chief in turn --*

1 MR. LAWSON: Yes, immediately notified all the
2 emergency personnel that needed to be notified.

3 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. So that way you are not
4 trying to talk to them, you are working --

5 MR. LAWSON: Busy taking care of the area.

6 MR. FLANAGAN: -- on that specific area.
7 Okay.

8 Before the accident, were there any kind of
9 indications of anything out of the ordinary,
10 indications of occupancy or anything --

11 MR. LAWSON: No.

12 MR. FLANAGAN: Everything --

13 MR. LAWSON: Everything was normal.

14 MR. FLANAGAN: Just a normal morning.

15 MR. LAWSON: Yes.

16 MR. FLANAGAN: Up until that moment.

17 That location and I think we will ask for
18 some kind of little printout or something so we can
19 orient ourselves, but, especially right at a control
20 point or very close to a control point --

21 MR. LAWSON: Yes, the nearest one the train
22 had passed earlier.

23 MR. FLANAGAN: And there is a siding where the
24 EP equipment was.

25 MR. LAWSON: Yes.

1 MR. FLANAGAN: Do you get any kind of
2 indication or information about that equipment being on
3 siding?

4 MR. LAWSON: Yes, there was an indication
5 there.

6 MR. FLANAGAN: Indication -- You knew
7 something was there.

8 MR. LAWSON: Yes.

9 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. And how about passengers
10 on the train, do you get, do you have a way of knowing
11 approximately how many passengers are on that train at
12 any time?

13 MR. LAWSON: Working at the dispatcher desk,
14 no. You know, I do, was entailed in that job, but I
15 have seen the lay reports, so, you know, I have like a
16 basic average, I guess.

17 MR. FLANAGAN: Yes. You don't get a report
18 like the conductor calls you and --

19 MR. LAWSON: No, no.

20 MR. FLANAGAN: -- from some station --

21 MR. LAWSON: No, from a day to day basis, no.

22 MR. FLANAGAN: -- we have 20 on at this
23 station.

24 MR. LAWSON: No.

25 MR. FLANAGAN: Or we have 300 on the train.

1 MR. LAWSON: No.

2 MR. FLANAGAN: Or anything.

3 MR. LAWSON: No.

4 MR. FLANAGAN: That is not anything that you
5 would have.

6 MR. LAWSON: No.

7 MR. FLANAGAN: And in the course of this
8 incident unfolded, did you have any direct
9 communication with emergency responders or any dealings
10 with them?

11 MR. LAWSON: No, not from the dispatcher desk,
12 no.

13 MR. FLANAGAN: No, okay. From --

14 MR. LAWSON: I just tried to contact the crews
15 of the trains to see if everything, if they are okay.

16 MR. FLANAGAN: Yes.

17 MR. LAWSON: And that was it. Later on, I
18 didn't get any respond, but I am sure they were busy.

19 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. Did you have any
20 communication with the Train 100 crew at all?

21 MR. LAWSON: Yeah, he called me not too long
22 after I spoke with 901. The crew, the engineer, I
23 believe I was talking to, he informed me that they
24 derailed and needed emergency personnel dispatched to
25 the scene.

1 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. Okay. The last question I
2 have and I will give a chance to add anything you might
3 have, just in general how you think it went in terms of
4 handling this emergency?

5 MR. LAWSON: Well, I think we did pretty good.
6 I think the response for the emergency personnel was
7 excellent.

8 MR. FLANAGAN: One of the things where I was
9 looking at is, you know, any opportunity to improve
10 anything and talking to folks like you sometimes things
11 come up that are helpful.

12 MR. LAWSON: Yes. We were on it, as soon as I
13 got the call, I let the chief know and he made the
14 calls immediately, so, I don't know how the time would
15 be any sooner any other way, but --

16 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay.

17 MR. LAWSON: If there was, hopefully somebody
18 else will figure it out and let us know.

19 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. Okay. Good. Well,
20 thanks, Melvin.

21 I will see if Steve wants to add anything.

22 MR. JENNER: Okay. I will ask you some
23 followup questions and then some questions about your
24 background.

25 Did you have any official debriefing after

1 *things settled down about how things went and did you*
2 *get feedback from others?*

3 *MR. LAWSON: We had a little meeting after the*
4 *initial things. We did go and have a meeting.*

5 *MR. JENNER: Okay. Can you summarize what was*
6 *discussed?*

7 *MR. LAWSON: We just discussed that we need,*
8 *you know, be more attentive right now, you know, make*
9 *sure we do everything okay, you know, because this is a*
10 *very serious incident that just happened, so we just*
11 *wanted to make sure that everybody was the same chord.*

12 *You know, be a little more, be a little diligent right*
13 *now, don't try and be in a hurry to rush anything right*
14 *now.*

15 *MR. JENNER: Okay. Did anyone give you*
16 *feedback about how they thought things went, how, in*
17 *handling the situation?*

18 *MR. LAWSON: Well, I was told that I did okay.*

19 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

20 *MR. LAWSON: Did a good job.*

21 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

22 *MR. LAWSON: I was told.*

23 *MR. JENNER: Okay. Do you have any materials,*
24 *checklists, notebook to help you with the telephone*
25 *numbers or contact people, and what procedures you are*

1 *suppose to follow in the event of an emergency?*

2 *MR. LAWSON: Yes.*

3 *MR. JENNER: Okay. Can you describe some of*
4 *that material?*

5 *MR. LAWSON: Just let you perform, a emergency*
6 *form, asking for the time, the incident, what happened,*
7 *train speed and who to notify.*

8 *MR. JENNER: Did you discover anything that*
9 *you thought was lacking or that you wish you had this*
10 *type of form?*

11 *MR. LAWSON: No, I think, the form that we*
12 *usually, the dispatcher usually fills it out when he is*
13 *like, when he doesn't have a chief there, when he is*
14 *there by himself. I think the chief filled that form*
15 *out because after that I, you know, after I told him*
16 *about the incident.*

17 *MR. JENNER: You had mentioned that you were*
18 *aware that there was DP train on the siding.*

19 *MR. LAWSON: Yes.*

20 *MR. JENNER: Is that a normal situation?*

21 *MR. LAWSON: Sometimes, yeah.*

22 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

23 *MR. LAWSON: They park trains there,*
24 *sometimes, yes.*

25 *MR. JENNER: You took no exception to that*

1 *train being there.*

2 *MR. LAWSON: No.*

3 *MR. JENNER: How were you aware that it was*
4 *present?*

5 *MR. LAWSON: Informed by the previous*
6 *dispatcher.*

7 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

8 *MR. LAWSON: When we do our turnover, to let*
9 *me know what is going on, what is in my railroad, what*
10 *is happening.*

11 *MR. JENNER: Okay. Let me ask you a little bit*
12 *about your background and the facts in the railroad,*
13 *can you just run through, when you started and where?*

14 *MR. LAWSON: I am relatively new.*

15 *MR. JENNER: I understand that you were*
16 *relatively new, where were you working before you*
17 *started as dispatcher?*

18 *MR. LAWSON: Well, I was still working within*
19 *Metrolink, I just became a dispatcher, but I still*
20 *worked within Metrolink. I have been working here for*
21 *about eight or nine years now, somewhere around there.*

22 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

23 *MR. LAWSON: But, I was, I was, in 2000 I was*
24 *working the coordinator desk here at the Dispatch*
25 *Center, which is a job that they have integrated with*

1 *the dispatch job here at Metrolink. So that is the job*
2 *I was working.*

3 *MR. JENNER: In the Year 2000?*

4 *MR. LAWSON: Yes.*

5 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

6 *MR. LAWSON: And before that I was still*
7 *working for Metrolink, but I was a field service*
8 *representative working out in the field, taking care of*
9 *stations and needs out there.*

10 *MR. JENNER: Okay. -- in 2000 you were*
11 *coordinator --*

12 *MR. LAWSON: And before that, I was a field*
13 *service representative for about a year.*

14 *MR. JENNER: Okay. So when did you start in*
15 *this dispatching arena?*

16 *MR. LAWSON: I just started, hired on as a*
17 *dispatcher in June of, what is it, 2004.*

18 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

19 *MR. LAWSON: And is when I came on.*

20 *MR. JENNER: If you can walk me through the*
21 *process, the training and various --*

22 *MR. LAWSON: Okay. After that I went to class*
23 *in Texas, offered by the BSF, where they let me know*
24 *about the rules and regulations of the railroad.*

25 *MR. JENNER: Okay. And how long is that class*

1 *about?*

2 *MR. LAWSON: Well, I didn't start exactly, I*
3 *hired on in June, but the next class wasn't until*
4 *August.*

5 *MR. JENNER: Oh, so it started in August.*

6 *MR. LAWSON: Yes, I was there from August to*
7 *the end of October.*

8 *MR. JENNER: Okay. Then what did you do?*

9 *MR. LAWSON: Then I came back here and started*
10 *training on the desk that I was working.*

11 *MR. JENNER: Okay. Can you describe the*
12 *process, how you trained, how you --*

13 *MR. LAWSON: Yes, I trained with an experience*
14 *qualified dispatcher, where they are teaching me the*
15 *ropes on things to do.*

16 *MR. JENNER: Okay. How long was that process?*

17 *MR. LAWSON: It depends on the individual, I*
18 *came back in, like I said, the end of August, October,*
19 *rather, so I came back and started training in early*
20 *November, somewhere.*

21 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

22 *MR. LAWSON: So, from November until just*
23 *recently, about a week, week and a half ago, I was --*

24 *MR. JENNER: Is there any sort of test that*
25 *you take to become qualified?*

1 MR. LAWSON: I had to a, a familiarization
2 test, I believe it was called, to make sure I was
3 familiar with the territory I was going to be
4 operating. And aside from being assessed from the
5 dispatcher who was training me, you know, they had to
6 write a, let people know how they felt I was doing, if
7 they believed that I could do the work well, you know.

8 MR. JENNER: Okay. How does one demonstrate
9 familiarity of the territory, that they ask you about?

10 MR. LAWSON: Siding, whatever, just the
11 different geographic locations of things on the
12 territory, stuff like that.

13 MR. JENNER: Okay. Do you feel that you were
14 ready? Did you have any reservations about --

15 MR. LAWSON: No.

16 MR. JENNER: -- being ready.

17 MR. LAWSON: No, I thought I was ready, that
18 is why -- They asked me if I was ready, and I said,
19 yes, otherwise I wouldn't have been, I guess, working
20 it by myself, I would still have been training.

21 MR. JENNER: Okay. How, how was your comfort
22 level, at least, was this your second day --

23 MR. LAWSON: No, I have been working that job
24 I think about, probably my eighth day, seven, eight,
25 nine, one of them. I don't know.

1 MR. JENNER: In your total of seven days,
2 normal experience, did you have any incidents,
3 situations --

4 MR. LAWSON: No, nothing like that.

5 MR. JENNER: Okay. That much we know.
6 Do you feel comfortable dispatching?

7 MR. LAWSON: Yes.

8 MR. JENNER: Okay. You come from a invaluable
9 position now in that you have gained your credible
10 experience that others hopefully don't have to go
11 through.

12 MR. LAWSON: Yes.

13 MR. JENNER: Is there anything that you could
14 reflect on that in your training that went particularly
15 well, or that you think --

16 MR. LAWSON: Yes, I just remembered to secure
17 the area, that is the first thing I thought about after
18 I notified the chief about, you know, dispatch the
19 emergency personnel to the scene, you know, is to
20 secure the area and make sure not to let no other
21 trains in the area there.

22 MR. JENNER: Okay.

23 MR. LAWSON: That is one of the main things,
24 the first thing that popped in my mind, if this
25 happens, you don't know, I couldn't see my screen and I

1 *don't know what is turned over or how it is turned*
2 *over, or what is, so I remembered secure the how area.*

3 *MR. JENNER: What does that involve securing*
4 *the area?*

5 *MR. LAWSON: With the ditgicom system you put*
6 *up a series of blocks so you, so it doesn't allow you*
7 *to move any trains or anything into that area. You*
8 *know, set up any signals or anything. It doesn't allow*
9 *anything else to get in that area.*

10 *MR. JENNER: Okay. Are you also on the radio,*
11 *talking to --*

12 *MR. LAWSON: Yes.*

13 *MR. JENNER: -- to train operators?*

14 *MR. LAWSON: Yes, radio, talking to the other*
15 *trains, letting them know that they won't, that they*
16 *can't go pass this location, let them know where to*
17 *stop and everything, and, you know, let them know a*
18 *little bit of what is going on, this is why you won't*
19 *be going any further. We have an incident out there.*

20 *MR. JENNER: Okay. And that processed in your*
21 *mind went well?*

22 *MR. LAWSON: Yes.*

23 *MR. JENNER: You didn't have any communication*
24 *problems, anything --*

25 *MR. LAWSON: Of course, I had help, I, you*

1 *know, from the trains that I already contacted, the*
2 *chief had already talked to them and let them know.*

3 *MR. JENNER: Do you have a normal shift,*
4 *normal shift time and days that you work?*

5 *MR. LAWSON: Right now, yes.*

6 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

7 *MR. LAWSON: Six to two.*

8 *MR. JENNER: Six a.m.--*

9 *MR. LAWSON: To two p.m.*

10 *MR. JENNER: Two p.m. Was that your shift*
11 *yesterday?*

12 *MR. LAWSON: Yes.*

13 *MR. JENNER: What were your previous days that*
14 *you were working?*

15 *MR. LAWSON: I was training on the same shift.*

16 *MR. JENNER: Okay. So, you worked Tuesday and*
17 *Monday as well.*

18 *MR. LAWSON: Yes.*

19 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

20 *MR. LAWSON: Monday through Friday.*

21 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

22 *MR. LAWSON: Monday through Friday, I have*
23 *been working six to two.*

24 *MR. JENNER: Okay.*

25 *MR. LAWSON: Recently. Before that I was*

1 working, I mean, the same shift, six to two, but I was
2 working Thursday through Monday, but the same, same
3 shift, six to two.

4 MR. JENNER: Okay. When you come on, is this a
5 comfortable shift for you in terms of you are feeling
6 pretty alert when you get here?

7 MR. LAWSON: Yeah.

8 MR. JENNER: Okay.

9 MR. LAWSON: You know, we come in, work six to
10 two, but we are here a early so we can go through a job
11 briefing before we go in and actually get a turnover
12 from the previous dispatcher.

13 MR. JENNER: Okay. What time would that start?

14 MR. LAWSON: Probably about 5:50.

15 MR. JENNER: Five fifty.

16 MR. LAWSON: Yes.

17 MR. JENNER: Just a 10 minute --

18 MR. LAWSON: Yes.

19 MR. JENNER: Okay. I don't know, were you
20 any reason asked for a toxicology testing, some
21 toxicological testing?

22 MR. LAWSON: No.

23 MR. JENNER: Okay. In some circumstances they
24 do, and you were not asked for that.

25 MR. LAWSON: No.

1 MR. JENNER: Okay.

2 MR. FLANAGAN: Let's see if others might have
3 a question. Any point you want to take a break, say
4 so.

5 MR. LAWSON: Okay.

6 MR. FLANAGAN: Doing okay?

7 MR. LAWSON: Yes.

8 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. Great.

9 Let me just work around the table this way
10 from -- Any questions? No.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Mike -- California --
12 Being new on the job and other
13 circumstances (inaudible) I don't think I have any.

14 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. Just one quick followup
15 on the schedule, working Monday to Friday. Did you
16 have both Saturday and Sunday off?

17 MR. LAWSON: Yes.

18 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. Great. Anything you want
19 to add at this point?

20 MR. LAWSON: No.

21 MR. FLANAGAN: Okay. We will turn this off.

22 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)