



Motor Carrier Attachment 39:
AAAfordable Mechanic Interview
Baltimore, MD; 11/1/2016
HWY17MH007
(22 pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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SCHOOL BUS/COMMUTER BUS CRASH IN
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND ON
NOVEMBER 1, 2016

Accident No.: HWY17MH007

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Interview of: EMMANUEL J. LESTER

904 Nottingham Road
Baltimore, Maryland

November 2016

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL FOX, Highway Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Emmanuel J. Lester:

By Mr. Fox

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I N T E R V I E W

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2 MR. FOX: This is Michael Fox, investigator, NTSB, out of the
3 Washington D.C. office. I am currently located at 904 Nottingham
4 Road in Baltimore, Maryland. I'm currently going to interview the
5 maintenance person that's employed by AAAffordable, and his name
6 is Emmanuel J. Lester.

INTERVIEW OF EMMANUEL J. LESTER

7
8 BY MR. FOX:

9 Q. Mr. Lester, if you could, for the record, state your name --
10 your full name, your title, and spell your last name for us.

11 A. My name is Emmanuel J. Lester. My last name is L-e-s-t-e-r.
12 And I'm a part-time mechanic, light-duty mechanic for
13 AA Affordable.

14 Q. And how long have you been employed by the carrier?

15 A. On and off, maybe a couple years. Because I was a truck
16 driver, so I worked once in a while.

17 Q. Okay. And when you say you're a light-duty mechanic, can you
18 explain what duties you have?

19 A. Change light bulbs, windshield wiper blades, do the check on
20 the buses, tires. I look at the brake shoes just to make sure
21 they're not low, you know, to get them replaced. I repair the
22 seats, like the headlights and seats, inside interior. I check
23 the safety equipment as far as the lights, emergency windows,
24 emergency hatches, emergency doors. Some electrical work; if the
25 stop signs stop working, I test it and make sure that it's not

1 getting current or getting current. If it's not getting current,
2 I'll have them order a part and replace it. So meaning I do a lot
3 of little light-duty stuff.

4 Q. You said that you are a truck driver, also?

5 A. I was.

6 Q. You were. And who did you last work for?

7 A. BWI.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. It's down off of -- down by the airport, off of 176.

10 Q. And they were a general freight hauler?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. Now, can you describe the maintenance program that you
13 have at the company?

14 A. Basically, once a week I will go through them. When I walk
15 around them, I check to see if any lights are out. I check to see
16 if the emergency buzzer is working and the operation of the
17 vehicle. And some things I will jot down and -- jot it down and I
18 will, when I have the time, I'll go ahead and have it repaired.
19 If it needs to go out and have it repaired, I let them know to
20 schedule to have a repair done or repair it myself, one of the
21 two.

22 Q. This is the maintenance for 1876, which is the unit number
23 for the bus that was involved in the accident. Were you familiar
24 with the bus?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Was it the newest bus in your fleet?

2 A. Yes, the newest bus in the fleet.

3 Q. And there are some inspection sheets, which I'm not familiar
4 with, and some of the staff was not exactly familiar with. Can
5 you describe this one? It says Baltimore City Public Schools
6 School Inspection -- correction -- School Vehicle Inspection.

7 Do I understand, is this -- these forms are filled out by
8 city employees or city inspectors a couple of times a year?

9 A. Basically this -- let me see. These forms, yes. Actually,
10 what they do, when they go to inspection for Baltimore City, they
11 have these forms, and then they will check off anything that's
12 wrong, and then either put it -- they either put it out of service
13 or tags removed, and then it'll have to go back and be repaired.

14 Basically, what I did, I just used this sheet to do a
15 general -- when I walk around, I'll do a general look around and
16 I'll check off something that I might see that's wrong. Because
17 since it's already documented as a -- one little sheet, then I'll
18 just take and check off what I find that's wrong.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. And I use this as a guide.

21 Q. I see. And then I understand it gets an annual inspection?

22 A. Yes, a couple of annual inspections by Baltimore City a year.

23 Q. Okay. And this is a sheet that shows purchase of the
24 vehicle. Were you familiar with when it first arrived at the
25 company?

1 A. I was there -- let's see -- 6/20/14. No, I was not there
2 when it actually came there because I was out on the road. I was
3 driving tractor-trailers for a while, and then I switched off,
4 coming off the road to a local operation. But I am familiar with
5 the bus when it came in.

6 Q. Okay. Were there any -- did you notice, was anything -- when
7 you first inspected it, did you notice anything about the vehicle?

8 A. No. Usually those buses, when they come in, they usually
9 don't have too many problems. I didn't notice any major things
10 wrong with it at that time when I looked at it. Because I really
11 didn't have to do a whole lot to it because this was new, it come
12 from the factory. So when it comes from West End, West End have
13 to go through them before they allow the bus contractor take them,
14 anyway. So they do a full inspection.

15 Q. Okay. This is the other form that I was told is the annual
16 inspection form. Does that document look familiar to you?

17 A. Yes. This a form that comes from Department -- I guess from
18 the MVA inspectors; Sergeant Alright (ph.) and them, comes from
19 down Glen Burnie. They're a division of the MVA department.
20 These forms have to be filled out, to go through and check to see
21 any problem with the bus, and then you have it corrected.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And I see something on here that is not correct because this
24 is the wrong form. Okay.

25 Q. I don't know if that's --

1 A. Yeah, this -- that one wasn't completed at the time. This is
2 the newest one.

3 Q. Yeah, so that's the latest annual inspection?

4 A. Right. And basically, what I do as far as the brakes is
5 concerned is, I have a tool that I buy from Ryder. Ryder Truck
6 Industries, they have the tools they use to check brake readings
7 and stuff. There's a series of -- they look like fingers that
8 come on the thing and they have no go, go, replace, good. So it
9 has certain specs.

10 And then, with that said, you have to know what brakes
11 they're using on the -- what brakes are on that vehicle, and you
12 go to the manufacturer and find out what the minimum specs are for
13 brake readings. So you go from there. Because every brakes
14 nowadays are totally different. They have different settings on
15 them. And on these particular buses, the brake pads are much
16 thicker than normal.

17 Q. Do you remember what size -- what the brake chambers were on
18 the vehicle?

19 A. You mean brake chambers far as the --

20 Q. Size.

21 A. The brake pads itself?

22 Q. Um-hum.

23 A. When they come out of the box brand-new, they're 22-32nds.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. When they come out of the box, they're 22-32nds. The minimum

1 that's -- now, like I said, based on each manufacturer, you have
2 to look up and see what the minimum specs are. And 99 percent of
3 the time, based on them specs on the particular brake shoes, 8
4 millimeters should be take them off and remove them. Because
5 basically what happens, when they come out too far, the pistons
6 comes out and don't return like they should. So when it comes
7 down to a certain point, you should have them taken off. Even
8 though they might still have good brake wear, have them taken off,
9 because what happens is the pistons comes out too far and they'll
10 stay out or stick, could cause them to stick, because water and
11 stuff builds up, you know, rust.

12 Q. I see.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Okay, very good. Here is a form that we're interested in
15 finding out. It says at the top AA Affordable Transportation,
16 LLC. It has a date. It has your address. It has the vehicle
17 type. Can you describe what this document is?

18 A. Okay, basically, when I -- if I repair something, or what I
19 normally do, I use this laptop here, present in my possession. I
20 use Adobe and I open this file up. Because this file came from
21 AA Affordable, so what I do is I scan it into my system and I just
22 take and use Adobe and open it up, and then I can just type in
23 what I have done to it. That way it's easier for me not to write
24 it and I just have -- and that way, I keep a file of it.

25 Q. So you author this document?

1 A. Hmm?

2 Q. You create this document?

3 A. No, this document came from JJ Keller.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. The only thing I did was take and use Adobe to feed in the
6 information.

7 Q. So these entries you're putting in?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. And so this is your initials over here?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Basically all -- the only thing, just so I don't have to keep
13 repeating it, is just the address, stuff like that. But basically
14 all this stuff here, this information here, and the mileage, the
15 meter reading itself, it come from a form from JJ Keller's.

16 Q. All right, sir. Thank you. And this is not all -- well,
17 maybe it is. These are the driver vehicle inspection reports.
18 You're familiar with those? Do you get them at all? Do you
19 review them in your procedures?

20 A. Ninety-nine percent of the time, yes. Basically every day
21 when I come in, or when I'm down there -- if I'm not away or out
22 of town or something, I will go down and check them. Periodically
23 I will just do a walk around and check them. In this instance,
24 you know, as you can see, there's some problems with this form and
25 not being filled out like it's supposed to be. I inquired the

1 company to have the drivers to correct that information, as you
2 can see where (indiscernible). And this will indicate
3 basically --

4 Q. Right.

5 A. This will indicate that everything on that's bus is wrong.

6 Q. Right. So they were doing it the opposite way?

7 A. Yes. Because I've been trained to, I've been trained to -- I
8 went to school for tractor-trailer school down Allstate Career,
9 and I've been certified to do DOT, you know, the walk around, pre-
10 trips. So I'm very familiar with pre-trips, how to do it and when
11 to do it, what to look for, what not to do, you know, what to look
12 for, how to correct things when there's something wrong.

13 Q. Did you ever know a time when a form or a defect was remarked
14 and the company didn't act upon it?

15 A. No. Every time that something was written down, it was
16 performed. Say, a driver may say my horn's not working and they
17 would -- if I look at the sheet, it will let me know when -- they
18 might -- so a lot of times I'm there when they come in. And they
19 say my horn's not working, and I say, well, just write it up. Or
20 if you can, just write up, and I know about it, so I'll just go
21 ahead and check it right quick, and I will take a meter and go in
22 and see if, like, you know, if I have current, then I know it's
23 the horn.

24 Q. I see. And then the last set of documents are these, West
25 End. Now, is it my understanding that they are the repair shop

1 that took care of your heavy maintenance?

2 A. Yes. Because the bus, they have what you call an extended
3 warranty.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. An extra warranty on the buses. So that includes torn
6 electrical -- anything that's not normal, like the EGR valves worn
7 out, the brakes, stuff like that, it will go back to West End, and
8 then one of the managers up there will make an appointment for the
9 bus to go back out to West End for repairs.

10 Q. Did you ever know any issues with this vehicle? Does it
11 stand out in your mind? I know there's several buses that the
12 company uses. Do you recall any issues with the mechanical
13 operation?

14 A. No. Normally, no, not with this particular bus. It has a
15 few minor things, like Baltimore City wrote up the power steering
16 hose, which I changed, which is on --

17 Q. Yeah, this form here. I see.

18 A. Yeah. I changed the hose. For some reason, they didn't like
19 the way it looked. I verified it with other hoses on the bus.
20 And then when they bought the new one, I looked at it and matched
21 them exactly identical. Now the way it's laid out, is not the
22 best. That's a manufacturer problem, need to be corrected.
23 Because what it does, it comes up -- it comes down and then curves
24 up.

25 Q. I see.

1 A. And then you have to take a cable tie to pull it away from
2 the shock absorber housing.

3 Q. Right. So it was rubbing?

4 A. No, it wasn't rubbing. It's just the way they -- it was
5 close to it, I would say about a baby finger length. But they --
6 it's just, it's a factory design problem. That's something that
7 International need to correct. The way the tank is sitting, the
8 tank needs to be moved, because they got a plastic outlet the hose
9 hook to. It should be turned approximately another 45 degrees,
10 and that way the hose will come up and go away. It's, like I
11 said, some things -- see, by me being a military contractor, I
12 used to work on F-16 planes.

13 Q. Oh, wow.

14 A. Yeah, so I've been a government contractor for 30 years.

15 Q. Oh, my word.

16 A. So I worked at Westinghouse for 15½ years, and outside of
17 that, I worked at all different government manufacturers as a
18 military contractor. So I'm very familiar with procedures, what
19 you have to follow, what you're not supposed to do, things have to
20 be done a certain way.

21 Q. So as far as the mechanical operation of this bus, 1876, you
22 don't recall any specific instance --

23 A. No.

24 Q. -- except for this minor hose that you were describing?

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. Now the driver, Mr. Chappell, were you familiar with him in
2 the operation of the bus?

3 A. I might talk to him once in a while, most of the time, how
4 you doing. Because I might be somewhere on one of the buses and
5 I'll see him come through and go to the door, go inside, and I'll
6 speak to him. He might speak to me. He might say -- oh, yeah,
7 one day he told me the battery door -- not the battery door, but
8 the electrical supply where the fuses and stuff at, the latch kept
9 popping open.

10 Q. Oh, I see.

11 A. So what I did is order one from Freightliner down Annapolis.
12 Because the ones that International uses, it's a cheaper grade
13 quality. And so instead of having to keep repeating the same
14 thing over, I'll order one from Freightliner, which is actually
15 identical, but it's as much better grade part.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. All it is, is a latch with a little lever that comes out and
18 hold the battery door and stuff closed, that's basically what it
19 is. Other than that, no major problems that we had with it so far
20 that I can recall.

21 Q. And as far as observations, when he would come in pre-trip or
22 leave, or anything like that, did you notice anything unusual
23 about the driver?

24 A. No. He seemed to be in pretty good health, as far as I'm
25 concerned. He didn't show any signs of weakness or anything like

1 that. He walked pretty good. He had good speed to him. I didn't
2 notice any medical problems that he had with him. Of course, you
3 know, a lot of times I don't discuss that with people unless they
4 directly tell me.

5 Q. Right. It was brought to our attention that he had an
6 incident maybe within the past week or two weeks where the bus --
7 he had an incident on the bus and he either maybe fainted or
8 passed out. I don't know. I'm getting secondhand information.

9 A. I also heard that secondhand. I was not there to witness any
10 of that that took place. I got it secondhand from somebody on the
11 street, and I couldn't say anybody in the company told me anything
12 about it. One of the occupants in the area said something about
13 did (indiscernible) but they don't know what it was. So I didn't
14 ask anybody about it.

15 Q. Do you know when this was?

16 A. I can't be exact. I would say 2 weeks, a week, a month
17 maybe. I'm not exactly sure. Like I said, it was hearsay to me
18 from somebody on the street. People talk all the time about, you
19 know, so --

20 Q. Right. But as far as you know, you did not have to go out
21 and recover a bus --

22 A. No.

23 Q. -- because Mr. Chappell had a fainting spell or any kind of
24 issue of that nature?

25 A. No. Normally, I won't recover a bus or anything like that

1 because I'm not allowed to drive a commercial vehicle at this time
2 because I had a stroke. So when I had the stroke, my DOT medical
3 certification went out.

4 Q. Oh, I see.

5 A. Because I was in the hospital. So I was worrying about
6 getting myself back together as far as my stroke was concerned. I
7 knew I wasn't going back, not driving no tractor-trailer no more,
8 so I said, well, I ain't going to worry about it. My friends and
9 my brother-in-law took me where I needed to go at, so --

10 Q. I see.

11 A. I do have a license but it has on there noncommercial. I
12 will show you that in a minute.

13 Q. Well, that's all right, sir.

14 A. Yeah, it says noncommercial, so I know better than to drive
15 anything that I'm not supposed to.

16 Q. So specifically, you did not recover a vehicle from
17 Mr. Chappell over the last month?

18 A. No. No.

19 Q. Or any time?

20 A. No.

21 Q. At no time since you've been employed with the company?

22 A. No.

23 Q. And we're just trying to vet that same rumor that we heard,
24 or it was brought to our attention through several people. So we
25 just were trying to track it down.

1 A. No, as far as I know of -- like I said, it was secondhand
2 information to me. I never asked him about it, he never said
3 anything to me about it, so -- but like I said, sometimes people
4 personal -- it's so much stuff go around that neighborhood, I just
5 try to blank it out, because you -- some nights when I come home,
6 in my head I'm saying -- because the police are coming down the
7 street and I say, Lord, have mercy, I just see it's in my head.

8 But anyway, getting back to the story, far as I know of, I
9 didn't know anything, that he had any medical problems. Not to my
10 knowledge.

11 Q. All right. Is there anything about the maintenance
12 program -- you clarified these forms that were something that
13 Carol didn't exactly know and I wanted to get clarification from
14 you how this paperwork transpired. Is there anything else that
15 you'd like to add about the bus or the operation that we haven't
16 discussed?

17 A. You mean the operation as far as the operation of the bus or
18 operation of the company?

19 Q. Either one.

20 A. Well, see, I come from a strong military background and I'm
21 used to documentation. That's a must. You have to document
22 everything.

23 Q. Right.

24 A. That's just how the military works things. And it's for good
25 reasons, because you can't just have everybody doing something the

1 way they want to do it because it'll cause problems. So you have
2 to follow the specs the way they are designed. Because I used to
3 be a model maker. So, whatever came in Westinghouse that was
4 developed, we developed in our group, we made the models of it and
5 then we sent it over to manufacturing once we approved that they
6 can do it, and then go from there. So I'm very familiar with
7 specs.

8 As far as I'm concerned, I think they probably can do a
9 little better far as making everything computerized. That's the
10 way I see it.

11 Q. Okay. But as far as safe operation of vehicles, mechanical
12 operation of vehicles, in your department there was nothing that
13 was out of the ordinary?

14 A. No. And Ms. Carol Williams is very strict on things that --
15 and especially stuff safety-wise. If it was something safety-
16 wise, they would have to reassign the buses until they get
17 whatever I found that was deemed to be a safety problem corrected.
18 Because every driver had the right to refuse to drive something
19 that's not to -- if they feel that it's not safe to them, then I
20 would say no, we can't use it because this part is bad, it has to
21 be replaced, and they would have it done.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. So I would check the front end parts, turn it, and if I can't
24 turn it by hand, I'd lift it up, jack it up and do the kingpin
25 checks -- the kingpin checks, and I would check the tie rod ends,

1 make sure they don't have no play in it. If it did, then I would
2 let them know.

3 So, basically, like I said, Carol Williams is very strict
4 about maintenance. If I call her and tell her that something's
5 wrong with one of them, seriously wrong, then she would say order
6 the part, or it has to go to West End or American Bus Sales or
7 they'll send it down to Diesel Doctor, which is a little closer,
8 to do the major repairs on it.

9 Q. All right, sir. Well, you've answered my questions about the
10 maintenance files. So, I appreciate your time tonight. And if
11 you do have anything else further to add to the interview --

12 A. Let me ask you a question. Would it be -- now like I
13 explained to them before, as far as the minor stuff, is that a
14 problem, what I do, as far as your standpoint of view?

15 Q. No, the only question we had was, we were a little unclear on
16 the flow of this paperwork, how these forms that I'm showing
17 you -- your generated form, I saw that it was computer generated.
18 I didn't know how that happened, and you explained it, that it
19 came out of your computer. So you've answered those questions
20 that we had concerns about.

21 A. Um-hum. Yes, actually this form comes from JJ Keller, and
22 all I did was scan it in and -- because this is what Carol
23 Williams wants me to use. So I scans it in. Anytime I do
24 anything, I'm going to just take and go in the computer and just
25 type it in. I'll fill this in. And all I do is click and point

1 and just type in what I did.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. That way you have a good record, a legible record of what's
4 done.

5 Q. And we appreciate that. It makes it very understandable now
6 that you've explained it. So if there's nothing else to add, I'm
7 going to go ahead and conclude the interview.

8 A. Okay.

9 MR. FOX: And the time now is 6:50 p.m.

10 (Whereupon, at 6:50 p.m., the interview 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: SCHOOL BUS/COMMUTER BUS ACCIDENT
 IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND ON
 NOVEMBER 1, 2016
 Interview of Emmanuel J. Lester

DOCKET NUMBER: HWY17MH007

PLACE: Baltimore, Maryland

DATE: November 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.

Lisa Fuerstenberg
Transcriber