

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

\* \* \* \* \*  
In the matter of: \*  
\*  
METROLINK TRAIN NO. 111 \*  
COLLISION WITH UNION PACIFIC \*  
RAILROAD LEESDALE LOCAL, \* Docket No.: DCA-08-MR-009  
September 12, 2008, \*  
Los Angeles, California \*  
\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: CHRIS CASSEL

National Transportation Safety Board  
Courtroom  
1515 West 190th Street  
Gardena, California

Wednesday,  
November 5, 2008

The above-entitled matter came on for interview  
pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: JIM REMINES

## APPEARANCES:

JIM REMINES, Operations Group Chairman  
National Transportation Safety Board  
Washington, D.C.  
(202) 314-6434

C. WAYNE WORKMAN, Investigator in Charge  
National Transportation Safety Board  
Atlanta, Georgia  
(404) 562-1670

RICK NARVELL, JR., Human Performance Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board  
Washington, D.C.  
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I N T E R V I E W

(Time Noted: 10:52)

1  
2  
3 MR. REMINES: I'm Jim Remines. I'm with the National  
4 Transportation Safety Board. Today's date is November the 5th,  
5 2008. I'm here regarding the investigation of DCA-08-MR-009,  
6 the collision of Metrolink Train 111 and UP Freight Train LOF-  
7 65-12, on the 12th of September 2008.

8 I'm going to start out by going around the room and  
9 ask the folks here to give us their name, who they work for, or  
10 title, and then spell their last name for the record, and then  
11 we'll begin the questioning.

12 MR. NARVELL: So I'll start off. Rick Narvell,  
13 N-a-r-v-e-l-l, Human Performance Investigation with the  
14 National Transportation Safety Board, out of Washington, DC.

15 MR. WORKMAN: C. Wayne, W-a-y-n-e, Workman,  
16 W-o-r-k-m-a-n, Investigator in Charge of the accident, from  
17 Florida.

18 MR. REMINES: Jim Remines, R-e-m-i-n-e-s, with the  
19 NTSB. I'm the Operations Group Chairman, out of Washington, DC,  
20 and we're here to interview --

21 THE WITNESS: Chris Cassel, C-a-s-s-e-l, and I am  
22 trying to stay retired at the moment.

## INTERVIEW OF CHRIS CASSEL

BY MR. REMINES:

23  
24  
25 Q. Mr. Cassel, we understand that you have information

1 regarding the day of the accident that you may be able to offer  
2 us, and I'd like to ask you, basically, to describe your day  
3 that day and what you have to offer us as far as information.

4 A. Okay. The day was pretty much like any other  
5 day -- come over, meet a friend of mine, Bob Atkinson, and kind  
6 of, like, a get-together, assist people for Amtrak getting on  
7 the trains, the right trains, operating the ticket machines,  
8 something to do.

9 That day when Metrolink 111 pulled in, just like any  
10 other day, it was a Friday. Just spoke very briefly because  
11 their stops are very brief, maybe a minute. When he pulled out,  
12 "Have a great weekend. See you Monday." He pulled out and  
13 cleared us, and we just happened to look down the tracks.

14 It was like any other day and had a green signal.  
15 Bob Atkinson remarked to me, "He's got a green signal. I guess  
16 he's coming through the tunnel first" -- excuse me, "going  
17 through the tunnel first."

18 And we had known that there's a local freight train  
19 comes through, and he hadn't come through yet. He normally  
20 comes through long before -- about an hour before the Metrolink  
21 train goes up. He comes back down. He hadn't come through yet.

22 So we noticed the green. I saw it, probably about  
23 when 111 was going past Devonshire Street -- the first east-  
24 west street up here. And that's all I saw.

25 Q. Was there anything unusual about that day as opposed

1 to other days you had been out here?

2 A. No, sir, nothing.

3 Q. You said you spoke? Did you have a conversation with  
4 the engineer?

5 A. Just "Hi, how are you? How's your day going?"  
6 Just -- I didn't know him on a real friendly basis like "Hey,  
7 let's go to dinner" or "Let's go to lunch." I didn't know him  
8 that well.

9 Q. Did he have anything in his hands, or did he look  
10 like he was occupied with anything other than operating the  
11 train? Could you describe how he was? You could look --

12 A. His demeanor was friendly. I -- his demeanor was  
13 friendly, as normal. He was always a very friendly guy.  
14 Bob Atkinson and he talked about the Dodgers for a second.  
15 They were in the playoffs then -- and nothing unusual about  
16 that day. It was Friday. Everybody was glad to get off. I'm  
17 sure of that.

18 Q. Were you seated?

19 A. No, I was standing. I was over right where he  
20 pulls the engine in and stops the train.

21 Q. Um-hum?

22 A. I was standing up.

23 Q. Did you see the conductor?

24 A. At the other end of the train.

25 Q. Did the conductor and the engineer exchange

1 any -- any kind -- make any exchange between them, verbal or  
2 waive, or anything of that sort?

3 A. I did not see it. No.

4 Q. Could you hear anything going on in the cab like a  
5 conversation in the locomotive where the engineer was?

6 A. No, sir.

7 Q. No?

8 A. No. Bob and Rob were doing most of the talking, so I  
9 really wasn't paying that close attention.

10 Q. Where exactly were you standing when you looked  
11 toward the signal?

12 A. Right where Rob stops the engine -- the little canopy.  
13 That's where he stops. I was just -- it would be maybe ten  
14 feet south of where I was standing before I'd walked around the  
15 bench and just stood there.

16 Q. Is that something you would normally do?

17 A. Probably half the time, just -- no reason why. I  
18 stopped and looked.

19 Q. And you seen other signals, other than green signals  
20 there?

21 A. Yellow and flashing yellow.

22 Q. Can you --

23 A. Not that day. I mean, I've seen them.

24 Q. That's what I'm asking. Can you see a red signal  
25 from there?

1 A. No -- at night, but during the day, no.

2 Q. Anything unusual that anyone's ever said about the  
3 signals up there at Topanga from the standpoint of any changes  
4 in colors or strange occurrences?

5 A. No. We had a strange occurrence up here, the day  
6 before and the day of. Just out of the blue, they brought an  
7 Amtrak train in, which 99 percent of the time stops on this  
8 track where that Amtrak is stopped, and for no reason at all  
9 they just pulled him over on the other side, on the other track,  
10 and there was no other traffic. We couldn't figure that one  
11 out, but --

12 MR. REMINES: Okay.

13 Mr. Workman?

14 BY MR. WORKMAN:

15 Q. Chris, just to clear up a couple of items  
16 when -- when you mentioned "up here," are you referring to the  
17 intermediate signal prior to reaching Chatsworth Station from  
18 the east?

19 A. The one you can see down here on Lassen Avenue.

20 Q. Okay. And when you mentioned the other track, are  
21 we -- are we saying the track that would be adjacent to -- that  
22 would be referred to as the passing side?

23 A. It would be Track 2 over on the other side of this  
24 one.

25 Q. That would be Track 2 on the other side?



1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. I just want to help clear it up so the reader would  
3 understand?

4 A. You're right. I was a little vague. It's two tracks,  
5 as you probably know, down here from just this -- this side  
6 just north of De Soto Avenue. It's two tracks up here to the  
7 north of Chatsworth Street where he goes back into one to go  
8 back up around the park and up through the tunnels and over the  
9 hill into Simi Valley.

10 Q. Okay. Regarding -- regarding the signals, have you  
11 ever noticed the signal at Topanga being lit when there wasn't  
12 trains here at the station?

13 A. Only in advance of trains approaching.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. I'll look down and see whether it's a yellow or  
16 flashing yellow, or it will be green.

17 Q. Okay. When you say the signal at -- at Topanga being  
18 a flashing -- you can -- you can get a flashing yellow at  
19 Topanga?

20 A. Yeah. When you refer to Topanga, that's --

21 Q. That's the signal.

22 A. That's the signal north of us?

23 Q. North of us.

24 A. Yeah. Yeah. We seen flashing yellows.

25 Q. You've seen flashing yellows there?

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. And was there a train here when you saw those?

3 A. No.

4 Q. Okay. No train here when you saw those?

5 A. No.

6 Q. And when looking at that signal at Topanga, have you  
7 ever -- have you ever seen a green signal with that train here?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Okay. You've seen green signals and no trains?

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. And during the daylight hours, have you ever  
12 seen a red signal down there?

13 A. No.

14 Q. No. Okay. And on the day of the accident, when you  
15 were speaking with the engineer and you observed the green  
16 signal --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- that -- when you observed that, where were you  
19 standing in relationship to the train?

20 Were you -- were you along the -- there's a -- for  
21 clarification there is a yellow line along the edge of the  
22 platform; and in relationship to that yellow line where the  
23 train was stopped, where would you have been standing in  
24 relationship to that?

25 A. While it was here, I was actually underneath the

1 canopy, this side of the solid yellow line, while he was  
2 stopped.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. When we were talking.

5 Q. And then when you observed the train, you were  
6 standing where?

7 A. Well, I moved the other side the line and looked  
8 straight down the tracks.

9 Q. Okay. So you would have -- you would have been  
10 inside the yellow line.

11 A. Inside the yellow line. Yes, sir.

12 Q. Okay. And the individual that was with you -- you  
13 referred to him as Bob?

14 A. As Bob. Yes, sir.

15 Q. Okay. And where was Bob at?

16 A. He would have been standing -- I was facing this way.  
17 He would have been in front of me to the north.

18 Q. Okay. Just for clarification, Mr. Cassel would have  
19 been on the yellow line, and the friend of his named Bob would  
20 have been on his north side?

21 A. Correct.

22 Q. And would have been in front of him facing the  
23 Topanga signal to the north?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Just getting people lined up and where we are --

1 A. Right.

2 Q. -- where we were all at.

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. Now, the conductor, when you saw the conductor, where  
5 was he located in relationship to you when -- when he  
6 got -- when he opened the doors and exited the train?

7 A. He was standing right over here where the handicapped  
8 ramp is.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. You can't really see from where you're sitting, but  
11 there's a handicapped ramp right over here to the south. He  
12 was in that car, and we were standing up at the north end where  
13 he had stopped.

14 Q. Okay?

15 A. Three car lengths away.

16 Q. So -- so the conductor was -- was he on the rear car?

17 A. Rear car.

18 Q. The conductor was on the rear car or the south car?

19 A. That's when I saw him, yes.

20 Q. And -- and when he opened the door and came out, he  
21 was -- he was located near the handicapped ramp at the south  
22 end of the station?

23 A. When I saw him, yes.

24 Q. Okay. Good. That's okay.

25 MR. WORKMAN: That's all I have.

1 BY MR. REMINES:

2 Q. One question there. When you say -- did the  
3 conductor board the train? Did he keep his head out as the  
4 train pulled from the station, or how would the conductor, when  
5 the train left the station heading  
6 northbound -- what would have been the conductor's position at  
7 that point?

8 Some conductors keep the door open. That's why I'm  
9 asking this.

10 A. I didn't notice if he -- if he had his head out  
11 looking or anything like that.

12 Q. Okay. Thanks.

13 MR. REMINES: Rick?

14 MR. NARVELL: Yes. Rick Narvell. I just have just a  
15 couple, and these are going to pertain, Chris, to the weather,  
16 basically.

17 THE WITNESS: Okay.

18 BY MR. NARVELL:

19 Q. First of all, what was -- to the best of your  
20 recollection, what was the weather? Can you describe the  
21 weather that day?

22 A. A lot like it is right now. It was -- we have  
23 afternoon breezes come up here.

24 Q. Um-hum?

25 A. It would come up that afternoon out of the northwest,

1 ten miles an hour.

2 Q. Clear?

3 A. Clear, yeah.

4 Q. Sunny?

5 A. Um-hum.

6 Q. Have you ever had a chance -- and I guess I'll go  
7 back to what I would call very warm days here -- when you  
8 looked down that track on warm days, have you ever seen what  
9 I'll call a shimmering or a waving?

10 A. Oh, yes.

11 Q. That was out of the signal?

12 A. Out of the signal?

13 Q. Yeah. From your perspective here, a mile or so down  
14 from Topanga, has there ever been the case where it appears to  
15 shimmer or waver?

16 A. Not out of the signal, so to speak, if you're looking  
17 at the signal like I'm looking at you.

18 Q. That's what I'm asking.

19 A. No.

20 Q. That day there was no doubt in your mind that it  
21 appeared to be green to you?

22 A. No doubt.

23 Q. No obstructions? Trees? Limbs?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Again, the shimmering effect. Anything that would

1 obstruct or hinder your view down to the signal light?

2 A. No, sir.

3 MR. NARVELL: That's all I have.

4 BY MR. REMINES:

5 Q. Last question I'd like to ask you is do you have  
6 something to offer that we haven't asked?

7 A. Well, I got all kinds of questions. There's no doubt  
8 about that because I feel like I have a personal vested  
9 interest in that catastrophe.

10 Q. Do you have any information that we might not have  
11 asked you for?

12 A. The only question I have -- and this is really from  
13 listening to the news or reading the newspaper, and you  
14 gentleman would know more about this than I would. I know  
15 there's a milepost detector on the tracks up there. Did  
16 that -- what's it -- what's -- yield any information? Was that  
17 checked, because it came out and said that the signals worked  
18 fine and all the computers and all that were fine, or at least  
19 the lady said that in your first press conference?

20 I was just wondering if -- and you may not even be  
21 able to answer this because you're still investigating  
22 this -- but I know there is a milepost detector up there. Does  
23 that yield anything, or is that just for Metrolink?

24 MR. WORKMAN: I'm not -- this is Wayne Workman. I'm  
25 not -- when you say a milepost detector --

1           THE WITNESS: There's -- from all the years that I  
2 road Metrolink, there's certain sections of track where  
3 they'll -- you can hear in the conductor's radio about a  
4 milepost detector. It gives your speed and whether it says no  
5 defects.

6           MR. WORKMAN: Okay. A defect?

7           THE WITNESS: When someone's looking for, like, bad  
8 bearings, bad wheels, or whatever. And I know there's one up  
9 there in the pass because I've heard it when I lived over in  
10 Simi Valley when I was riding back and forth from L.A. to Simi  
11 Valley.

12          MR. WORKMAN: Okay.

13          THE WITNESS: And 4444 is the number.

14          MR. WORKMAN: Okay. The -- what we would refer to  
15 that as a defect detector, equipment defect detector, and  
16 you're exactly right. What it does is it checks the bearing if  
17 there is any defect in the wheel or flat wheels, and some of  
18 them have impact detectors with them, and that is -- that's  
19 information that's still under investigation right now. So  
20 what we're doing here is, is doing with this trip is a routine  
21 follow-up --

22          THE WITNESS: Okay.

23          MR. WORKMAN: -- with -- with part of our team  
24 to gather information that we didn't -- we didn't or were  
25 unable to get, you know, when we were on the scene.



1 THE WITNESS: Okay.

2 MR. WORKMAN: And then what we're doing here is  
3 following up on the investigation, and we've got different  
4 members of the team, not only with yourself or people here at  
5 the station but other people.

6 MR. REMINES: We did collect that information. We  
7 didn't miss it.

8 MR. WORKMAN: No. No. We got all the information --

9 MR. REMINES: Yes.

10 MR. WORKMAN: That -- that's out there.

11 THE WITNESS: Okay. Because if you don't mind me  
12 talking for a minute -- because I've wanted to talk --

13 MR. WORKMAN: Sure.

14 THE WITNESS: -- but I just, like, clammed up.

15 MR. REMINES: Okay.

16 THE WITNESS: Like I said, I have a personal vested  
17 interest in this because I knew somebody, you know, who died,  
18 which was Engineer Rob. I've been contacted by an attorney.  
19 The state PC has been out.

20 And, you know, I told that gentleman exactly what  
21 I've just told everybody here because that's all I saw and  
22 that's all I know, but I got a lot of questions about this. I  
23 really do since, like I said, I've been riding since '98. And  
24 I -- and I feel I know a fair amount about how Metrolink  
25 operates.

1           MR. WORKMAN: Because it's an open -- Wayne  
2 Workman -- because it's still an open investigation right now,  
3 with regard to the information, we're gathering from -- from  
4 numerous sources, we really can't discuss anything that, you  
5 know, hasn't already been released from the press as we put our  
6 picture together from everyone.

7           THE WITNESS: That's understandable.

8           MR. WORKMAN: So I -- I understand that you have a  
9 vested interest in this.

10          THE WITNESS: Yes.

11          MR. WORKMAN: I truly appreciate that you've taken  
12 the time and being absolutely forthright, and I commend you for  
13 that. But we want to make sure from the National  
14 Transportation Safety Board that we talked to everyone that we  
15 can -- any and all the eyewitness that are involved in the  
16 accident -- and gather all the records that are available from  
17 the locomotive, from the signal systems, from the dispatcher's  
18 system.

19                 Everything that's out there and available, we're in  
20 the process of gathering. And while it's an open investigation,  
21 unless we've released it to the public, we're, you know, we're  
22 unable to discuss it right now.

23          THE WITNESS: Oh, I understand.

24          MR. REMINES: True.

25          THE WITNESS: A lot of them were my opinions. Like I

1 said, and I've certainly got a couple. To me it makes no sense  
2 whatsoever, none, for Rob to blow a red signal for something he  
3 can see especially along a straight away.

4 He's got -- I mean, you know the tracks as well as I  
5 do. When you were out here right after the crash, you know  
6 it's a straight shot from the I-5 Freeway just before Burbank  
7 all the way to the corner up there. And there's another  
8 straight shot all the way up. It just makes no sense. It just  
9 makes no sense.

10 I mean, that man did this run five times a week, four  
11 times a day.

12 MR. WORKMAN: Do you have anything?

13 MR. NARVELL: No. I'm good. Thank you.

14 MR. REMINES: Appreciate your taking the time to talk  
15 to us.

16 THE WITNESS: Do you need me to show you where we  
17 were exactly so that, when Chris and Bob get in here and start  
18 talking about where they were standing, you'll have a better --

19 MR. WORKMAN: Yeah. That would be good.

20 MR. REMINES: Um-hum.

21 THE WITNESS: Recollection of or -- not recollection,  
22 but better idea --

23 MR. WORKMAN: Absolutely.

24 THE WITNESS: -- of where Chris was standing, Bob was  
25 sitting and standing, and where I was?

1           MR. WORKMAN: And since there's four of us, why don't  
2 we first put Rick where the conductor was, and then Jim and  
3 I'll walk down with you, Chris. And we'll see where you were  
4 standing in relationship and where Bob was at.

5           MR. REMINES: Um-hum.

6           MR. WORKMAN: And from a question-and-answer  
7 standpoint, it would be good for us to all know exactly where  
8 we want those positions.

9           MR. REMINES: Okay.

10          THE WITNESS: I want you to know where I was standing  
11 so I mean, I -- whether -- I'm sure it's pertinent, and I'm  
12 sure it's relevant. But it's also to help you when the other  
13 two gentlemen come in. They won't be pointing and asking  
14 questions.

15          MR. REMINES: We'll conclude our interview.

16          We will get ready for the next witness in just a  
17 short order.

18          (Off the record.)

19          (On the record.)

20          MR. REMINES: I want to ask you about that signal.

21          We'll get you back on the record. Chris, state your  
22 name one more time.

23          THE WITNESS: Chris Cassel, C-a-s-s-e-l.

24                           INTERVIEW OF CHRIS CASSEL

25          MR. REMINES: All right. I'm Jim Remines. We're all

1 back in the room. Wayne Workman's here. Rick Narvell is here.

2 BY MR. REMINES:

3 Q. I want to ask you about the signals to the south of  
4 the station?

5 A. Lassen Avenue?

6 Q. These two --

7 A. Yes. That's Lassen Avenue.

8 Q. -- railroad signals? Lassen Avenue?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. And looking south to the station, the signal on your  
11 left -- what color was it the night of the accident?

12 A. It was red.

13 Q. On your left?

14 A. My left, looking south, yes.

15 BY MR. WORKMAN:

16 Q. Number 1 track?

17 A. Number 1 track because he came this way. I'm looking  
18 south, and it was red.

19 Q. Okay. That's good and the signal on the right?

20 A. As far as I remember, it was red also. They were  
21 both red for going south which was --

22 Q. Okay?

23 A. -- different, rare, however, you want to call it.

24 Q. Sure. Okay. And that was before Metrolink 111  
25 arrived?

1           A.    Yes, sir.

2                   MR. REMINES:   Okay.   That's it.

3                   (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled  
4 matter 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: METROLINK TRAIN NO. 111  
COLLISION WITH UNION PACIFIC  
RAILROAD LEESDALE LOCAL,  
September 12, 2008,  
Los Angeles, California  
Interview of Chris Cassel

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-08-MR-009

PLACE: Gardena, California

DATE: November 5, 2008

was held in accordance with the record, and that this is the  
original, true and accurate transcript which has been compared  
to the recording accomplished at the interviews.

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Willie Anderson, Jr.  
Court Reporter