

Attachment B – Signal Observation Test

On September 15, 2008, members of the Operations Group traveled to Chatsworth Station in Chatsworth, California to observe block signal indications at CP Topanga, MP 444.4.

Chatsworth was the last station stop that Metrolink 111 made before running through the switch at CP Topanga and colliding with the Union Pacific Leesdale local. The Metrolink conductor had given a statement to emergency responders that he had observed a clear block at CP Topanga before departing Chatsworth.

The observations were made at the same time of day as the accident three days prior in order to determine if ambient light conditions, reflections, or atmospheric conditions affected crewmember's interpretation of signal aspects as well as overall visibility from the vantage point of both Metrolink's conductor and Engineer.

At 1620 hours unaided visual observations of CP Topanga were made from the conductor's platform and from the platform adjacent to where the lead unit of 111 would have been stopped.

The Metrolink dispatcher lined the CP Topanga switch for movement into the siding so the signal on the mainline at CP Topanga would display a stop indication.

A very faint glimmer of red was intermittently visible to some Operations Group members, others reported seeing nothing.

At 1630 we boarded the cab of Metrolink 111 at Chatsworth while it was sitting at its typical spot. The Engineer stated that he could see the block signal at Topanga but noted that he knew where to look through experience.

The distance from the spot for 111's engine and CP Topanga is approximately 5,288-feet.

The Engineer was instructed to take off as he normally would from a station stop and proceed west toward CP Topanga and stop at a point where the red signal became solidly visible to him.

Train no. 111 proceeded west at 1634 hours. The Engineer stopped short of the first road crossing at Devonshire Avenue and stated that he could clearly see the block signal. The signal was clearly visible to some Operations Group members; others reported still seeing only an intermittently visible flickering red. At this point the train had traveled 953-feet and was still 4,335-feet from CP Topanga.

Train 111 then backed up to spot at Chatsworth Station and the Metrolink dispatcher lined CP Topanga for 111's movement in order to display a clear aspect as reported by the Metrolink conductor involved in the incident.

At 1645 a flashing yellow aspect appeared at CP Topanga. The aspect was highly visible to all members of the Operations Group both in the cab and on the coach car.

At 1646 CP Topanga displayed a green aspect that again was highly visible to all members of the Operations Group.

At 1651 CP Topanga displayed a stop indication. The red signal was very faint and only intermittently visible from both the locomotive and coach car. Not all members were able to observe the signal from that distance.

While at Chatsworth Operations Group members spoke to a rail fan who habitually watches trains from the platform. The man, Robert Atkinson, told members he witnessed the departure of Metrolink 111 on September 12, 2008 and noted that the train was running late. When asked if he saw what aspect CP Topanga displayed as 111 departed, the man, without hesitation stated that the block was green. He stated he was in the habit of leaning forward to look at the block that the trains departed on.

