



SURVIVAL FACTORS ATTACHMENT 2

CHP Witness Statements

Palm Springs, CA

HWY17MH005

(40 pages)

Maria Alvarez

On October 26, at 0905 hours, Investigator Smith and NTSB Investigator Barth interviewed Ms. Alvarez. The interview was conducted at the Desert Regional Medical Center, room #3115, and concluded at 0949 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Ms. Alvarez was familiar with Mr. Vides and the USA Holiday bus having been riding it for the last seven years. Ms. Alvarez usually took the bus [MCI] to go to the casino about once per month. She used to go more often, but stopped riding on the MCI approximately three years ago because Mr. Vides stopped going to various casinos. Ms. Alvarez believed the other routes were taken away from Mr. Vides because he would always fall asleep. Ms. Alvarez said Mr. Vides would always drive over the yellow line on the roadway because she would hear the noise the tires made as went over the yellow reflective markers. The only reason she rode the MCI on the day of the collision was because she met up with her friend and fellow passenger Elvia Sanchez, who convinced Ms. Alvarez to go with her. Ms. Alvarez also related that the busses were not kept in good condition because they were always breaking down and they “jump” a lot.

Ms. Alvarez explained that to get on the bus she did not purchase tickets; rather she paid twenty dollars to the driver or a “lady” that collects the money. After paying twenty dollars, her name would be added to a list and once they get to the casino she received a thirty dollar credit on her casino player’s card. Ms. Alvarez also related that she had never received any type of instructions or safety briefing on what to do in case of an emergency after getting on the MCI.

On October 22, Ms. Alvarez entered the MCI at 2030 hours at the bus stop located at West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue, in the city of Los Angeles. After getting on the bus, she sat in the window seat of the fourth row on the right side of the MCI. The MCI arrived at the Red Earth Casino at 2200 hours and upon arrival, she exited the MCI and went inside the casino. Throughout the night, Ms. Alvarez occasionally saw Mr. Vides playing the machines. During her encounters with Mr. Vides, she did not observe him eating or drinking. At 0345 hours, Ms. Alvarez went out to the bus pick up site; however, the bus was did not arrive until between 0400 and 0430 hours, which Ms. Alvarez described as being late. Ms. Alvarez felt the bus was late due to Mr. Vides playing the slot machines and going to sleep late. Ms. Alvarez believed Mr. Vides went to sleep for about 30 minutes prior to picking the passengers up for departure from the casino. Once the MCI arrived, Ms. Alvarez sat in the same seat she had been sitting in on the way to the casino. Seated next to her was Alberto Alvarez and seated in front of her was her friend Elvia Sanchez.

Ms. Alvarez characterized the driving of Mr. Vides while he drove the MCI back to Los Angeles as “He was driving like crazy. He was driving really fast.” Eventually, Ms. Alvarez fell asleep after the bus left the casino.

Maria Alvarez

Ms. Alvarez remembered waking up as the bus was being cut by fire and rescue personnel. She was not sure if she had been sleeping or had lost consciousness as a result of the collision. After she woke up, she noticed the seat in front of her had buckled and folded backwards and Ms. Alvarez was wedged between the seats and was almost standing up. Her friend, Ms. Sanchez, was face to face with her and all of the overhead items, including a container and neck pillow belonging to Ms. Alvarez, were on top of Ms. Sanchez. Ms. Alvarez tried to wake Ms. Sanchez up, but she was unresponsive. Eventually, the firefighters cut the seat behind Ms. Alvarez and placed her on a backboard and then transported to the hospital by ambulance.

Jose Hernandez

On November 3, at 1426 hours, Investigator Smith and CHP Southern Division MAIT Investigator Castaneda interviewed Mr. Hernandez. The interview was conducted at the residence of Mr. Hernandez and concluded at 1456 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mr. Hernandez was somewhat familiar with Mr. Vides. He heard about the bus service by word of mouth and seeing people gathered waiting to take the bus. He had been riding the bus [MCI] for about three months. Mr. Hernandez usually took the bus to go to the casino once or twice per month. He explained that he normally paid the bus coordinator twenty dollars. The casino would later provide him with a player card and thirty five dollars in credits. Mr. Hernandez related that Mr. Vides was not always the person driving the MCI; however, during the occasions he drove, his driving was "normal." Mr. Hernandez did not receive any instructions or safety brief on the trip October 22; however, on a previous trip the driver gave instructions to break the windows in case of an emergency.

On October 22, Mr. Hernandez arrived at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. Upon his arrival, Mr. Hernandez saw Mr. Vides at the corner, but the MCI had not arrived yet. Eventually, the MCI arrived with a driver other than Mr. Vides driving. Mr. Hernandez said that another driver was supposed to have driven the bus; however, that driver did not show up, so Mr. Vides drove the MCI to the casino [Red Earth Casino]. Mr. Hernandez entered the MCI and sat in the aisle seat on the left side of the MCI in row seven. Idalia Arevalo was seated next to Mr. Hernandez in the window seat. Mr. Hernandez described Mr. Vides as appearing normal. The MCI departed for the casino at 2030 hours. During the trip to the casino, Mr. Hernandez characterized the driving of Mr. Vides as normal and that the drive was relaxing and problem free. The MCI arrived at the Red Earth Casino between 2300 and 2330 hours.

After arriving at the casino, Mr. Hernandez entered the casino and "grabbed some coffee." At approximately 0200 hours, he saw Mr. Vides inside the casino. Mr. Vides had a cup in his hand and was drinking coffee or soda. Mr. Hernandez did not see Mr. Vides again until getting back on the MCI.

At 0355 hours, Mr. Hernandez exited the casino and lined up outside to wait for the MCI. The MCI pulled up to the designated pick up location at 0400 hours. As Mr. Hernandez entered the MCI, he saw Mr. Vides and described him as appearing normal. Mr. Hernandez sat down in the same seat he was seated in on the trip to the casino. The MCI departed between 0405 to 0407 hours. After departing the casino, Mr. Hernandez described the driving of Mr. Vides as normal, and not fast and not slow. Approximately 30 minutes after the MCI departed the casino, and as the bus entered the freeway, Mr. Hernandez fell asleep.

Mr. Hernandez was sleeping prior to the collision and all he remembered was being on the floor of the MCI and that firefighters carried him off the MCI and placed him on a gurney. Mr. Hernandez was taken to the hospital by ambulance.

Jorge Lopez

On October 29, at 1025 hours, Investigator Smith and NTSB Investigator Barth interviewed Mr. Lopez. The interview was conducted at the Desert Regional Medical Center, room #3121, and concluded at 1042 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mr. Lopez entered the bus [MCI] at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. He sat in the left side aisle seat of the third row. Seated directly behind him was Delia Paz-Sanchez. During the trip from Los Angeles to the casino [Red Earth Casino], Mr. Vides “drove fine.”

Once at the casino, Mr. Lopez recalled seeing Mr. Vides during the night playing inside the casino. When it came time to leave the casino, Mr. Vides was five to ten minutes late picking up the passengers. Mr. Lopez said Mr. Vides was sleeping in the bus and wasn’t waking up. Another passenger began walking towards the bus in order to wake up Mr. Vides. The passenger was halfway to the bus when it began moving forward. Mr. Lopez entered the MCI, sat in his seat, and covered his head with a sweater before falling asleep.

Mr. Lopez was sleeping prior to and at the time of the collision and did not awake until after the impact. As a result of the impact, the legs of Mr. Lopez were trapped by the seat in front of him and his back was being poked by a piece of metal. He was face to face with Mr. Vides and saw that Mr. Vides had been crushed. He observed a woman trapped on the floor near him and saw there was glass and debris everywhere. Mr. Lopez looked around and saw Delia behind him and called out to her for help; however, Ms. Paz-Sanchez just stood there looking around leading Mr. Lopez to believe she was in shock. After the firefighters arrived, they began cutting up the MCI in order to free the passengers. Mr. Lopez was placed on a backboard and lifted out of the bus through a window before being transported to the hospital by ambulance.

Lucia Martinez-Flores

On October 28, at 1305 hours, Investigator Smith and CHP Indio Area Officer Trinidad interviewed Mrs. Martinez-Flores. The interview was conducted at the Desert Regional Medical Center, room# 3529, and concluded at 1350 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mrs. Martinez-Flores was familiar with Mr. Vides having been riding the bus [MCI] for two years. She usually rode the MCI two or three times per week. Mr. Vides was not the only bus driver. Mrs. Martinez-Flores described Mr. Vides as a “normal driver” and related that he would drive slowly; however, she noticed Mr. Vides would sometimes fall asleep while driving and believed the driving task made Mr. Vides sleepy. Mrs. Martinez-Flores based her opinion on the fact he was always chewing gum, eating something, or drinking coffee while driving. She related the bus was old and in a “so-so” condition. Mrs. Martinez-Flores did not receive any instructions or safety briefing on what to do in case of an emergency while on the MCI.

Mrs. Martinez-Flores explained that she would pay Delia Paz-Sanchez twenty dollars entering the MCI. If Ms. Paz-Sanchez was not present, Mrs. Martinez-Florez would give the money to the driver. After paying, Mrs. Martinez-Flores’ name and casino player card number are written on a list that is turned in to the casino [Red Earth Casino]. Upon arrival at the casino, a thirty-five dollar credit would be added to her player card.

On October 22, Mrs. Martinez-Flores entered the MCI from the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. She sat in the right side window seat of the 6th row and there was no one seated in the seat directly next to her. Alberto Alvarez was seated in the aisle seat in the row in front of her. The bus departed at approximately 2030 hours and arrived at the casino at 2330 hours.

Throughout the night, Mrs. Martinez-Flores saw Mr. Vides playing slot machines while at the casino. She did not see him eating or drinking anything and last saw him at approximately 0300 hours. She went out to wait for the bus and it took Mr. Vides a while to pull up.

At approximately 0350 hours, Mrs. Martinez-Flores entered the MCI from the designated pick up location and she said it took Mr. Vides “a while to pull up.” She related that Mr. Vides was yawning and scratching his head and Mrs. Martinez-Flores believed he was tired based on the fact he was also drinking coffee. A passenger on the MCI had lost her wallet, causing the MCI to leave later than normal. The MCI left the casino at 0410 hours.

Mr. Vides was driving slow, not fast and described his driving as “normal.” About 10 to 15 minutes after the MCI passed through the first traffic signal, Mrs. Martinez-Flores recalled Mr. Vides applied the brakes of the MCI late when he came upon another traffic signal. She felt Mr. Vides may have been distracted while talking with a passenger named Henry. Henry later sat in the seat behind her. Once on the freeway [Interstate 10 westbound], the MCI was traveling at about 50 miles per hour and Mrs. Martinez-Flores did not notice anything unusual.

Lucia Martinez-Flores

She was awake and seated with her back to the window with both legs stretched out on the two seats. Mrs. Martinez-Flores was looking at her phone when she heard a very loud noise and realized the MCI had crashed. Prior to the collision, she did not feel the MCI braking or slowing. As a result of the impact, Mrs. Martinez-Flores was trapped by the seat in front and behind her. After the firefighters arrived, they helped her exit the bus through one of the back windows and down a ladder. She, and two other passengers were taken to the hospital by ambulance.

Maria Arceo

On November 3, at 0923 hours, Investigator Smith and Investigator Castaneda interviewed Mrs. Arceo. The interview was conducted at the residence of Mrs. Arceo and concluded at 0946 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mrs. Arceo was familiar with Mr. Vides, whom she had known as “Elias,” and the USA Holiday bus [MCI] since she had been riding the MCI for about four years. Mrs. Arceo usually took the MCI to go to the casino [Red Earth Casino] about two or three times per month. Mrs. Arceo explained that to get on the MCI she would pay twenty dollars to Delia Paz-Sanchez. Mrs. Arceo was uncertain if Ms. Paz-Sanchez was the wife of Mr. Vides, or just a friend. Once she paid, Ms. Paz-Sanchez would write Mrs. Arceo’s name and casino player card number on a notepad. After arriving at the casino she would get in line to get a thirty-five dollar credit added to her player’s card. Mrs. Arceo described Mr. Vides as a “fine” driver; although sometimes he would drive into the other lanes and the MCI would “jump” as the tires went over the raised pavement markers. However, Mrs. Arceo had not felt the MCI “jump” the night of the collision. Mrs. Arceo had never received any type of instructions or safety briefing from the bus driver on what to do in case of an emergency; however, the windows had instructions on how to open them in case of an emergency.

On October 22, the MCI, driven by Mr. Vides, arrived at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue between 1830 to 1900 hours. While getting on the bus Mrs. Arceo Mr. Vides told her he was glad to see the passengers since it had been a while since he last saw them. Mrs. Arceo sat in the left side aisle seat of the last row. Hipolito Arceo was seated next to her. The MCI departed at 2000 hours. Mrs. Arceo recalled that Mr. Vides was driving fine on the way to the casino. The bus arrived at the casino between 2345 to 2350 hours. As she exited the MCI, Mr. Vides wished her good luck.

While inside the casino Mrs. Arceo saw Mr. Vides playing a slot machine, two machines away from her. During this time she did not see Mr. Vides eating or drinking. At 0330 hours, she grabbed some coffee and saw Mr. Vides was still playing the slot machines. At 0345 hours, Mrs. Arceo left the casino and lined up at the designated pick up location outside of the casino entrance. The MCI had not arrived and Mrs. Arceo assumed Mr. Vides was still warming it up. She entered the MCI at approximately 0350 hours. Mrs. Arceo sat in the same seat she sat in on the way to the casino. Mr. Vides remained in the driver seat as the passengers entered the MCI. Mr. Vides had a cup of coffee and was talking with a couple of passengers as they got on the MCI. Mrs. Arceo described Mr. Vides as “fine” and stated “he seemed ready to assume the responsibility for everyone on the bus.” Mrs. Arceo fell asleep about 5 to 10 minutes after the MCI departed. Mr. Vides was driving “fine” and he was “safe” during the time Mrs. Arceo remained awake.

Maria Arceo

At the time of the impact, Mrs. Arceo was sleeping, but was awoken as a result of the impact. She was thrown from her seat into the aisle. Mrs. Arceo could not breathe and felt tightening all over her body. Everything was dark and someone had landed on top of her. She related she just wanted to breathe and began kicking trying to get out from under the debris. After the person on top of her was removed Mrs. Arceo felt blood coming out of her neck. She was later told it was only a scratch. She was unable to move one of her knees. After firefighters arrived they opened the emergency window and placed a ladder for the passengers to get out. The firefighters helped her out of the MCI using the ladder. Next, she walked to an ambulance along with her husband and she was transported to the hospital.

Dora Benavidez

On November 16, CHP Southern Division ISU Investigator Sanchez provided Investigator Parent with the following summary related to the recorded interview of Ms. Benavidez:

Investigator Downing and I contacted Dora Lemus Benavidez as she was identified as a passenger on the bus at the time of the collision. The interview was conducted at Rosario Colorado's home. She related in essence the following.

She began the interview by telling me about a delay that occurred when a woman thought she had forgotten her purse in the casino. This delayed the bus approximately 20 minutes. The bus left the casino at approximately 0425 hours. About 20 minutes into the trip she began to fall asleep. When the actual collision occurred she did not feel it. When she woke up, the collision had already occurred. She woke up to the sounds of people screaming and asking for help. Firefighters had already arrived on scene and were helping other passengers. The first responders helped her and her mother onto an ambulance and they were taken to the hospital.

The bus picked her up at the intersection of Vermont and Olympic and was set to depart at 2030 hours. She arrived at the casino approximately 2300 hours. Aside from her mother she did not know many people on the bus. She mentioned her friend Rosalba Ruiz was sitting near her and unfortunately had passed away in the collision. She thought the driver was a good driver and added he was always cautious and careful. She commented on the driver, saying he was a good man who always greeted her and wished her luck. This particular night she saw the driver gambling in the casino at 0300 hours. She went on to say he would usually go to sleep at 0100 hours; however he did not do so on this night. She thought it was strange that on this night, the driver stayed on the bus as the passengers loaded up.

He would usually, get off the bus and go into the casino for a coffee. He would say to the passengers, "Good Morning", because he had just recently woken up. She described the driver's driving as cautious and said he always drove appropriately. She felt safe when he was driving. As to the condition of the bus, when the bus was in need of repairs, the driver would rent another bus and driver. He would not take out the bus if he thought it was in need of repair. Finally, she told us she would be willing to share her medical records.

Idalia Arevalo

On October 31, at 1312 hours, Investigator Smith and Investigator Castaneda interviewed Ms. Arevalo. The interview was conducted in person at the residence of Ms. Arevalo and concluded at 1342 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Ms. Arevalo was familiar with Mr. Vides. She heard about the bus service by seeing the busses stopped in the area and by word of mouth. She has been riding this bus [MCI] for about two years. Ms. Arevalo usually took the bus to the casino [Red Earth Casino] once or twice per month. Ms. Arevalo related that it was a “normal” bus and she believed it was safe. She explained that to get on the bus she normally paid the bus driver twenty dollars. The casino later reimbursed you thirty-five dollars, which was credited to your player card. Mr. Vides was not always the driver of the bus; however, she had taken at least 15 trips during which Mr. Vides was driving. She said Mr. Vides would always drive “fine.” Ms. Arevalo related she did not receive any instructions or safety briefing on what to do in case of an emergency from the driver.

Ms. Arevalo entered the MCI at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. She sat in the left side window seat in the 7th row. Jose Hernandez was seated next to her in the aisle seat. Rosalba [Rosario Alba Ruiz] was seated behind her. As she entered the MCI, she saw Mr. Vides and he looked very happy and he was talking with other passengers. The MCI departed for the casino at 2040 hours. She related he was driving normal on the way to the casino. The bus arrived at the casino at 2330 hours.

After arriving at the casino, Ms. Arevalo went inside to get something to drink. She recalled seeing Mr. Vides soon after they arrived and it looked like he was drinking a soda. She got in line to get the playing credits added to her card. She did not see Mr. Vides afterwards.

The MCI arrived to pick the passengers up at 0400 hours. Ms. Arevalo sat in the same seat she had earlier. The MCI departed between 0410 to 0415 hours. Mr. Vides was driving fine and at a safe speed. Approximately 15 minutes after the MCI left, she fell asleep.

Ms. Arevalo was sleeping prior to the collision and woke up after the impact. She saw that the trailer [Utility] was inside of the MCI. She saw that Mr. Hernandez was trapped and one of the televisions had fallen on top of him. After the firefighters arrived they got her out through one of the back windows. She and Mr. Hernandez were taken to an ambulance and transported to the hospital.

Hipolito Arceo

On November 3, at 0848 hours, Investigator Smith and Investigator Castaneda interviewed Mr. Arceo. The interview was conducted at the residence of Mr. Arceo and concluded at 0920 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mr. Arceo was familiar with Mr. Vides, whom he knew as Elias, and the USA Holiday bus [MCI] having been riding it for about five to ten years. Mr. Arceo usually took the bus to go to the casino about once per week and usually on the weekends. Mr. Arceo explained that to get on the MCI he did not purchase tickets; rather he paid twenty dollars to the driver or a separate lady that collects the money. After paying, his name is added to a list and once they arrive at the casino he would get a thirty-five dollar credit added to his casino player card. Mr. Vides was the usual driver of the bus since he was the owner; however, on occasion a different driver would drive. Mr. Arceo described Mr. Vides as a careful driver; although sometimes he would drive over the lines. Mr. Arceo described hearing the bus driving over the reflectors delineating the traffic lanes. Mr. Arceo related that he never received any type of instructions or safety briefing on what to do in case of an emergency from the driver after getting on the bus.

On October 22, Mr. Arceo entered the MCI between 2000 and 2030 hours, at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. He sat in the left side window seat of the last row next to Maria Arceo. On the way to the casino the driver was driving "fine." The MCI arrived at the casino [Red Earth Casino] at between 2330 and 0000 hours. After arriving, Mr. Arceo went into the casino along with the other passengers. Mr. Arceo described the casino as a small place where one can see what everyone was doing while sitting down or where one runs into each other throughout the night. Mr. Arceo saw Mr. Vides gambling throughout the night, which was not unusual. Mr. Vides would gamble until he exhausted the money he had; therefore, the time spent gambling varied. It was also rare for Mr. Vides to go to sleep, unless he lost his money "really fast." That night he did not observe Mr. Vides eating or drinking. The last time Mr. Arceo saw Mr. Vides was at approximately 0330 hours, at which time Mr. Vides was still gambling inside the casino.

At 0345 hours, Mr. Arceo went out to the bus pick up location near the casino entrance. The MCI was a little late to pick them up. Once the MCI arrived Mr. Arceo entered the bus and sat in the same seat he had sat in earlier. Mr. Vides remained in the driver seat as the passengers entered the MCI. Mr. Vides looked "fine," just like usual and Mr. Vides would talk with the passengers as they entered the bus. The MCI departed the casino a little past 0400 hours. Prior to falling asleep, Mr. Arceo related Mr. Vides was driving fine and not driving fast.

Mr. Arceo was sleeping at the time of the impact, but believed the MCI had been traveling for an hour prior to the impact. Mr. Arceo woke up after the impact and saw that everyone had been thrown from their seats and people were screaming and crying. Mr. Arceo was thrown into the aisle and was trapped by seats that had broken off. Mr. Arceo had to push a seat and a woman that was on top of him in order to free him from the debris.

Hipolito Arceo

After firefighters arrived they opened the emergency window and placed a ladder for the passengers to get out. After getting out of the bus using the ladder Mr. Arceo and his wife were taken to the hospital by ambulance.

Marta Benavidez

On November 16, CHP Southern Division ISU Investigator Sanchez provided Investigator Parent with the following summary related to the recorded interview of Ms. Benavidez:

Investigator Downing and I contacted Marta Benavidez at the residence of Rosario Colorado as she was identified as a passenger on the bus at the time of the collision. Ms. Benavidez related in essence the following.

She left with her daughter [REDACTED] from her home at 1900 hours on their way to the corner of Olympic and Vermont. They boarded the bus and left for the casino at 2030 hours and arrived at the casino at approximately 2315 hours. Once at the casino, she settled in to her routine, walked around a bit, and played slots. At one point in the early morning hours, she sat at a slot machine and noticed she was sitting next to the bus driver. They had a brief conversation then she walked away so she would not disturb him. A short while later she returned to the same slot machine and noticed the driver had left. She added it was quite late she saw him at the slot machine. She stated it was approximately 0300 hours when she saw him sitting in front of the slot machine. Her and her daughter realized it was 0400 hours and began to make their way towards the bus. As she boarded the bus, she greeted the driver again and quickly took her seat. Once on the bus she snacked on some food and began a conversation with her daughter about the trip. She made herself comfortable and fell asleep a short while after the bus had left the casino. She did not wake up until after the collision had taken place and did not see or hear anything prior to the collision.

With respect to the driver, she said he was a good man; she added he did not look tired or sick. In fact she said he was very happy when she saw him playing at the slot machine. According to her, he was not drinking anything when she saw him. She confirmed he was playing at the slot machine at approximately 0300 hours. On a previous trip to the Accord Casino with this same driver, she complemented his safe driving. She recalled that during that trip it was snowing and he drove very slowly and safely. She thought the bus was in good condition and trusted the driver. Finally, she also stated there was no safety briefing at all during the trip.

Gloria Campos

On November 3, at 1309 hours, Investigator Smith and Investigator Castaneda interviewed Mrs. Campos. The interview was conducted at the residence of Mrs. Campos and concluded at 1340 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mrs. Campos was familiar with Mr. Vides, whom she had known as Elias, and the USA Holiday bus [MCI] having been riding it for the first time about five years ago. Mrs. Campos rode the MCI on three previous occasions. The last time she rode in the MCI was about three years ago. Mrs. Campos was not fond of the Eagle Casino, which was the casino the MCI had previously been taking passengers to; therefore, Mrs. Campos stopped going on the trip. Mrs. Campos said her friend Pilar [Pilar Medrano] invited her to go on the trip to Red Earth Casino and Mrs. Campos agreed. Mrs. Campos explained that once all of the passengers were on the bus she paid twenty dollars to the bus coordinator named Delia [Delia Paz-Sanchez]. Ms. Paz-Sanchez then wrote down Mrs. Campos' name on a notepad. After arriving at the casino she got a players card with forty dollars in playing credits. During all of the trips Mrs. Campos had taken on the MCI, Mr. Vides had been the driver. Mrs. Campos described Mr. Vides as a "fine" driver. Mrs. Campos related she never received any type of instructions or safety briefing on what to do in case of an emergency from the driver after getting on the bus. Mrs. Campos recalled that only the windows and the fire extinguisher had safety instructions on them.

Mrs. Campos entered the MCI from the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. While entering the MCI, Mrs. Campos saw Mr. Vides and described his appearance as "normal." She sat in the right side window seat about four or five rows in front of the restroom. Pilar Medrano was seated next to her. The MCI departed for the casino at 2030 hours. During the trip to the casino, Mr. Vides was driving "fine."

At 0200 hours, while at the casino, Mrs. Campos began walking around the casino looking for Ms. Medrano. At that time, Mrs. Campos observed Mr. Vides playing the slot machines. Mrs. Campos looked to see what time it was and thought, "This man is not going to sleep or what."

At 0350 hours, Mrs. Campos exited the casino to wait for the bus. Since the bus had not arrived, she went back inside to look for Ms. Medrano. She went back to the pickup location at 0400 hours and the bus was there waiting. As she got on the bus she noticed Mr. Vides had his jacket over his shoulder and was slumped forward. She believed he was half asleep. She then said, "Hi" to the driver but she did not get a response. Mrs. Campos sat in the same seat she had sat in earlier. The bus left the casino at 0430 hours because they were waiting for a woman that had misplaced her purse. A man that was seated behind her told Mrs. Campos that he was moving forward to talk to the driver to ensure he would not fall asleep. Mrs. Campos then saw the man move to the front. Mrs. Campos related Mr. Vides was driving fine after leaving the casino. She then fell asleep about 5 to 10 minutes after the bus departed.

Gloria Campos

Mrs. Campos was sleeping prior to the collision and woke up after the impact. She flew from her seat towards the front of the bus. She landed on top of people and broken seats. She saw a woman's face was next to her body that was trapped in between some debris. A male passenger was trying to calm people inside of the bus and was having passengers that could walk exit the bus through an emergency window. Mrs. Campos climbed out of the bus with the help of other passengers. She then saw the man that had gone forward to talk to the driver. She related that he heard the man say, "No, no I'm sure he didn't fall asleep. I just left him." She also heard the man say it had been no more than five minutes since he left the driver. After the firefighters arrived they began cutting up the bus and freeing the passengers that were trapped. Next, she walked to an ambulance and she was transported to the hospital.

Gemma Chambers

On October 29, at 0959 hours, Investigator Smith and NTSB Investigator Barth interviewed Ms. Chambers. The interview was conducted at the Desert Regional Medical Center, room #3121, and concluded at 1019 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Ms. Chambers was familiar with Mr. Vides, whom she knew as Elias, and the USA Holiday bus [MCI]. She found the bus service through a flyer that was handed to her on the street. She had been riding the bus to different casinos for a month and goes on trips five times per week. Ms. Chambers explained that Mr. Vides was a good driver, but he got tired from all the driving. She also stated that Mr. Vides always gambled at the casinos.

Ms. Chambers got on the bus at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. She sat in the left side window seat of the third row and seated directly behind her was Delia Paz-Sanchez. Ms. Paz-Sanchez was the wife of Mr. Vides and was in charge of collecting the money from passengers.

Ms. Chambers recalled seeing Mr. Vides playing the slot machines. She related that he always gambled and went to sleep for about 30 minutes. After getting on the bus Ms. Chambers went to her seat and placed a blanket over her head. Ms. Chambers could not recall anything that occurred prior to waking up at the hospital.

Rosario Colorado

On November 16, CHP Southern Division ISU Investigator Sanchez provided Investigator Parent with the following summary related to the recorded interview of Ms. Colorado:

Investigator Downing and I contacted Rosario Colorado as she was identified as a passenger on the bus at the time of the collision. The interview was conducted at the residence of Mrs. Colorado. She related in essence the following.

The night of the collision she was on her way home to Los Angeles from a casino. She was not sure of the name of the casino but did believe it was in or near Coachella. She was picked up from Koreatown (Vermont and Olympic). She was picked up on Saturday at 2030 hours and left towards the casino. She arrived at the casino at approximately 2330 hours and was dropped off at the front of the casino. She was able to show me on a diagram that she was sitting about four rows back from the driver and on the aisle seat. Once the night was over and the time came to load the bus to return home, she took her seat and immediately fell asleep in her seat. She only woke after the collision had occurred. She added she was not able to relate any information with regard to the lane position or speed of the bus prior to the collision.

With respect to the driver of the bus, she could not recall any information. She only got a quick glimpse of him as she quickly boarded the bus and took her seat. While in the casino, she did not see the driver throughout the night. She did mention there was a 15-20 minute delay at the time the bus was leaving the casino. She added there was a woman who misplaced her purse. While on their way to the casino from Los Angeles, she did not recall any specific driving habits from the driver which she would characterize as bad or dangerous. She thought he was driving normally. She mentioned she only used the service a few times a year and usually there were different drivers. Every time she used the service, she thought the driving was appropriate. She did however, add this bus was older than the other buses but thought it was in good condition.

After the collision, she was trapped under a seat and began screaming for help. Once the first responders arrived, she was removed from the bus. Once out of the bus she was examined briefly and then was sent to an unknown hospital for further treatment.

Carmen Alonso

On October 31, at 1100 hours, Investigator Smith and Investigator Castaneda interviewed Mrs. DeAlonso. The interview was conducted at the residence of Mrs. DeAlonso and concluded at 1200 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mrs. DeAlonso was not familiar with Mr. Vides or the bus service, having only taken it four times previously. She was told of the bus service by her sister Aracely Tije. She explained she paid a man twenty dollars to get on the bus. Since it was her first time going to the Red Earth Casino she was reimbursed forty five dollars by the casino. Mrs. DeAlonso related she did not receive any type of instructions or safety brief on what to do in case of an emergency from the driver after getting on the bus.

She entered the bus [MCI] at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. She sat in the left side window seat, four rows from the back of the bus. No one was seated next to her. She related that on the way to the casino Mr. Vides was driving well. The MCI departed at approximately 2030 hours and arrived at 2330 hours. The driver told them that they needed to be outside at 0345 hours to get back on the bus.

At approximately 0200 hours, while walking around inside the casino, Mrs. DeAlonso recalled seeing Mr. Vides playing the slot machines. She walked up to him and had a small conversation. She asked him if he was going to rest. He told her not to worry that it was nothing for him, he was very strong. During her interaction with Mr. Vides she did not see him drinking anything.

At approximately 0345 hours, Mrs. DeAlonso exited the casino to wait for the bus. The MCI had not pulled up and she believed Mr. Vides was sleeping. The bus pulled up about 15 to 20 minutes late. When she was getting on the MCI it appeared to her that Mr. Vides was cold because he was wearing a jacket and he appeared really tired because he was yawning. Later, she realized she had lost her purse. She went back inside to look for it with the help of her sister. She later located her purse under her seat. She asked her sister to sit in the back of the bus with her, but her sister told her no and she sat down at the front of the bus. The MCI departed at 0425 hours.

Mrs. DeAlonso stayed awake for a while after the bus left the casino. She observed a male passenger had gone to the front of the bus and was talking with Mr. Vides. She related that to her it felt as though Mr. Vides was driving fast. She related it was drizzling and the driver looked tired. Although Mrs. DeAlonso had never driven a car, it felt like Mr. Vides was driving fast. Mrs. DeAlonso was almost asleep when she heard the collision. She recalled hitting her head on either the window or the window frame. She began screaming and calling out to her sister. Within five minutes firefighters arrived at the scene. She was helped out of the bus by the firefighters. She, along with two other passengers, was taken to the hospital by ambulance.

Maria DeMerino

On November 3, at 1037 hours, Investigator Smith and Investigator Castaneda interviewed Mrs. DeMerino. The interview was conducted at the residence of Mrs. DeMerino and concluded at 1110 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mrs. DeMerino was familiar with Mr. Vides, whom she knew as Elias, and the USA Holiday bus having been riding it for about two years. Mrs. DeMerino usually took the bus to go to the casino about once per week. Mrs. DeMerino stated the bus was old and recalled it once broke down while at the Acorn Casino. Mrs. DeMerino explained that to get on the bus she would normally pay Delia Paz-Sanchez twenty dollars. After paying, Ms. Paz-Sanchez would write Mrs. DeMerino's name and casino player card number on a list. Mrs. DeMerino would then get reimbursed thirty five dollars by the casino. Mrs. DeMerino added that Ms. Paz-Sanchez did not usually go to the casino but that this time she did. She described Mr. Vides as a calm and happy person that would normally joke around with the passengers. She described him as a normal driver that did not drive fast. Mrs. De Merino related she never received any type of instructions or safety briefing on what to do in case of an emergency from the driver after getting on the bus.

On October 22, Mrs. DeMerino entered the MCI from the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. The bus would normally depart on Saturdays at 2030 hours and return on Sunday at 0615 hours. Mrs. DeMerino sat in the right side window seat near the middle of the MCI. Rosario Ruiz was seated next to her. The bus arrived at the Red Earth Casino between 2330 to 0000 hours.

While inside the casino Mrs. DeMerino recalled seeing Mr. Vides gambling. On other trips she usually saw Mr. Vides gamble for a while before leaving to go sleep. At 0400 hours, Mrs. DeMerino exited the casino and lined up at the pickup location. The MCI was late, which she felt was very unusual. Mr. Vides was usually very punctual; therefore, Mrs. DeMerino believed something was not right. She thought maybe Mr. Vides was not feeling well. She related that a male bus coordinator had to go knock on the bus door to wake up Mr. Vides. The MCI finally pulled up around 0415 or 0420 hours. Mrs. DeMerino entered the bus, sat in her seat, and immediately fell asleep.

Mrs. DeMerino was sleeping prior to the collision and woke up after the impact. She flew out of her seat and struck the seat ahead of her before her head struck the window. The bus came to a stop and she noticed the trailer [Utility] was just one window away from her. Next, she saw Ms. Ruiz on the floor with other passengers and debris on top of her. After the firefighters arrived they broke the window next to her. Mrs. DeMerino was placed on a backboard and lifted out of the bus through the window. She was taken to the hospital by ambulance.

Quiana Earvin

On October 23, CHP Indio Area Officer Kirk contacted Ms. Earvin at Eisenhower Medical Center. She was identified in person by Officer Kirk and provided a brief statement at that time. The statement was not recorded. Ms. Earvin related that she was asleep in the back of the bus and was awoken by the feeling of an impact. She did not provide any further details.

On November 3, at 1000 hours, Investigator Smith contacted Ms. Earvin via telephone to schedule an in person interview. Mr. Earvin was generally uncooperative and stated she was not currently available for an interview. During that phone conversation, Ms. Earvin disconnected the call. At 1219 hours, 1244 hours, and 1504 hours, Investigator Smith attempted to contact Ms. Earvin via telephone with no success. At 1515 hours, Investigator Smith and CHP Southern Division MAIT Investigator Castaneda responded to Ms. Earvin's address, obtained via Department of Motor Vehicles records. Upon arrival, Investigator Smith and Investigator Castaneda contacted a male at the residence who verbally identified himself as her father. The male related that Ms. Earvin did not reside at the residence and was unable to contact her.

On November 15, at 1317 hours, 1324 hours, 1409 hours, and 1445 hours, Investigator Smith attempted to contact Ms. Earvin via telephone with no success.

On November 16, at 1050 hours, Investigator Smith attempted to contact Ms. Earvin via telephone with no success. At 1052 hours, Investigator Smith contacted Ms. Earvin via telephone. This conversation was digitally recorded. During the conversation, Ms. Earvin was generally uncooperative; however, she did verbally confirm her name, contact, and other identifying information. She refused to provide a statement or answer any questions and instructed Investigator Smith to contact her attorney. Ms. Earvin refused to provide the name and/or contact information for her attorney and instead disconnected the call.

No further attempts to contact Ms. Earvin have been made.

Jose Guerrero

On November 15, at 1619 hours, CHP Temecula Area Officer Serrano interviewed Mr. Guerrero. The interview was conducted via telephone and concluded at 1633 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mr. Guerrero had been riding this bus [MCI] frequently about five times per week. The bus went to the Red Earth Casino or the Tortoise Rock Casino. Mr. Guerrero entered the MCI from the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. Once on the MCI, he sat in the second row from the rear, on the right side of the bus. The bus departed for the casino between 2000 and 2015 hours. They arrived at the Red Earth Casino between 2230 and 2300 hours.

The passengers had been told to meet outside of the casino at 0345 hours to get back on the bus. The bus was supposed to depart at 0400 hours; however, the bus departed a little late because a passenger had lost a bag. After getting on the bus, Mr. Guerrero did not pay attention to the condition of Mr. Vides and went to his seat. Mr. Vides was driving normal after leaving the casino.

Mr. Guerrero was sleeping prior to the collision and was woken up after the impact. He was later taken to the hospital.

Odilia Flores

On November 3, at 1645 hours, Investigator Smith and Investigator Castaneda interviewed Ms. Flores. The interview was conducted at the residence of Ms. Flores and concluded at 1721 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Ms. Flores was not familiar with Mr. Vides since this was the first time taking this bus to the Red Earth Casino. She heard about this bus service from a woman while on a trip to the Morongo Casino. She explained that she paid a woman twenty dollars in cash. The casino later gave her a player card and reimbursed her the bus fare. She received either thirty-five or forty dollars in playing credits from the casino.

Ms. Flores entered the bus [MCI] from the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. At that time, she felt Mr. Vides looked a little tired. She sat in the left window seat near the middle of the bus. She was seated next to the emergency exit window. A woman passenger was seated next to her. The bus departed at 2030 hours. On the way to the casino Mr. Vides made hard braking applications on three occasions. It also appeared to her that the bus was going into the adjacent lanes. The bus arrived at the Red Earth Casino at 2330 hours.

While in the casino gambling, Ms. Flores did not see Mr. Vides. At 0345 hours she went outside to get back on the bus. She had a bad feeling and sensed something bad was going to happen. She did not want to get back on the bus; however, she had no other way to get home. As she was getting on the MCI, Mr. Vides looked really tired. His eyes were red and he looked sleepy. Ms. Flores told Mr. Vides that he looked very tired and that he shouldn't drive and that he should let "the other guy" drive. Mr. Vides told her that he had slept for two hours, which was enough sleep to drive and that he was fine. Ms. Flores sat in her seat. Seated in the window seat across the aisle was a male passenger she believed to be the copilot.

After leaving the casino, Ms. Flores was paying attention to the way Mr. Vides was driving. She was nervous because she felt he was really tired. She complained to the copilot that Mr. Vides was braking too much. The copilot got up and went to talk to Mr. Vides for a while. While he spoke to Mr. Vides, Mr. Vides drove fine. Once on the freeway, the MCI was traveling in the #1 lane, next to the divider. Since there was no traffic, she felt Mr. Vides was driving fast. Later, the copilot returned to his seat and sat down. Ms. Flores reclined her head, closed her eyes for a second, and then the impact occurred.

After the impact, Ms. Flores believed she fainted. She tried to scream but she had lost her voice. She got out of the bus by climbing out of a window. After getting out of the bus, she began feeling a lot of pain to the point where she could not walk anymore. Later, firefighters took her to the back of an ambulance and she was taken to the hospital.

Henry Turcios Lainez

On November 22, at 1224 hours, CHP Investigator Parent interviewed Mr. Lainez. The interview was conducted in person and concluded at 1320 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview:

Mr. Lainez began by describing the seating positions of other passengers. Mr. Lainez knows the driver (Mr. Vides) very well. When Mr. Lainez was 14 years old, he met Mr. Vides in Honduras where they both raced motorcycles. They have been friends since then. Mr. Vides indicated that he assists Mr. Vides with his bus services and accompanies him often on the trips to the casinos. Mr. Lainez usually stands at the front of the bus and talks to Mr. Vides while he drives to keep him awake.

Mr. Lainez believed that Mr. Vides should have stopped driving and has told him on previous occasions that he shouldn't be driving because he has been driving for too many years. Mr. Lainez described Mr. Vides as a "very healthy person." According to Mr. Lainez, Mr. Vides employs two other drivers. Mr. Lainez related on one of those drivers is a gentleman known as Jose Hidalgo. Typically, Mr. Vides only drives on Sundays and Mondays. Mr. Lainez explained that Mr. Vides parks the bus at a lot in San Pedro when he is not on trips. He believed that Mr. Vides usually sleeps during the day, but is not sure if he had slept the day before the trip. Mr. Vides has told Mr. Lainez that in the past he has used to take pills that keep him awake for up to three days.

On October 22, at 6:00 pm, Mr. Lainez went to the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue in Los Angeles just to "say hi" to Mr. Vides. He was "surprised" that Mr. Vides was going to drive because he doesn't usually drive on Saturdays. The person (Jose Hidalgo) who was supposed to drive that night didn't answer Mr. Vides calls that day. Since Mr. Vides was going to driver, Mr. Lainez decided to ride with him to the casino. When Mr. Lainez boarded the bus, the other passengers were already on the bus.

Generally, Mr. Lainez explained, as people board, the bus coordinator (a different gentleman name Jose) writes down people's names on the manifest. Jose does not ride the bus. Once all the passengers are on the bus, Delia collects the bus fare (\$20.00) from each person. Upon arrival at Red Earth Casino, each passenger listed on the manifest receives a player card with \$35.00 credit to gamble with. There is open seating but sometimes people would fight over seats because they have a specific seat they prefer to sit in.

The bus left Los Angeles at 8:30 pm and Mr. Lainez did not note anything out of the ordinary on the drive to the casino. When they arrived at the casino, Mr. Vides dropped off the passengers at the front door then drove the bus to park and presumably sleep.

When it was time to depart the casino, Mr. Vides had to wait an additional 30 mins because a lady thought she left her wallet in the casino. As it turned out, her wallet was actually under her seat the whole time. Some of the passengers complained to Mr. Vides about the delay. Mr. Vides calmly asked all the passengers if anyone had to work that morning. No one did, so Mr. Vides graciously waited for the lady to find her wallet.

On the trip back to Los Angeles, Mr. Vides did not seem tired at all. Mr. Lainez stood next to Mr. Vides for the majority of the trip back and talked about local news worthy events. Mr. Lainez indicated Mr. Vides drove "fine," and nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Mr. Vides did not appear to having any issues with bus and was able to stop, steer, and accelerate like normal. After a while, Mr. Lainez was tired so he went to the back of the bus to go to sleep. While he was asleep the traffic collision occurred. After the collision, Mr. Lainez described a chaotic scene. He attempted to help other passengers remain calm and he rendered aid, before he jumped out of a window. He remained at the scene until emergency personnel arrived.

Gloria Rodriguez

On October 26, at 1109 hours, Investigator Smith and NTSB Investigator Barth interviewed Ms. Rodriguez. The interview was conducted at the Desert Regional Medical Center, room #3520, and concluded at 1138 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Ms. Rodriguez was not familiar with Mr. Vides since this was her first time taking this bus to the Red Earth Casino. Ms. Rodriguez explained that Mr. Vides was driving fine, going to and from the casino; however, she stated, "He was driving in the carpool lane so I think he was driving really fast."

During her time in the casino, Ms. Rodriguez had not seen Mr. Vides. Ms. Rodriguez departed the casino and lined up at the designated pickup location; however, the MCI had not arrived. Ms. Rodriguez felt the driver must have overslept. The MCI finally arrived at 0400 hours and they departed at 0410 hours. Ms. Rodriguez sat in the left side window seat, near the middle of the bus. Seated behind her was Rosario Ruiz.

Once on the MCI, Ms. Rodriguez remained awake for about 20 minutes before falling asleep. She was awoken by the impact and began to scream and call out for Juan Guerrero. Two cars had stopped and the occupants began helping people off the bus through the broken left side window. About four or five passengers, including her had already exited the bus by the time the firefighters arrived. Later, firefighters got Juan Guerrero out of the bus and took him to the back of an ambulance. She told them she wanted to go with him to the same hospital and she was placed inside the cab of the ambulance and was transported to the hospital.

Miguel Martinez

On November 16, CHP Southern Division ISU Investigator Sanchez provided Investigator Parent with the following summary related to the recorded interview of Mr. Martinez:

Investigator Downing and I, contacted Miguel Martinez as he was identified as a passenger on the bus at the time of the collision. The interview was conducted at Mr. Martinez' home. He related in essence the following.

Mr. Martinez related he and his wife would regularly travel with "Don Elias" (tour bus driver). They would board the bus at Vermont and Olympic and the bus would leave for the casino at approximately 2030 hours and arrive at the Red J casino at 2330 hours. Once the trip was over, the bus would leave the casino at 0400 hours and head back to Los Angeles. On this particular trip, the bus left the casino at 0410 hours due to a small delay. Mr. Martinez said the drive began like most other drives without incident and he stated the driver was driving well. However, Mr. Martinez stated he and the other passengers were aware that the driver (Don Elias) would sometimes fall asleep while driving. With this in mind, Mr. Martinez would sit at the front of the bus and converse with the driver in order to help him stay awake during the long drive. On this particular trip, he decided to take a seat at the rear of the bus and another passenger (Henry) sat in the front to converse with the driver. Once the bus passed "Aguas Calientes" Henry moved to the back of the bus and told Mr. Martinez that the driver was "good" and that he should move to his normal seat to the front of the bus.

Mr. Martinez decided not to and remained at the rear of the bus talking with Henry. As the trip continued just past "Indiana Highway", he noticed the bus was traveling too fast. Mr. Martinez added it was unusual for Don Elias to be driving the bus that fast. He had been familiar with this driver for approximately two years and had never experienced traveling as fast as he had the night of the collision. Mr. Martinez thought maybe the driver was in a hurry to get back because the bus was supposed to make another trip at 0830 hours. Since there had been a delay in leaving the casino, Mr. Martinez thought the driver was trying to make up time. A short while later he noticed a "big rig" traveling ahead, it was traveling in the furthest right hand lane (#4 lane) at a slow speed. The big rig then changed lanes one lane over to the left (#3 lane). Mr. Martinez added the bus was traveling at approximately 75 miles per hour at the time he noticed the truck ahead. He looked away for a few seconds, when he returned his attention towards the front of the bus; he saw the big rig approximately 15 to 20 feet ahead. He tried to scream but had no time; the front of the bus ran into the rear of the big rig.

Miguel Martinez

After the impact, Mr. Martinez was thrown towards the front of the bus along with several other passengers. In the aftermath, as things settled he struggled to figure out what had happened. He thought that perhaps the bus had run off the road and rolled over. As the seconds passed he noticed that the trailer had intruded into the bus. He realized what had happened and began searching for his wife and helping others. He broke out two windows and assisted others in getting out. After helping the people who were not trapped, he remained on the bus looking for his wife. He noticed there were still several people on the bus who were trapped however he could not help these people, and since the fire department had already arrived he got off the bus. Once off the bus he went to the front of the bus to check on the driver, he could see all the others who had died. Once off the bus he and his wife were loaded onto an ambulance and transported to the hospital.

After the collision, Mr. Martinez stated he did not speak to anyone with regards to the collision. Once he was treated for his injuries, he was released. Mr. Martinez was asked to point out his seating position on a seating chart. He stated he was sitting in seat #36. Mr. Martinez stated he did not see the driver during his stay in the casino. He only saw him when he got off the bus upon arriving and when he got on the bus just before leaving. He did not notice anything particularly strange or different about the driver. Additionally, he said during the trip from Los Angeles to Palm Springs the driver exhibited his normal safe driving habits. Mr. Martinez finish up the interview by telling us about his injuries and adding that he would be willing to allow us to review his medical records if needed.

Ana Car

On November 16, CHP Southern Division ISU Investigator Sanchez provided Investigator Parent with the following summary related to the recorded interview of Mr. Martinez:

Investigator Downing and I contacted Ana Car as she was identified as a passenger on the bus at the time of the collision. The interview was conducted at Rosario Colorado's home. She related in essence the following.

She boarded the bus at Vermont and Olympic at approximately 8:00pm. The bus was almost full, so she took one of the last seats towards the rear of the bus. She was not familiar with a lot of the other passengers since she did not take this bus frequently. The bus left at 8:30 pm and arrived at the casino at approximately 11:30 pm. She was not very sure of where the casino is, she only knows that it is past Palm Springs and Indio. During her stay at the casino she did not socialize with many of the other passengers of the bus. She mainly conversed with her friend Rosalba. When the time came to return home to Los Angeles at 4:00 am she went outside to where the bus picks up the passengers. She stated the driver was sleeping on the bus and had not arrived at the pickup location. Someone had to go wake up the driver of the bus and once everyone was on the bus they departed the casino at approximately 4:10 am. Once the bus left the casino she got comfortable in her seat and fell asleep. Mrs. Car stated she did not even feel the impact of the collision when it occurred. She was awakened by the screams of a man who had been thrown and trapped nearby. She struggled to free herself and managed to get out of the bus through an open window. After exiting the bus, she was helped by some Good Samaritans who had stopped to assist.

Mrs. Car related to me she would visit the Pala Casino with more frequency, this was only the second time she took this trip to the "Red J" casino. She said the trip from Los Angeles was very uneventful. She added she did not see the driver at all during the night, she didn't know if he had been "playing" or not. She got on the bus and almost immediately fell asleep. Mrs. Car thought the bus was in good condition even though it was an older bus. She went on, adding she did frequently travel on the tour buses that travel to the casinos. One thing she mentioned was her firsthand knowledge that some drivers did not sleep on the trips and she thought this was not right. She thought the drivers should sleep and rest because they are responsible for many people on these trips. She clarified the driver was sleeping on the bus prior to leaving the casino, and added she was not sure who actually woke him up. A passenger named "Henry" was the person who mentioned the driver had been sleeping. Mrs. Car verified there was no safety briefing at any point during the trip. The only discussion was regarding the use of the restroom. She did not see the driver drink or eat anything at any point during the trip; she thought he looked in good health. Mrs. Car reiterated she did not have very much information about the actual collision since she had fallen asleep almost immediately.

Roy Costa

On November 2, at 1240 hours, Associate Investigator Downing interviewed Mr. Costa at his residence. Officer I. Sanchez, #20291, Officer J. Conley, #19782, and passenger Rowena Valerio were also present. The interview was concluded at 1310 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

On October 22, at approximately 1830 hours, Mr. Costa arrived at the intersection of Vermont Avenue and Olympic Parkway. At approximately 1900 hours, the bus arrived at approximately 1900 hours, and he boarded the bus with the other passengers at approximately 2015 hours. The bus departed for the Red Earth casino at 2030 hours.

Mr. Costa said the driving of the bus was OK on the way to the casino and every now and then he could feel the bus weave. Mr. Costa also mentioned Mr. Vides' niece was with him and that she is usually not with them on the bus. Mr. Costa fell asleep about one hour into the trip and they arrived at the casino at approximately 2345 hours.

After arriving at the casino, Mr. Costa related "relaxed and played" in the casino until approximately 0345 hours. Mr. Costa never saw Mr. Vides in the casino at all that night. Mr. Costa went back to the bus at 0345 hours and related Mr. Vides was running a little late and showed up at approximately 0415 hours.

At this time he did see Mr. Vides and noticed he looked kind of groggy and couldn't see if he was drinking anything. He did see Mr. Vides check the tires and tread and at approximately 0430 hours they headed back towards Los Angeles. Mr. Costa said the drive back towards Los Angeles was slower than usual. Mr. Costa fell asleep approximately 15 minutes later.

Mr. Costa felt the collision and was thrown forward approximately 6 rows. He did not know what they hit and he looked around for people to help. He was on the bus for approximately 15 minutes before being assisted off with help from the fire department. Mr. Costa waited for Rowena Valerio before being transported to John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital with three other passengers.

Mr. Costa sustained injuries to his back, torn ligaments in his right hand, and injuries to his knees and shin where "the meat had been shaved off." Mr. Costa stated he would release his medical record to the California Highway Patrol if needed.

Mr. Costa has known Mr. Vides for approximately 2 years and heard about the bus service at the same time. Mr. Costa related Mr. Vides is his usual driver and that Mr. Vides is well liked except for a bias towards black people, and they are friends. Mr. Costa related the bus service is more convenient and easier to use than a car.

Mr. Costa related every once in a while the bus is driven by another driver but it is usually Mr. Vides who drives. Mr. Costa used to ride this bus to the Golden Acorn casino, but now they only go to the Red Earth and Turtle Rock casinos due to Mr. Vides losing a contract with the Golden Acorn casino. Mr. Costa says the rumors of the lost contract are due to racial issues with black people.

Mr. Costa related Mr. Vides does sleep while they are at the casinos but that he usually plays in the casinos every night as well.

Mr. Costa related the bus was an older bus but it was maintained "OK." Mr. Costa said the bus broke down one time while he was on it due to the transmission slipping. He was never given a safety briefing prior to departure from Mr. Vides like some other bus companies and drivers do.

Juan Guerrero

On October 26, at 1109 hours, Investigator Smith and NTSB Investigator Barth interviewed Mr. Guerrero. The interview was conducted at the Desert Regional Medical Center, room #3520, and concluded at 1138 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mr. Guerrero was not familiar with Mr. Vides since this was the first time taking this bus [MCI] to the Red Earth Casino. He sat in the left side aisle seat of the 3rd or 4th row, next to Gloria Rodriguez.

Mr. Guerrero recalled seeing Mr. Vides gambling inside the casino at approximately 0130 hours. Mr. Guerrero did not see Mr. Vides eating or drinking anything at the time. Mr. Guerrero last saw Mr. Vides at approximately 0200 hours.

Mr. Guerrero got on the bus and immediately fell asleep. He only remembers being taken out of the bus through a window and waking up in the hospital.

Pilar Medrano

On October 25, at 1247 hours, Investigator Smith and CHP Indio Area Officer Ramirez briefly interviewed Ms. Medrano to obtain a preliminary statement. On October 27, at 1414 hours, Investigator Smith and CHP Indio Area Officer Trinidad conducted a follow up interview of Ms. Medrano. The interview was conducted via telephone. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Ms. Medrano was familiar with Mr. Vides, whom she knew as Teodulo Elias, and the USA Holiday bus having been riding it since 2005. Ms. Medrano usually took the bus to go to the casino about once or twice per week. Ms. Medrano found out about this bus service after seeing the bus stopped at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. Ms. Medrano described the bus [MCI] as being in a good condition. She described Mrs. Vides as a good driver whom she trusted. Ms. Medrano related she did not receive any type of instructions or safety briefing on what to do in case of an emergency from the driver after getting on the bus. Ms. Medrano added that she thought it was not necessary since all the passengers are regulars and they knew the bus and they knew Mr. Vides.

On October 22, at 1915 hours, Ms. Medrano arrived at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. When the MCI arrived, she entered the bus and sat in the right side aisle seat about three or four rows in front of the lavatory. Her friend [Gloria Campos] sat next to her in the window seat.

While inside the casino [Red Earth Casino], Ms. Medrano did not see Mr. Vides. While getting back on the MCI she saw Mr. Vides and related that he looked fine. She sat in her seat and began conversing with Mrs. Campos. During this time (a few minutes), Mr. Vides was driving normal, like he always does. Approximately 10 minutes after the MCI left the casino, Ms. Medrano fell asleep.

Ms. Medrano was awoken by the impact. She was thrown to the ground and people landed on top of her. As the passengers were trying to stand up to get out of the bus, many of them were stepping on her legs and feet. After firefighters arrived they placed her on a backboard and she was carried out of the bus. She and Ms. Campos were taken to an ambulance and were transported to the hospital.

Delia Paz-Sanchez

On November 19, at 1015 hours, Investigator Vazquez interviewed Ms. Paz-Sanchez. The interview was conducted via telephone and concluded at 1152 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Ms. Paz-Sanchez was introduced to Mr. Vides approximately eight years ago. She learned that he drove a bus and would go to different casinos. Ms. Paz-Sanchez would take the bus and go to the casinos between two to four times per week. Ms. Paz-Sanchez related she developed an extra marital relationship with Mr. Vides seven years ago. She described their personal relationship as being very close. They would always talk and spend time together. She did not get involved with the family or business of Mr. Vides, except to help him out once in a while. She helped him by collecting the money and making the passenger manifest. She was never employed by the bus company; however, she was not charged the twenty dollar fee to get on the bus. Ms. Paz-Sanchez related Mr. Vides was healthy and he had no medical conditions. She was unaware if he was going through any highly stressful situations at work or with his family. She related he had recently renewed his medical certificate and he was healthy.

Mr. Vides was not the only driver. On Saturday morning the bus had been driven by the other driver. During the time that Mr. Vides would drive he was always very cautious. Mr. Vides talked about how he had been driving buses for 22 years and driving cars for 38 years. Mr. Vides was a very responsible person and would not drive over 70 mph. Mr. Vides would say, "I take care of them because I live because of them." She related that Mr. Vides would conduct a safety brief prior to every trip by using the public address system to inform the passengers to break the windows in case of an emergency. Ms. Paz-Sanchez explained the bus was very well maintained. Mr. Vides would take good care of the bus because he knew that at any moment he could get stopped and the bus would get inspected. He made sure he would not get placed out of service. She recalled that about one to one and a half weeks prior to the collision, the bus had some transmission service done along with fixing something with the wheels. The maintenance and services on the bus were done at the storage yard where Mr. Vides would park the bus.

Ms. Paz-Sanchez explained the bus schedule. On Monday to Friday the bus would arrive at 1900 hours at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. The bus was scheduled to depart at 2030 hours. It would arrive at the casino between 2300 hours and midnight depending on traffic. At 0345 hours, he would pick up the passengers in front of the casino and would depart at 0400 hours. The bus would arrive back in Los Angeles at approximately 0700 hours. On Saturday and Sundays, Mr. Vides would arrive at the pickup site between 1700 and 1800 hours. Once the bus was full he would depart and drive to the casino. While waiting in line or just after getting on the bus, the passengers paid twenty dollars to Ms. Paz-Sanchez or the other bus coordinator. The passenger's names and player card numbers or dates of birth were then written down on a list. Once at the casino, the manifest was given to the casino and Mr. Vides would sign the manifest and the casino would give the passengers thirty-five dollars or more in playing credits.

Delia Paz-Sanchez

On Thursday, October 20, Mr. Vides picked her up at her work in Playa Vista at approximately 2200 hours. Mr. Vides spent the night at her house and dropped her off at her work on Friday morning. Ms. Paz-Sanchez called him at approximately 1500 hours and he told her he was lying down watching television at his home. She spoke to him again at 1700 hours and again at 2330 hours and Mr. Vides told her he had just arrived at the Tortoise Rock Casino. She related Mr. Vides usually worked three or four days per week. When he was working, he would leave her house at 1630 hours to pick up the bus from the bus yard. He would prepare the bus and leave the yard between 1730 and 1800 hours.

On October 23 at 0700 hours, Mr. Vides drove Ms. Paz-Sanchez to the Normandy bus stop. He told her the tour bus [MCI] was being cleaned that morning. At 1900 hours, the bus arrived at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. Mr. Vides was late because the other driver was using the bus and he had arrived late. Ms. Paz-Sanchez left her workplace and arrived at the bus stop at 2020 hours. She collected the money from the passengers and the manifest had already been done by possibly Miguel Martinez. Ms. Paz-Sanchez sat down in the left side window seat of the fourth row. Ms. Paz-Sanchez recalled the Mr. Vides drove fine on the way to the casino and the MCI arrived at the Red Earth Casino around 2315 hours.

After the passengers exited the MCI, she gave the money she had collected to Mr. Vides. Next, she accompanied him to the gas station located next to the casino. She observed Mr. Vides drink a carton of milk and eat a hot dog. After parking the bus, she went inside the casino in order to get her playing credits and Mr. Vides went to sign the manifest. At approximately 0015 hours, Ms. Paz-Sanchez saw Mr. Vides and asked him if she could borrow forty dollars. After borrowing the money she went to the area of the casino that is closest to the gas station and she played there the rest of the night. She did not see Mr. Vides again until she got on the bus.

As Ms. Paz-Sanchez was getting on the bus, she had a conversation with Mr. Vides. She gave Mr. Vides a bottle of water and she gave him twenty dollars back and told him she would pay him the rest later. She related the Mr. Vides looked normal, just like always. She related the bus was delayed 10 minutes due to a passenger misplacing her wallet. Mr. Vides was driving fine and Ms. Paz-Sanchez fell asleep 10 to 15 minutes after the bus left the casino.

Ms. Paz-Sanchez was awoken by the impact. She opened her eyes and looked around trying to figure out what had just happened. She called out to Mr. Vides and was told by a passenger that he was dead. She was in shock and continued calling out to him. She was trapped by the broken seats and was later able to wiggle herself free. Firefighters had already arrived on scene and helped her out of the bus through one of the windows. She related she was taken to an ambulance and was transported to the hospital along with three other passengers, within five minutes of exiting the bus.

Enedina Perez

On October 28, at 1423 hours, Investigator Smith and CHP Officer Trinidad interviewed Ms. Perez. The interview was conducted via telephone and concluded at 1440 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Ms. Perez was familiar with Mr. Vides. She had been taking trips to the casinos for over a year. Some friends of Ms. Perez told her about the bus service. Ms. Perez described the bus as being in good condition. The bus had never broken down while she was onboard. She described Mr. Vides as a good driver and that he always drove slowly; people would tease him and call him a turtle. Ms. Perez related she did not receive any type of instructions or safety brief on what to do in case of an emergency from the driver after getting on the bus.

On October 22, Ms. Perez entered the bus [MCI] from the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. Ms. Perez explained that she usually paid twenty dollars to Delia [Delia Paz-Sanchez] and Jose wrote down her name on the manifest. At the casino, she would be given thirty-five dollars in playing credits. Ms. Perez sat in the right side aisle seat one row in front of the lavatory. Her son [Martin Vargas] sat next to her in the window seat.

While inside the casino, Ms. Perez saw Mr. Vides gambling. She saw him several times throughout the night. She did not see him eating or drinking anything. While getting back on the bus, she saw Mr. Vides and he looked fine. A passenger misplaced her purse causing the bus to leave late. The bus departed at 0420 hours. Approximately 30 minutes after the bus left the casino, Ms. Perez fell asleep.

Ms. Perez was sleeping prior to the collision and woke up after the impact. She heard people yelling but she could not get up. After firefighters arrived they placed her on a backboard and she was carried out of the bus and later taken to the hospital.

Ken Ramnath

On November 16, at 1043 hours, CHP Investigator Parent interviewed Mr. Ramnath. The interview was conducted telephonically. During the initial telephonic interview the call disconnected at 1125 hours. At 1745 hours, CHP Investigator Parent contacted Mr. Ramnath via telephone and continued the telephonic interview. The interview was concluded at 1904 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interviews:

Mr. Ramnath is somewhat familiar with the bus driver (Mr. Vides). He began riding this bus with Mr. Vides occasionally approximately seven years ago. Approximately one year prior to this collision, Mr. Ramnath began riding the bus from Los Angeles to the Red Earth Casino two to three times a week. During these trips Mr. Vides is usually the driver.

On October 22, Mr. Ramnath boarded the bus at the usual pick up location on the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue (in Korea Town) in Los Angeles. Mr. Ramnath didn't pay attention to the specific time he boarded the bus or when it departed but explained the bus usually picks up at 2000 hours and departs around 2030 hours. When Mr. Ramnath boarded the bus, he and Mr. Vides exchanged friendly conversation. Mr. Ramnath did not notice anything out of the ordinary about the driver or the trip to the casino. The trip to the casino usually took two to two and a half hours depending on traffic conditions. On this particular trip, Mr. Ramnath was asleep on and off for the majority of the time until the bus arrived at the casino [Red Earth Casino].

Mr. Ramnath explained that he normally paid the bus coordinator (an unidentified female, who also rode the bus) twenty dollars. At the casino, the passengers would receive a "free-play" card with thirty-five dollars in credits. This worked out to be a free trip in a way. Sometimes Mr. Vides would collect the bus fare, but usually a coordinator collected the bus fare. While on the bus, a different person (an unidentified male, who does not ride the bus) would document passengers on a manifest. The seating on the bus was open seating but some people had a seat that they preferred to sit in every time.

When the bus arrived at Red Earth Casino, Mr. Vides pulled along the curb near the front door to drop off the passengers. This was typical of past trips as well. Mr. Ramnath exited the bus and went inside the casino. He obtained his "free-play" card and gambled using the machines inside the casino.

On previous trips, Mr. Ramnath noticed that after the passengers off loaded Mr. Vides would park the bus and remain in the bus for a period of time (Mr. Ramnath assumed this was to rest). Then later in the evening Mr. Vides would come inside and use his "free-play" card until it was time to leave. On this night, Mr. Ramnath saw Mr. Vides using a machine inside the casino around 0300 or 0330 hours. Mr. Vides did not appear to be tired and looked "normal." Although the casino does serve alcohol, Mr. Ramnath had never seen Mr. Vides drink alcohol and did not see him drink alcohol on this night.

Ken Ramnath

At 0345 hours (typical of past trips as well) Mr. Ramnath went outside and waited for the bus to pull up. The bus was not there at that time. Mr. Ramnath had some bananas he wanted to get rid of and he started giving his bananas away to people. While he was giving away his bananas and talking with other people, the MCI had pulled up and people began to board the bus. When he boarded the bus there were already other passengers seated on the bus but the driver was not on the bus. When he boarded the bus, everything seemed to be “okay.” Mr. Ramnath didn’t see or speak to driver when he boarded. Mr. Ramnath sat in the third row from the back on the driver side in a window seat. Mr. Ramnath and the majority of the other passengers were boarded and seated on the bus by 0400 hours, but for some reason the bus did not depart until 0430 hours. This was unusual because Mr. Vides generally left at 0400 hours. Mr. Ramnath later heard, by word of mouth, that a woman had lost her purse which may have been the reason for the delay.

At 0430 hours the bus started moving and they left Red Earth Casino. Mr. Ramnath was awake for a period of time after the bus started moving. The driving patterns of Mr. Vides seemed “normal” for the period of time while he was awake. Shortly, after the bus started moving, Mr. Ramnath fell asleep.

Mr. Ramnath was asleep prior to the collision and could not recall what happened after he fell asleep. He was awoken by the feeling of a collision. Mr. Ramnath described the impact as a noise similar to screeching metal. He said he remembered being thrown forward and his body impacted the seat in front of him causing it to break. He realized that there had been some sort of collision and he was now facing the rear of the bus. He was afraid the bus would catch fire, so he started instructing other passengers to exit the bus. He looked to the front of the bus and saw that it was very dark and did not appear that he would be able to exit the bus from the front. He pushed his window open and climbed out. He was assisted down to the ground by a male, who he later realized was the driver of the truck. He remained at the scene until the fire department arrived. He walked to an ambulance and was transported to Desert Regional Medical Center.

Rowena Valerio

On November 2, at 1310 hours, Associate Investigator Downing interviewed Mrs. Valerio at the residence of passenger Roy Costa. Officer I. Sanchez, #20291, Officer J. Conley, #19782, and passenger Roy Costa were also present. The interview was concluded at XXXX hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mrs. Valerio was picked up by Mr. Vides and his bus on Vermont Avenue and left for the Red Earth casino at approximately 2030 hours. Mrs. Valerio thought his driving to the casino was Ok as far as she knew, but also related she usually falls asleep. During the bus ride to the casino, she did not talk to Mr. Vides and they arrived at the casino at approximately 2345 hours.

While at the casino, Mrs. Valerio did not see Mr. Vides in the casino and did not see him until about 0430 when he got back onto the bus. Mrs. Valerio thought this was a bit late and fell asleep after leaving the casino.

Mrs. Valerio heard a loud bang and the whole bus went dark. Mrs. Valerio banged her head and her left ribs and right knee hurt. She was taken off of the bus by the fire department through one of the windows. She was taken to John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital with Roy Costa.

Mrs. Valerio stated she knew a lot of people on the bus.

Mrs. Valerio related she had been using the bus driven by Mr. Vides for approximately two years and has been riding with Mr. Costa for about the same time. Mrs. Valerio always felt Mr. Vides was pretty safe.

Mrs. Valerio described the bus as an older bus but that Mr. Vides kept it in good condition.

Mrs. Valerio stated she would release her medical records to the California Highway Patrol if needed.

Martin Vargas

On Thursday October 27, at 1329 hours, Investigator Smith interviewed Mr. Vargas. The interview was conducted telephonically and concluded at 1356 hours. The following is a summary of the digitally recorded interview.

Mr. Vargas was somewhat familiar with Mr. Vides. Mr. Vargas usually rode the bus from Los Angeles to the Red Earth Casino and Mr. Vides was usually the driver. He has used this bus service regularly for the past year. He had heard about the bus service by word of mouth and had been riding this bus [MCI] every weekend (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) for almost a year. He related that Mr. Vides was not always the driver of the bus; however, Mr. Vides would drive the majority of the time. Mr. Vargas related that the bus only stopped at the Red Earth Casino. He explained that he normally paid the bus coordinator twenty dollars. The casino later provided a player card with thirty-five dollars in credits. He did not receive any instructions or safety brief on this trip. Mr. Vargas related he had never received any instructions or safety briefs on previous trips.

On Saturday, October 22, at 2030 hours, Mr. Vargas had arrived at the corner of West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue in Los Angeles to wait for the bus. He boarded the bus and rode to Red Earth Casino. The bus arrived at the casino later that evening around 2330 hours. He described this trip from Los Angeles to the Casino as “normal” and related that nothing was out of the ordinary. He categorized the driving as safe. Mr. Vargas slept for the majority of the trip to the casino.

Mr. Vargas arrived at the casino and exited the bus. He entered the casino and used the machines to gamble. While at the casino, Mr. Vargas observed Mr. Vides at the casino but did not observe anything unusual about the driver’s behavior. He observed Mr. Vides in the casino only once around 0130 hours. He related Mr. Vides was using the machines to gamble and said Mr. Vides had gambled during past trips but that it was rare. He estimated that he had seen Mr. Vides gamble on two previous occasions. Mr. Vargas did not see Mr. Vides again until he boarded the bus to leave the casino.

Mr. Vargas related the bus was scheduled to depart the Casino at 0400 hours. The instructions he received were to wait for the bus outside the casino at 0345 hours, then the bus would leave by 0400 hours. On this particular day, the departure was delayed because a woman had left her purse in the casino and they had to wait for her to retrieve it. Mr. Vargas estimated that the bus departed around 0445 hours. When Mr. Vargas boarded the bus, he saw Mr. Vides. He described the driver’s appearance as “normal.” Mr. Vargas boarded the bus and sat in the second seat from the rear on the right side of the bus (not behind the driver) in a window seat (seated next to his mother, Enedina Perez). He sat in his seat and was awake for a moment before falling asleep. Mr. Vargas fell asleep shortly after the bus entered the freeway. Mr. Vargas related the bus driver (Mr. Vides) drove safely before he fell asleep.

Martin Vargas Perez

Mr. Vargas was asleep prior to the collision and could not recall what happened after he fell asleep. He was awoken by the feeling of a collision. Mr. Vargas described the feeling as an “earthquake.” He said he remembered being thrown forward and was “standing up” after the collision. Firefighters assisted him out of the bus via a window on the side of the bus. He walked to an ambulance and was transported to Desert Regional Medical Center.