

Appendix I

Interview Transcript, Officer Jose Valle

Survival Factors Group Chairman's Factual Report

Metrolink train 111
Union Pacific train LOF 65-12
Los Angeles, California
September 12, 2008
DCA-08-MR-009

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

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In the matter of:

METROLINK TRAIN NO. 111
COLLISION WITH UNION PACIFIC
RAILROAD LEESDALE LOCAL,
September 12, 2008,
Los Angeles, California

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* Docket No.: DCA-08-MR-009
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Interview of: JOSE VALLE

Los Angeles, California

Wednesday,
September 17, 2008

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: DANA SANZO

APPEARANCES:

DANA SANZO, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C.
(202) 314-6439

CARLOS TAPIA, Inspector
Rail Operations Safety Branch
California Public Utilities

SERGEANT NINA SUTTER
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

JESUS OJEDA, Security Coordinator
Metrolink

JOHN QUINTANAR, Battalion Chief
Metrorail Coordinator
Los Angeles Fire Department

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E X H I B I T S

EXHIBIT NUMBER

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No Exhibits.

I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MS. SANZO: My name is Dana Sanzo. I'm an accident
3 investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board, and
4 we're conducting an interview today for Accident Number: DCA-08-
5 MR-009, the collision of Metrolink train and UP freight train, in
6 Los Angeles, California. And if we can start by going around the
7 table and everybody state their names and their organizations?

8 MR. TAPIA: My name is Carlos Tapia. I'm a motor power
9 and equipment inspector in the Railroad Operations Safety Branch
10 of the California Public Utilities Commission.

11 SGT. SUTTER: I'm Nina Sutter, a sergeant with L.A.
12 County Sheriff's Department assigned to Metrolink bureau.

13 OFFICER VALLE: I'm Officer Jose Valle, 32711, with
14 LAPD, Devonshire patrol.

15 MR. OJEDA: My name is Jesus Ojeda. I'm the security
16 coordinator for Metrolink, also assigned to assist NTSB in the
17 investigation.

18 BATTALION CHIEF QUINTANAR: John Quintanar, battalion
19 chief, L.A. Fire, Metrorail coordinator, assisting NTSB in the
20 investigation of the crash site.

21 MS. SANZO: And thank you for being here today and doing
22 this for us.

INTERVIEW OF JOSE VALLE

24 BY MS. SANZO:

25 Q. And if you can just start off by letting us know how you

1 were notified and tell us about the afternoon.

2 A. We were just on our normal patrol duties, just clearing
3 from, actually, from lunch, which was good. And we received a
4 call to respond Code 3 to -- it came out -- at first, it came out
5 as an explosion. At that time we didn't know -- it didn't come
6 out as a train accident.

7 Our dispatcher sent us the call and told us to respond
8 Code 3 to the location, which means lights and sirens. While we
9 were going there, we were getting more information and we were
10 being told that it ended up being a train collision.

11 We got there within probably about five minutes of the
12 call, if not faster. We started from Recita (ph.). Obviously, we
13 went with lights and sirens to Topanga and at that point, I think
14 it was Santa Susana Pass where me and my partner exited our
15 vehicle and we, obviously, saw the collision and, obviously, still
16 saw the train on fire. I immediately ran down to the location and
17 started directing other units on the radio to get into the place.

18 When I finally got down there -- I got there -- the fire
19 department units were already arriving. There were some doing
20 evacuations at that time of the first passenger car and they were
21 still trying at that point to turn off the fire from the collision
22 itself.

23 Once I got there, I kind of get a glance of what was
24 going on because our operator wanted to know. So I gave him a
25 situation estimate of what was going on and resources that we

1 needed. So I initially put out, obviously, we had over 100
2 injuries, unknown, and requested additional units. I requested
3 about 40 officers, I think, at that time.

4 At the same time, other officers from the division
5 started coming in. I made contact with a fire -- I honestly don't
6 know who it was. There was a fire captain there. I asked him how
7 we can assist him and they directed LAPD, the first resources that
8 had gotten there, to kind of help with the triage of patients and
9 helping them getting out of the train, if we can get them out of
10 the train, find out who was seriously injured.

11 So the first officers from LAPD that responded there,
12 that was our responsibility at that point and, like I said,
13 triaging, helping people that needed to be helped and finding out
14 who was seriously injured til the fire, all the fire resources got
15 down there.

16 When I saw that -- obviously, it was, it was total
17 chaos, you know, people in the train, out of the train. I
18 couldn't tell if it was citizens coming into the location from the
19 neighboring houses. Just various types of injuries, obviously,
20 head injuries, some -- it looked like right off -- I could tell
21 right off the bat people weren't breathing, fatalities already.

22 At that point, like I said, I took over radio command
23 for LAPD first responders and I pretty much tried to get our
24 resources to where we were at, which was the location of the
25 train, trying to get them into the school, a better location,

1 because I didn't want them to climb down from where I climbed. I
2 ran all the way down from the top of the hill.

3 And, like I said, at that point I was just trying to get
4 resources -- when they were coming in, I was just directing them
5 on what to do and help FD. And when we got additional resources,
6 we -- I started giving them orders to clear out, you know, either
7 camera crews, any other citizens that weren't supposed to be there
8 or that weren't helping or they were just there to take pictures
9 or anything like that.

10 So we started trying to kick those people out. But it
11 was kind of hard just with the chaos to find out who was actually
12 on the train and who wasn't on the train at that point.

13 At some point my captain showed up, Captain Ruiz, and we
14 still started -- and more officers started coming, at which point
15 I think it was probably like 40 minutes into it or 45 minutes into
16 it, I was actually pulled from the crime scene -- from the
17 location of the accident to our command post where I took over
18 radio responsibilities for the incident. That's pretty much it.

19 Q. Okay. Did you work -- early on did you work around the
20 train?

21 A. Me, myself?

22 Q. Um-hum. Yeah.

23 A. No. No. No. We're just in charge of regular patrol,
24 you know, and calls. We have nothing to do with the train itself.

25 Q. In --

1 A. Oh, do you mean when I first got there, if I was --

2 Q. Yes.

3 A. -- yeah, I was hands on. Yes, I was trying to -- I went
4 into the second car and the third one, trying to find additional
5 victims and see how I can help them and see what type of injuries
6 they sustained.

7 But, like I said, at that point fire resources were
8 concentrating for the most part on the first engine, and with
9 reason. So like I said, pretty much all the LAPD was directed
10 towards the other two trains.

11 Q. Okay. And did you have any difficulties with the train
12 equipment in getting into the train, say, the doors, were they
13 open or did you need to open those to get into the train?

14 A. No, they were all open when we got there. Like I said,
15 there were already passengers outside of the train helping other
16 passengers when we got there.

17 Q. Okay. And I'll go around the table and we'll have some
18 --

19 MR. TAPIA: When you arrived there, did you see any
20 other -- any firemen, any sheriffs, or were you --

21 OFFICER VALLE: At that point --

22 MR. TAPIA: -- the very first one to get there?

23 OFFICER VALLE: When I first got there, it was just at
24 that point LAPD and fire at that point. I did see a couple of
25 minutes, like 5, 10 minutes into it, where I saw a sheriff. I

1 actually saw the sheriff that was, I think, assigned to that, to
2 that train. I don't know if he was on there. He's an elderly
3 [sic] -- elderly gentleman, thin, and I tried to help him. He
4 looked kind of, you know -- with reason, he looked kind of dazed,
5 in a daze. I tried to help him and he actually said, you know, I
6 don't need any help and he started helping people. I don't know,
7 at some point, I guess, he collapsed. He had a couple of --
8 broken pelvis or something like that. I don't know if that was
9 the sheriff himself that was out there.

10 MR. TAPIA: Did you walk into the first Metrolink
11 passenger car or --

12 OFFICER VALLE: The one that was flipped over?

13 MR. TAPIA: Yes, sir.

14 OFFICER VALLE: No, I never went into that one, sir.

15 MR. TAPIA: What did you see on the second one and the
16 third Metrolink cars?

17 OFFICER VALLE: Patients pretty much all over. The
18 first -- on the second train, I think it's the first door on the
19 right side of the train, I saw two people -- I don't know if they
20 were breathing or not -- on the stairwell going up to the second
21 part of the train itself. I couldn't see them moving, so I
22 assumed that they were deceased. I tried to talk to them and I
23 wasn't getting a response from them.

24 I saw additional victims just seated down in the chairs
25 themselves, like the seats themselves. One gentleman in that same

1 car was complaining of pain to his stomach. I guess he was
2 sitting down and from the table, I guess, kind of crushed his mid-
3 section. He was complaining of stomach pain and --

4 MR. TAPIA: Was the table up against him or --

5 OFFICER VALLE: No. He actually somehow -- he was --
6 somebody forced him out and he was just down on the ground kind
7 of, you know, in pain, just screaming, you know, for somebody to
8 help him.

9 MR. TAPIA: That was on the second car?

10 OFFICER VALLE: Yeah, this is on the second car.

11 MR. TAPIA: Anything else?

12 OFFICER VALLE: Just saw a female complaining of -- a
13 female probably in her 40s. She was probably about 200 pounds and
14 black and it looked like she couldn't move. For some reason her
15 legs looked like they were, they were -- how would you call it?

16 MR. OJEDA: Pinned?

17 MS. SANZO: Pinned possibly or --

18 OFFICER VALLE: No, no. She could move, but they looked
19 like they were swollen.

20 MR. OJEDA: Oh.

21 OFFICER VALLE: And she was complaining of internal --
22 she said she was internally bleeding. I don't know how she felt
23 it, but I directed a -- a paramedic at that time got there and
24 started assisting her.

25 MR. TAPIA: How about, how about on the upper level?

1 Did you get a chance to go up there?

2 OFFICER VALLE: I went on the upper level -- I actually
3 couldn't go on the upper level of the second one because of the
4 passengers that were there. I didn't want to jump the two
5 passengers that weren't moving. I didn't go into that second
6 level. Then I went into the third train and I actually went up
7 there, and I think there was only like two people up on the second
8 -- on the third train that were up there still.

9 But pretty much it was clear -- but those people could
10 walk and we were escorting them down to the --

11 MR. TAPIA: They could?

12 OFFICER VALLE: Yes. They can walk. There was nobody
13 up there that, I think, had any -- I didn't see any injuries or
14 cuts or bruises. From the first train I saw people with head
15 wounds, you know, and broken -- one, I saw, he -- I know he had a
16 wound to the small of his back. It looked like something probably
17 stabbed him or he got hurt in the back.

18 MR. TAPIA: What about contents or anything like as far
19 as like chairs and seats and tables, were they all busted up
20 and --

21 OFFICER VALLE: Yes. Actually, yeah, some of the chairs
22 because I know there was a patient in there that I took off one of
23 the seats and I used it to rest his head because he couldn't move
24 and he was trying to hold his head up.

25 So I -- and I remember everything being all over the

1 place, bags, and chairs and like cushions, I think, especially,
2 were off the train.

3 MR. TAPIA: When you were on the radio talking to other
4 officers, did you run into any problems with communicating or, I
5 mean, were others trying to communicate at the same time or --

6 OFFICER VALLE: No. For the most part, I didn't see any
7 problem with our dispatch and ways of communication. No,
8 everything I was putting out, the RTO was -- the RTO, which we
9 call our operator, she was clear in giving out that information
10 that was needed.

11 MR. TAPIA: When you first got there, you said you ran
12 down a hill?

13 OFFICER VALLE: Yes.

14 MR. TAPIA: Where did you --

15 OFFICER VALLE: I started from the top of Topanga --

16 MR. TAPIA: Okay.

17 OFFICER VALLE: -- which is where you see the crash
18 site. You can actually see down. And I actually parked my car on
19 top and I ran -- we ran down to the bottom.

20 MR. TAPIA: Okay. That's what I have right now.

21 MS. SANZO: Okay. Questions?

22 BY SGT. SUTTER:

23 Q. Did you end up escorting people and carrying people to
24 the triage area or was that not one of your --

25 A. I escorted people out and there were other resources

1 from LAPD with -- along with LAFD and I think sheriffs when I got
2 there. And CHP at some point, I think, got there like 15 minutes
3 afterward to help us out, too. They were all doing -- carrying
4 people out. Yeah, there's a couple of officers here that were in
5 charge of that, Officer Bullard (ph.) and Officer Wolleck were in
6 charge of helping the paramedics take people out on stretchers.

7 Q. When you were dispatched to the location, what location
8 were you dispatched to? Do you remember? Was it the
9 (indiscernible) address or something different?

10 A. Honestly, I don't. I don't remember which address. It
11 didn't come out as last known Topanga. It came out as an actual
12 address and I don't recall which address it was. I would have to
13 look at the (indiscernible) at the call when it came out. But it
14 wasn't -- it didn't come out as the actual Topanga, last --

15 Q. It came out as the train tracks?

16 A. It came out as the train tracks. And working up there,
17 I figured, you know, what train tracks they were talking about.

18 BY MR. OJEDA:

19 Q. During the -- your response time, at any time did you
20 hear of anyone on the radio call to shut down the railroad to
21 prevent other trains from entering that site and cause more
22 damage?

23 A. At that -- you know, at that point I didn't think about
24 that. No, I didn't hear it, at least through LAPD radio. Like I
25 said, I didn't hear it. You know, I was monitoring -- I was

1 trying to monitor, but, obviously, it was loud. The helicopter
2 was over, which is, you know, kind of -- you know, especially,
3 with the radio contact, you know, at that point didn't help for a
4 bit. But, no, I didn't hear anything -- say that over the radio.

5 Q. And you didn't have any type of a problem getting into
6 the equipment, you said?

7 A. No. All the doors were open. There was no problem
8 going in, up and down the train.

9 Q. Thank you.

10 BY BATTALION CHIEF QUINTANAR:

11 Q. Do you have any medical training at all, you know, EMT
12 or CPR, that type of --

13 A. Just the first aid, CPR that's trained by the fire
14 department on how to -- you know, first aid stuff, wounds.

15 Q. Where'd you get that? At the academy or --

16 A. No, I -- well, I got that in the academy, but I just got
17 re-certified for it about a -- I should have my certification card
18 -- but less than a year ago.

19 Q. Okay. Good. So when you started, you didn't attempt to
20 go to the first train because they had enough resources there?

21 A. Yes, they had enough resources there.

22 Q. So you concentrated on the second and third train?

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. Okay. You said -- you mentioned you saw possibly two
25 fatalities in the second train?

1 A. It looked like they were.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. They weren't moving. They were not responsive to any
4 questions. Yeah.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. They were on the ground, like I said. So I assumed they
7 were probably -- I directed fire resources to it and at some point
8 I went back and they had -- I don't know, they had like a tag on
9 them. I don't know what that tag meant. It was a card about this
10 big --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. -- with a tag, but I had no clue what those meant. So,
13 obviously, somebody made contact with them from the fire
14 department.

15 Q. And the third train, did you observe any fatalities in
16 that one?

17 A. No. All I saw was a gentleman on the ground complaining
18 just of pain, I guess, to his back and wasn't able to move.
19 That's the actual gentleman that I helped, that I put the cushion
20 under and told him not to move and I kept him there.

21 Q. When they relieved you of duty to go to the command post
22 to be the radio person --

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. -- so you had to go through that grassy area?

25 A. Yes. I went through that -- where they had the --

1 Q. What did you observe in the grassy area?

2 A. Oh, I just observed that they were using it as a triage
3 area.

4 Q. Okay. And that would be if you're approaching the
5 command post area, the left side would be your triage area and the
6 right side was where the helicopters were landing and --

7 A. Correct, sir.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. And did you happen to see that operation, helicopters
11 landing in the triage --

12 A. I saw -- yeah, I saw a couple of them landing and taking
13 off, but at that point then I was -- I saw a couple of takeoffs
14 and they were -- it looked to me like they were landing pretty
15 quick. You know, they had a good response time. And, like I
16 said, there was already a helicopter there when I got there and I
17 was -- you know, I thought it was a pretty good response time.

18 Q. Oh, you mean initially when you made --

19 A. Initially, there was a helicopter.

20 Q. Oh, really?

21 A. I don't know if he was a water-dropping helicopter, but
22 when the fire was still burning in the engine --

23 Q. Right.

24 A. -- a helicopter was overhead and it looked like an FD or
25 a county helicopter, was already at the scene.

1 Q. Did you notice when that fire was knocked out? Did you
2 happen to -- or just --

3 A. It was knocked out pretty quick. I mean, I don't think
4 it took more than five minutes to turn that fire off. They were
5 pretty quick.

6 Q. Good. By the way, we interviewed one of our chief
7 officers or incident commander and the operations chief and he
8 wanted me to commend you gentlemen for the acts you did, for,
9 well, your courage and so forth.

10 A. Thank you.

11 Q. So I would just pass it on. I mentioned it to your Lt.
12 Mills and also Captain Ruiz.

13 A. Thank you, sir.

14 BY MS. SANZO:

15 Q. And I've been asking people if they could offer any
16 advice to other departments on how best to plan to respond to an
17 incident like this. What advice would you give them?

18 A. The only problem I had is when we tried to switch over
19 to the sheriffs. For some reason we can hear you, but we can't
20 broadcast to you on radio communications. And I don't know -- all
21 we get -- we get your -- and we get what your, I think, operator's
22 saying, but we can't hear what your officers are saying.

23 Unless -- I don't know what channel it was they told us
24 to switch over to.

25 SGT. SUTTER: C Tac-1.

1 OFFICER VALLE: Yeah, we went over there. We can't
2 broadcast from that.

3 SGT. SUTTER: Really?

4 OFFICER VALLE: Yeah. We get like this -- when we click
5 it to try to broadcast to you guys, we -- it doesn't go over.

6 SGT. SUTTER: Could you hear both?

7 OFFICER VALLE: We can hear like the -- just the -- for
8 some reason your RTO, but we can't hear --

9 SGT. SUTTER: Excuse me, the C Tac-1, the dispatcher's
10 not on it.

11 OFFICER VALLE: Or somebody we can hear and --

12 SGT. SUTTER: So the (indiscernible).

13 OFFICER VALLE: Yeah, okay. But we can hear it, but we
14 can't broadcast. It gives us a big just beeping sound. And I
15 know I've had that problem before and it's with other agencies
16 too.

17 That's the only thing that I would suggest is if somehow
18 we can get that fixed or -- maybe we can. I know fire has -- some
19 of them have our radios.

20 BATTALION CHIEF QUINTANAR: Right.

21 OFFICER VALLE: So we have no problem with fire in
22 directing us in to certain places because they just get up on the
23 radio and have direct contact. But when we deal with like the
24 sheriffs and the CHP, it's hard for us. Like I said, we can't go
25 through. And I never tried to use Claymars (ph.) to see if it

1 works.

2 SGT. SUTTER: Right.

3 OFFICER VALLE: So I -- you know, I would like to test
4 that one out. But we always switch over to Tac and we couldn't
5 hear. I mean, we can hear, but we couldn't broadcast.

6 SGT. SUTTER: And I think that's what we can do to
7 you --

8 OFFICER VALLE: Yeah.

9 SGT. SUTTER: -- on ours is hear your --

10 OFFICER VALLE: Yeah.

11 SGT. SUTTER: -- your Devonshire (indiscernible), but we
12 can't --

13 OFFICER VALLE: Yeah, I wish we could have. That's the
14 only thing -- I wish we could have had more contact with them
15 because at the CP we didn't know how many resources they had and,
16 obviously, you probably didn't know how many resources we had at
17 that time and how to -- you know, how to better use them.

18 That's the only problem. Like I said, I thought the
19 response was great. The fire department responded in a timely
20 manner and, you know, we tried to do, you know, the best we could
21 with what the resources we had at that time.

22 BY MS. SANZO:

23 Q. In the course of walking through those two cars, did you
24 ever see the train conductor?

25 A. No.

1 Q. That you recall.

2 A. No. I don't recall seeing him.

3 MS. SANZO: Well, do we have a second round of
4 questions?

5 MR. OJEDA: I have one, one follow up to yours that you
6 didn't see the Metrolink conductor. Did you see any of the
7 freight crew? I know that two of them were still inside the cab
8 probably when you showed.

9 OFFICER VALLE: Correct.

10 MR. OJEDA: Did you see a third person?

11 OFFICER VALLE: No.

12 MR. OJEDA: You didn't see anyone outside the UP
13 equipment?

14 OFFICER VALLE: No. No, sir.

15 BY MS. SANZO:

16 Q. Did you know where the Chatsworth Valley School was?

17 A. Yes. I've been there before.

18 Q. Were you familiar with it?

19 A. Yes.

20 BY BATTALION CHIEF QUINTANAR:

21 Q. I'd like to say a comment or maybe you can comment on
22 the joint effort by, you know, the four different groups of first
23 responders: LAPD, sheriff, CHP, and the fire department, LAFD.
24 Can you comment on that?

25 A. Well, like I said, the response -- like I said, the

1 response time I think was great, I think, from every agency. You
2 know, like I said, within just, I think, minutes that we got there
3 -- we were first police resources there with, like I say, Officer
4 Wolleck and Officer Case (ph.).

5 And from that point, I think, it took about less than
6 about 10 minutes and we had -- the sheriffs were there and CHP.
7 They were all there.

8 Q. No, but you were all working together, you weren't --

9 A. Correct. Oh, yeah. No, no, no. We were all working
10 together.

11 Q. Right.

12 A. I mean, we were -- I don't know if you can see -- I know
13 there's video of the place. But, you know, they were all helping
14 out the fire department anyway we could because, obviously, you
15 guys are the lead in a situation like that until we can -- you
16 know, until, obviously, the investigative part comes in.

17 You know, and like I said, we just take your lead. We
18 made contact. Like I said, I contacted one of your captains. I
19 don't know who it was. I just saw the bars and I went to him and
20 see what we can do. And, like I said, all they wanted us to help
21 escort people out.

22 And then after, you know, you guys got enough resources
23 and then we started clearing the area. But, no, like I said,
24 everybody was -- we worked well together. I didn't see any
25 problem with any of the agencies.

1 Obviously, when it's an incident like that, I think
2 everybody's going to bring their A game, you know, and don't care
3 about where they're from or who's responsible for -- just get it
4 done. And that's what everybody was doing.

5 Q. Okay.

6 MS. SANZO: Any additional questions?

7 (No audible response.)

8 And I'm -- thank you again for being here today and that
9 will conclude the interview.

10 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled matter
11 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 Jose Valle

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-08-MR-009

PLACE: Los Angeles, California

DATE: September 17, 2008

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been compared to
the recording accomplished at the hearing.

Kay Maurer,
Transcriber