

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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NEW JERSEY TRANSIT TRAIN #1614

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ACCIDENT AT HOBOKEN TERMINAL

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Accident No.: DCA16MR011

AT HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY

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ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2016

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Interview of: NICHOLAS ARTUNIAN

Weehawkin, New Jersey

Sunday,

October 2, 2016

## APPEARANCES:

DAVID BUCHER, Railroad Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN JENNER, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

NICHOLAS WEBSTER, M.D., Medical Officer  
National Transportation Safety Board

PATRICK VEDDER, Inspector  
Federal Railroad Administration

BRUCE PARKIN, Inspector  
Federal Railroad Administration

FRED MATTISON  
New Jersey Transit

RANDY FANNON  
Safety Taskforce  
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLET)

WILLIAM BATES  
SMART, Transportation Division

STEPHEN HAMER  
SMART, Transportation Division

STEPHEN BURKERT, General Chairman  
SMART Transportation Division

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I N T E R V I E W

(4:00 p.m.)

1  
2  
3 MR. BUCHER: Okay. This is Dave Bucher, rail accident  
4 investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, and  
5 this is the interview of Nicholas --

6 MR. ARTUNIAN: Artunian.

7 MR. BUCHER: -- Artunian. He was a witness to the accident  
8 that occurred on September 29, 2016, at Hoboken, New Jersey and  
9 that accident number is DCA16MR011.

10 For the transcriptionist -- the purpose of this investigation  
11 is to increase safety, not assign fault, blame or liability.  
12 NTSB however cannot guarantee confidentiality or immunity from  
13 legal or certificate actions. A transcript of this or a summary  
14 of this interview will go into the public docket.

15 The interviewee can have one representative of the  
16 interviewee's choice. The representative may be an attorney but  
17 not required to be an attorney. The representative may not  
18 testify for the employee but you can take a break and go outside  
19 and talk any time you want to say something, okay?

20 MR. ARTUNIAN: Um-hum.

21 MR. BUCHER: Okay. We'll go around the table and to my right  
22 I have?

23 DR. JENNER: Stephen Jenner, S-t-e-p-h-e-n, J-e-n-n-e-r, with  
24 the NTSB.

25 MR. VEDDER: Patrick Vedder, P-a-t-r-i-c-k, V-e-d-d-e-r,

1 inspector, FRA.

2 MR. PARKIN: Bruce Parkin, B-r-u-c-e, P-a-r-k-i-n, inspector  
3 with the FRA.

4 MR. MATTISON: Fred Mattison, F-r-e-d, M-a-t-t-i-s-o-n, New  
5 Jersey Transit.

6 DR. WEBSTER: Nicolas Webster, N-i-c-h-o-l-a-s, W-e-b-s-t-e-  
7 r, Medical Officer, National Transportation Safety Board.

8 MR. FANNON: Randy Fannon, R-a-n-d-y, F-a-n-n-o-n, BLET  
9 Safety Taskforce.

10 MR. HAMER: Stephen Hamer, S-t-e-p-h-e-n, H-a-m-e-r, SMART  
11 Transportation Division.

12 MR. BATES: William Bates, SMART TD.

13 MR. BUCHER: And could you spell your name for the --

14 MR. ARTUNIAN: Nicholas Artunian, N-i-c-h-o-l-a-s,  
15 A-r-t-u-n-i-a-n, New Jersey Transit, train conductor.

16 MR. BURKERT: Stephen Burkert, S-t-e-p-h-e-n, B-u-r-k-e-r-t,  
17 General Chairman, SMART TD.

18 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Thank you, gentlemen, for coming in.

19 INTERVIEW OF NICHOLAS ARTUNIAN

20 BY MR. BUCHER:

21 Q. And as I said, Nicholas, if you could just go back to the day  
22 of the accident and in the minutes before, what you were doing and  
23 how the accident occurred, that you saw.

24 A. I was standing outside the waiting room waiting for my train  
25 to come in on Track 2. I was talking to fellow conductors, and I

1 decided to go grab something to eat before my middle trip, but at  
2 that time my train just got into Track 2. So I went and put my  
3 bag on -- in the cab car, walked over to the -- if you want to  
4 call it the little market over there, the Subway. I placed my  
5 order. I went to go pay for my food. There's a window right over  
6 there and I'm just standing there looking out, and then I saw the  
7 train come right through the station.

8 I saw it hit the bumping block. I saw the train go up and  
9 landed and, you know, went up to the building. And I immediately  
10 ran outside to go help everybody out.

11 I started yelling at people. I saw people busting the  
12 windows open, trying to jump out. I was yelling at everyone to  
13 please stay inside; if you want to move anywhere, just move  
14 towards the back of the train. The catenary was sitting on the  
15 equipment and that's the last thing I wanted anybody to get, you  
16 know, electrified.

17 So I just kept on yelling at people, please stay inside,  
18 please stay inside. Help is, you know -- I know the other side  
19 was the platform. So I know people where helping out on the other  
20 side. I heard a bunch of people talking and yelling. I heard Joe  
21 Alexander and -- you know, I just -- everyone kept on looking at  
22 me. They wanted to jump out the window, but I just kept on  
23 yelling.

24 And then I saw the -- eventually the fire department came and  
25 they were asking a bunch of questions, if the power was still out,

1 if, you know, if there was third rail. And I told them they could  
2 walk along the tracks. They cut the -- the fences weren't up.  
3 They're all zip-tied. So they all walked along Track 2, 3, 4 to  
4 get to Track 5. And I was just helping out -- the fire department  
5 really didn't know if, you know, the power was out or anything,  
6 and I know Joe was calling to find out if the power was out.

7 Then after that, everyone just started pushing me away  
8 saying, you know, step outside, step outside.

9 Q. Okay. Great. Thank you. Just a couple of follow-up  
10 questions. You were on what train coming in?

11 A. 1612. I work 1612. I was the conductor on that train.

12 Q. And you came in ahead of the 1614?

13 A. The 1614, yes.

14 Q. Okay. Did you actually visibly see the train come in the  
15 track?

16 A. No, I didn't see because Track 2 -- my train was --

17 Q. Blocking it.

18 A. Blocking it. I just saw it hit the block, and I didn't see  
19 it before it hitting the block because my train was in the way of  
20 it.

21 Q. Okay. Okay.

22 A. But I didn't see the train before it hitting the block.

23 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Okay. That's all the questions I have at  
24 the moment. I'm going to pass it off to Mr. Jenner.

25 BY DR. JENNER:

1 Q. Okay. Thanks for being here.

2 A. No problem.

3 Q. The passengers who you asked to stay on the car, were they  
4 agreeing to stay on or were they making their way off?

5 A. A few people did. I know a woman in the front, in the car  
6 that had the cab car, a woman jumped out with another woman. But  
7 as I was yelling -- I mean, she was really hurt. She was wearing  
8 a skirt. I think her leg was really cut bad. So she jumped out,  
9 and I think it was one of the other guys who carried her outside  
10 to get assistance. But for the most part, everybody was  
11 listening. I was yelling pretty loud.

12 Q. Okay. When the windows got busted out, do you know if that  
13 was done by the passenger or was that done as a result of the  
14 collision?

15 A. It was the passengers. Because I remember them shaking the  
16 ones that you can't open, it wasn't an emergency exit, and I saw  
17 them trying to push against it to get them open. But the  
18 emergency ones were already -- I guess they, you know, they undid  
19 the emergency ones and popped them out.

20 Q. Right. Did you see them working on other windows that they  
21 were struggling to get out?

22 A. Yeah, because I saw the windows shaking because I guess they  
23 were trying to see if those would pop out also.

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. Because I'd just see the reflection of the window and it was



1 just going back and forth, back and forth.

2 Q. Right.

3 A. I guess, because -- I really don't blame them because, you  
4 know, they see one window open and then they think maybe all of  
5 them open. But it was a few that they were -- you know, they were  
6 trying to get out. They were -- but I just kept on telling them,  
7 just move towards the back of the train, I said. You don't want  
8 to stand there, just stay inside and just move towards the back.

9 Q. So they -- so a lot of them remained in there until the fire  
10 department arrived?

11 A. Yeah, and then I don't know who it was, I saw Felicia and  
12 somebody else where they had the door open on that side and, you  
13 know, we kept on yelling that, you know, it might be energized.  
14 But, you know, they stayed back until they got the okay, and then  
15 they got inside the train from my side of the track, too.

16 Q. So your initial view of the train was just as it's hitting  
17 the bumper?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Did you get a view of the engineer at that point?

20 A. No. No. It all happened back to back. It was just -- I  
21 heard the sound. I saw and I heard the sound, and it was just --  
22 in a second it was, you know, it was already on the platform.

23 Q. Were you in a position at all to estimate the speed?

24 A. Honestly, I couldn't possibly tell how fast it was going.  
25 From where I was inside, and being that I didn't even see it till

1 it hit the block, I couldn't even tell where I was standing.

2 Q. Okay. You know, I saw some of the news reports of people  
3 self-evacuating. Do you know what cars that was occurring from?

4 A. I -- from what -- I couldn't see much from my side, where I  
5 was standing, but I know it was between the first and second car,  
6 on the opposite side of where I was, so the platform side. I  
7 could see that people were getting off from there. A few people  
8 did get off where we were and there was the fire department there  
9 helping them out and they just kind of just sat on the ledge over  
10 there by the -- where the empty track was and the guy was just  
11 sitting there on his phone.

12 Q. Right. From your vantage point, the platform side, did you  
13 have confidence that that was a safe exit in terms of wires and  
14 structural damage?

15 A. Where they were?

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. I would hope. I would think so because that's where Joe  
18 Alexander and all those guys were, and I heard people were  
19 carrying people out of the window and stuff like that.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. But I couldn't do anything from my side really because it was  
22 -- it was just track and the fence and I, you know, there's just  
23 no way I could have helped anybody to get out from there. I  
24 wouldn't want to, you know, take that chance and, you know, have  
25 somebody fall and get hurt. I'd rather them get off where the

1 platform side is and, you know, where they could stand on  
2 something sturdy.

3 Q. Sure. Do you know the engineer who was involved in this  
4 accident?

5 A. Tom Gallagher, yes. I've worked with him before.

6 Q. Okay. How often have you worked with him before?

7 A. Maybe twice, three times.

8 Q. Okay. You worked with him and you were in a conductor  
9 position?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Yeah. How did that go?

12 A. Great. Fine. I mean, he -- for all I -- for what I know of  
13 Tom, being on the list, you know, he's -- I hear nothing but great  
14 stuff about him. He's a great engineer. He's been with the  
15 company for a while. I mean, the train was smooth. I never had  
16 any issues with Tom ever. I mean, I only worked with him twice so  
17 -- you know, it's just randomly that I got to work with him.

18 Q. Okay. So you're watching some of the emergency response go  
19 on. Did some of the responders -- how do you think that went  
20 overall?

21 A. I mean, I think it could have been a lot faster, but, I mean,  
22 you know, it's Hoboken. But a lot of the Transit police, they're  
23 all yelling and screaming, you know, they were -- they didn't know  
24 if the power was on. I think everyone's main concern was the  
25 power.

1 Q. Right.

2 A. So besides, you know, them knowing the power was on or off,  
3 after that, they all kind of -- you know, everybody did a great  
4 job.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. They had the ladders, you know, they -- it was maybe over 2  
7 dozen of them maybe on my side ready to go help everybody out.

8 Q. Right.

9 A. I think they did pretty good.

10 Q. Did you ever see the engineer?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Did you see him when he was pulled from the train?

13 A. No, I didn't. I didn't get to see that part.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. I didn't see -- I didn't see any of the crew members get off.  
16 By that time, I was already outside across the street.

17 Q. Right.

18 DR. JENNER: Terrific. That's all I have. Thank you.

19 MR. PARKIN: Bruce Parkin, FRA.

20 BY MR. PARKIN:

21 Q. Nicholas, from where you were, did you -- when the train did  
22 hit the wall -- the bumping block and then the wall, did you  
23 notice if the lights inside the train remained on? Were they off?  
24 Could you tell from where you were?

25 A. From where I was, I -- when I -- the train came to a stop,

1 the lights were off. I didn't notice any of the lights on. But  
2 before that, before when it hit the block, I really couldn't see  
3 anything inside the train until it came to a full stop. That's --  
4 because by the time the train stopped, I was running out.

5 Q. And you explained that a woman came out through the window.  
6 Were you able to see through the -- when the window was removed,  
7 if there was any lighting inside?

8 A. No, no lights on.

9 Q. There were no lights on. Okay.

10 A. No lights on.

11 Q. Okay. Thank you. And in your estimation, how long do you  
12 think it took from you seeing the accident until the first  
13 responders, the fire department, were on the scene?

14 A. I would say about 4 to 5 minutes.

15 Q. Okay. Okay. Thank you, Nick. I don't have any other  
16 questions.

17 A. You're welcome.

18 MR. MATTISON: Fred Mattison, New Jersey Transit.

19 BY MR. MATTISON:

20 Q. Hi, Nick.

21 A. How's it going?

22 Q. Thanks for coming out today. Sorry you're missing the  
23 football game.

24 A. It's okay. This is important.

25 Q. You've been in Hoboken, you've worked there for quite a while

1 now. Do you know -- you know what a train sounds like when it  
2 goes into emergency in Hoboken, right, when an engineer gets there  
3 and dumps it sometimes when it's cutting out.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Did you hear the train dump right before it hit the bumping  
6 block at all?

7 A. I couldn't give you, I couldn't give you like an accurate  
8 response because I was inside the store.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And there was a bunch of people in there talking and whatnot.  
11 So I heard the collision. I didn't hear anything before that  
12 because I was inside the store. So I, I couldn't tell you if I  
13 heard it dump.

14 MR. MATTISON: Okay. All right. That's all I've really got.

15 DR. WEBSTER: Nick, Nick Webster.

16 BY DR. WEBSTER:

17 Q. I think it was a hearing thing that I was going to ask about,  
18 too. From inside the store, could you have heard the -- a train  
19 entering the station?

20 A. If it was on Track 2, maybe with the bell on, but other than  
21 that, I don't think I would hear anything further than Track 2,  
22 because that's the closest track to that store, and if I was by  
23 the window, I would probably hear that bell. But other than that,  
24 I don't think I could hear anything further than that point.

25 Q. Okay. Thank you.

1 MR. FANNON: Randy Fannon, BLET.

2 BY MR. FANNON:

3 Q. I just have one question. When you're outside of the train,  
4 after it stopped, after you were back outside on the platform, did  
5 you happen to notice the brake indicators, lights, if they were  
6 on? And if so, what indication?

7 A. I -- all I remember is seeing the handbrakes go on. I saw  
8 the blue lights on. I didn't -- I don't remember seeing what  
9 indication, if they were applied or released. I did not pay any  
10 attention to that. I just saw -- because I was looking for the  
11 cab car. I wanted to see how far, because I didn't know that that  
12 car was -- it was a four-car set that day. So when I looked at  
13 the whole train, I was like, how far did it go into the building?  
14 But I saw the handbrakes on, so I'm like -- you know, I saw the  
15 cab car, so I'm like that's the first car. So I knew that it was  
16 just -- but I did not look at the indication of the brakes, if  
17 they were applied or released.

18 Q. Okay. Thank you.

19 MR. HAMER: Steve Hamer, SMART TD.

20 BY MR. HAMER:

21 Q. Nick, I just want to confirm, you were in the store when the  
22 actual crash happened?

23 A. Yes, I was inside the store.

24 Q. Okay. That's all.

25 MR. BATES: William Bates, no questions.

1 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Dave Bucher, I do not have any more  
2 questions.

3 DR. JENNER: I don't have any more.

4 MR. PARKIN: Bruce Parkin, no more questions.

5 MR. BUCHER: Anything else?

6 MR. MATTISON: Fred Mattison, New Jersey Transit.

7 BY MR. MATTISON:

8 Q. I have one question.

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Just one more question. Did anyone from Jersey Transit ask  
11 you to write out a statement of what you saw or whatever, like a  
12 written statement or questioned you about it?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Did you --

15 A. Yes, I did.

16 Q. Who did you give that to?

17 A. Murphy.

18 Q. Rayzon (ph.).

19 A. Yes, Rayzon Murphy, yes.

20 Q. Okay. Thank you.

21 A. He's got -- he told me he was going to give me a copy, but I  
22 was so, you know, I was --

23 Q. Do you want a copy of it still or not?

24 A. I mean, if he can. I mean, he did tell me he was going to  
25 give me a copy of the statement but I, you know, he was running



1 around. I didn't really want him --

2 Q. Yep. Okay. Cool. Thank you.

3 A. You're welcome.

4 MR. BUCHER: Okay. That concludes the interview with  
5 Mr. Artunian.

6 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:           NEW JERSEY TRANSIT TRAIN #1614  
                                  ACCIDENT AT HOBOKEN TERMINAL  
                                  AT HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY  
                                  ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2016  
                                  Interview of Nicholas Artunian

DOCKET NUMBER:           DCA16MR011

PLACE:                      Weehawkin, New Jersey

DATE:                        October 2, 2016

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed  
to the best of my skill and ability.

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Kathryn A. Mirfin  
Transcriber