

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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CSX FREIGHT TRAIN DERAILMENT *

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA * Accident No.: RRD18MR007

MAY 19, 2018 *

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Interview of: JOHN BLEDSOE
Director of Track
CSX Transportation

Sunday,
May 20, 2018

APPEARANCES:

JOE GORDON, Track and Engineering Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

TROY LLOYD, Track and Engineering Group
National Transportation Safety Board

DON RICHARDSON, Rail Safety Manager
Virginia State Corporation Commission

ROY MORRISON, Director of Safety
Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes Division
(BMWED)

DAVID DANIELS, Division Engineer
CSX Transportation
(On behalf of Mr. Bledsoe)

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. GORDON: All right. My name is Joe Gordon. I'm the NTSB
3 Track and Engineering Group chairman for this accident.

4 We are here today on May 20th, 2018, to speak with Mr. John
5 Bledsoe, who works for CSX. This interview is in conjunction with
6 the NTSB investigation where a southbound CSX mixed freight train
7 derailed and impacted a bridge spanning NS tracks. There were no
8 injuries, no hazardous materials released, and no evacuation as a
9 result of this accident. The NTSB accident reference number is
10 RRD18MR007.

11 And before we begin with our discussion, let's go around the
12 table, everyone introduce themselves. Ask that you spell your
13 last name, your company or agency that you're representing, and
14 your title. And I'll start off, and then we'll pass it around.

15 Again, my name is Joe Gordon, G O R D O N. And I'm the NTSB
16 Track and Engineering Group chairman.

17 MR. LLOYD: I'm Troy Lloyd, L L O Y D, with the NTSB. I'll
18 be assisting Joe with the Tracks and Engineering Group.

19 MR. RICHARDSON: Don Richardson, R I C H A R D S O N, State
20 Corporation Commission, rail manager, representing FRA.

21 MR. BLEDSOE: I'm John Bledsoe, B L E D S O E, Director of
22 Track for CSX.

23 MR. DANIELS: David Daniels, division engineer -- D A N I E L
24 S -- with CSX.

25 MR. MORRISON: Roy Morrison, M O R R I S O N, Director of

1 Safety, BMWED.

2 MR. GORDON: All right. Thanks everyone, for that.

3 Just a few housekeeping things before we get started. You
4 understand we're going to record the discussion today, and that
5 will eventually be a part of the public docket?

6 MR. BLEDSOE: Yes, sir.

7 MR. GORDON: And you can have a representative with you
8 today. Is Mr. Daniels going to be your representative?

9 MR. BLEDSOE: Yes.

10 MR. GORDON: Okay.

11 INTERVIEW OF JOHN BLEDSOE

12 BY MR. GORDON:

13 Q. So, John, if you could, just start off with kind of a -- the
14 synopsis of your work experience, kind of when you came to the
15 railroad and what got you to the position of director of track?

16 A. Started in June of '06, as a trackman. I worked various
17 positions in the craft. I believe it was in '09 I became an
18 assistant roadmaster at Point of Rocks, Maryland.

19 Q. All right.

20 A. From there, I became the roadmaster in Baltimore Terminal.
21 From Baltimore Terminal, to the roadmaster on the Philadelphia
22 Sub. And then in 2014, I got promoted to the assistant division
23 engineer job on the Albany Division. And then late 2015, I came
24 back to the Baltimore Division on the east side. I've been here
25 since then.

1 Q. Okay. And here on the Baltimore Division, since you
2 returned, have you been in the role of the director of track?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Okay. All right. And as the director of track, can you walk
5 us through kind of your duties and responsibilities and your
6 territory?

7 A. Sure. I have from Richmond, Virginia to Philadelphia,
8 Pennsylvania. I have four roadmasters -- five roadmasters and one
9 assistant roadmaster. I do the grid work, planning for our rail,
10 our tie structure, turnouts; schedule most of our big heavy jobs,
11 as far as putting turnouts in. I go through and high-rail with
12 the roadmasters monthly. Their territories, we look at concerns,
13 point of interest, joints, you know. Keep the division engineer
14 in the loop on what we need, what we see, and try to plan
15 resources for our areas of concern. And keeping our people safe.

16 Q. All right. Thank you for that. You said five roadmasters.
17 Is that five roadmasters -- does that pretty much equate to five
18 separate subdivisions that you have under your territory?

19 A. I have four subdivisions, and one subdivision has a
20 Roadmaster II and a Roadmaster I.

21 Q. Okay. Okay, and we heard from Sean Kaufman earlier. He's
22 one of those -- one of your five roadmasters that's assigned to
23 you?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Okay. And Sean talked to us about his manpower on the RF&P.

1 He said, you know, basically two sections, four track inspectors,
2 a welding crew, and he's got a surfacing crew that spends most of
3 its time on his territory. Is that a typical manpower for a
4 subdivision?

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. The surfacing units belong to me. I have three of them, and
8 my job is to put them where I need them.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And with running freight and passenger service on the RF&P,
11 we've got to keep it pretty par.

12 Q. Okay. Okay. Now let -- if we talk about the accident area,
13 that curve there on number 1 track, you've got a perspective of,
14 you know, being in the position that you're in since 2015, do you
15 remember any special circumstances there, any additional track
16 work that needed to be done or, you know, a request for ballast or
17 anything like that?

18 A. No, sir.

19 MR. GORDON: Okay. That's what I have for right now. I'll
20 pass it over to Mr. Lloyd.

21 BY MR. LLOYD:

22 Q. Yeah. Just real quick, how often do you -- how often is
23 geometry runs scheduled on -- through a subdivision?

24 A. Every 3 months.

25 Q. Every 3 months? Is it -- and now, so let's -- that was a

1 three-track territory up in there. So is it -- how would they
2 cover track 3, track 2, track 1? Is it every 3 months or --

3 A. We usually high-rail up one, throw in reverse; throw the
4 turnout, come back, throw the turnout, go up the other.

5 Q. Okay. On the last -- any of the last geometry runs, do you
6 remember any exceptions within the area that we had that field
7 failure?

8 A. No, sir.

9 Q. Okay. And if you would -- if they would come up with a -- if
10 they did find an exception hit, how would that -- how would you
11 guys take care of that? How would you protect it?

12 A. Depending on what the exception was, like if it was a
13 surface, my surfacing gang would hit it, you know. Then we'd slow
14 order it and protect it and get the tonnage that's required, and
15 lift it.

16 Q. Did -- were you aware of maybe the track inspector that maybe
17 being a -- I guess, a small problem area of periodically having to
18 take measurements, where he would be losing -- or actually
19 increasing crosslevel in that area from the low rail dropping?

20 A. We had talked about some of the problem areas. Every
21 subdivision has a problem area, depending on what it is, and
22 everybody does their own thing in those problem areas. And it was
23 just a place he kept a close eye on.

24 MR. LLOYD: Yeah. I'm good, Joe. That's it.

25 MR. GORDON: Don?

1 MR. RICHARDSON: If you want to go ahead and pass it, and
2 I'll think about something.

3 MR. GORDON: Okay.

4 BY MR. DANIELS:

5 Q. So when you were in the craft, were you ever a track
6 inspector?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. About how much time did you spend as a track inspector?

9 A. A year and a half, 2 years.

10 Q. All right. So you said you're director of track. And is
11 that a recent term?

12 A. That is a new recent term.

13 Q. Okay. So you're an ADE?

14 A. An assistant division engineer.

15 Q. As an assistant division engineer or director of track, is it
16 your responsibility to be the lead track inspector on your
17 territory?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. All right. You mentioned the grid, and then you didn't
20 really specify that. So kind of describe that. Would -- when you
21 talk about the grid, that talks about the production work from the
22 planning and preparation and the requests all the way through the
23 actual completion of the work?

24 A. Right.

25 Q. So you're responsible for all that?

1 A. I'm responsible putting in my tie program, my rail program,
2 turnouts, and pushing through what I feel needs to be approved.

3 Q. All right. And just to clarify, on the question about the
4 geometry car, when there's -- when the geometry car identifies a
5 defect, you would slow order that behind the geometry car, then
6 repair it, then put the appropriate slow order on for the work?

7 A. Depending what the limits were of the exception found.

8 MR. DANIELS: Okay.

9 MR. GORDON: Roy?

10 MR. MORRISON: Roy Morrison of the BMWED.

11 BY MR. MORRISON:

12 Q. You said you high-rail monthly with your roadmaster.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. I didn't -- did you -- when was the last time you high-railed
15 that area? Do you happen to --

16 A. We had a geometry car May 6th, I believe it was. And the
17 Thursday before that, probably the 2nd -- May 2nd, we traversed
18 that track.

19 Q. And that's when you went over it last, was May 2nd?

20 A. May 2nd.

21 Q. And you didn't see anything there that would concern you?

22 A. Nothing that caused any concern to me.

23 MR. MORRISON: All right.

24 MR. GORDON: Okay. Joe Gordon, NTSB.

25 BY MR. GORDON:

1 Q. So you came across May 2nd, you traversed -- did you actually
2 traverse 1 track, or do you remember which of the three was --

3 A. I believe I traversed 2.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Inspecting 1, and I had -- I had a passenger; they were
6 inspecting 3.

7 Q. Okay. And while I've got it, I'll just go with my follow-ups
8 and then we'll pass it over to Don. So if there was any increased
9 surfacing needed in that subject curve, any additional ballast
10 needed, you would know about it?

11 A. I would have known about it.

12 Q. Okay. All right. Your manpower -- you talked about five
13 roadmasters, four subdivisions, typically the same number of
14 employees -- engineering department employees on the different
15 subs. Is that -- do you feel like you've got the resources
16 available to maintain -- you know, is it a struggle? Do you have
17 to borrow people or -- I mean, the people that you have in place,
18 do you -- are you able to maintain the track?

19 A. I am able to maintain with the number of men I have.

20 MR. GORDON: Okay. Okay. Don?

21 MR. RICHARDSON: Just one thing. Don Richardson.

22 BY MR. RICHARDSON:

23 Q. John, do you know what VTI is, they run on locomotives?

24 A. Yes. I forget the actual term of -- I know what the VTI is.

25 Q. I think it's vehicle-track interaction --

1 MR. GORDON: Interaction. Yeah, I believe so.

2 BY MR. RICHARDSON:

3 Q. -- I believe, for those that are less familiar that are
4 reading this. Do you know if there's been any VTI incidents on
5 the RF&P, most notably main 1?

6 A. I have -- I do not recall seeing any.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. With my alerts.

9 Q. They are ran on the RF&P though, right?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 MR. RICHARDSON: Okay. Thank you.

12 MR. GORDON: Okay. Don, that's a good question. I'm glad
13 you raised that, because sometimes that's been an afterthought.
14 You know, we've thought about asking for VTI information, but that
15 stuff is perishable. So, you know, we'll want to ask for that
16 fairly soon if we're going to get anything.

17 But back to the VTI, if they have any type of a critical hit,
18 ride quality, you get an instant message to your phone that says
19 milepost location, GPS --

20 MR. BLEDSOE: With coordinates.

21 MR. GORDON: -- coordinates?

22 MR. BLEDSOE: Yes, sir.

23 MR. GORDON: Okay. And didn't have anything, to your
24 knowledge, on the RF&P recently? Okay.

25 So I'm looking around for questions one more time.

1 MR. RICHARDSON: Don Richardson again.

2 BY MR. RICHARDSON:

3 Q. Thinking about flash flood inspections, can you explain to us
4 a little bit kind of what the -- what your process is? I know
5 that it's directed by weather, correct?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. I mean, you'll get notifications. Are your inspectors, is
8 there a certain amount of time that they need to be out ahead of a
9 train or --

10 A. They will -- what happens is usually the help desk or the
11 dispatcher will contact us, and give you a set of limits, from
12 Point A to Point B, we got flash flood warning. They are to go
13 out and do their flash flood inspection. If they cannot get the
14 track, they are to call me. If I cannot get the track for them, I
15 am to escalate that to Mr. Daniels. And then if Mr. Daniels has
16 to escalate that to the vice president.

17 Q. Is there any time in there where you run a restricted speed
18 or you're out of service or anything?

19 A. I believe that they are running restricted during that time.

20 MR. RICHARDSON: Okay. Thank you.

21 MR. GORDON: Okay.

22 MR. LLOYD: If I can follow up, maybe.

23 BY MR. LLOYD:

24 Q. So, Troy from NTSB. So what happens if -- so you get this --
25 and it's a good question. So you call to do the flash flood

1 stuff, so they can't get the track. Okay. So what happens in
2 between there? Are they still running trains while you're waiting
3 to get the track, during -- are they still running trains while
4 you're still waiting to set -- or did they get these limits
5 between Point A and Point B? Or is the trains stopped, but
6 they're --

7 A. They are still running trains.

8 Q. Okay. So they could be running in an area that's, you know,
9 we're trying to do this flash flood inspection; you're not giving
10 us the track but you're running trains anyway. Right?

11 MR. MORRISON: So, to clarify a little bit. In this case,
12 they -- John is correct. The weather bureau advises of the
13 weather. The -- we get emails that we may or may not see, because
14 you may or may not have your computer on. But the help desk also
15 gets that same information, and they immediately contact the
16 responsible manager and -- or occasionally directly to the track
17 inspector, advising about the limits that they need to inspect,
18 and until -- and the expiration time of the authority.

19 The trains are instructed to run at restricted speed during
20 that time. The inspector gets out. He asks for track time. We
21 actually have a rule -- and I always forget the number, but I
22 think it's like 724.2. But it more or less says when the track
23 inspector asks for track time, the dispatcher must give it to
24 them, in an emergency situation.

25 We have instructed our track inspectors to know that rule by

1 heart and to tell the dispatcher, sir, by rule whatever, I'm
2 telling you I need to inspect, and if you do not let me inspect
3 the track, you are responsible for this. And generally that will
4 strongly encourage the dispatcher to give us track time.
5 Occasionally that doesn't work, and when it doesn't work, they are
6 instructed to escalate it immediately to the roadmaster. The
7 roadmaster tries -- and I mean right up the line, until it has to
8 -- until it gets to the division engineer, the chief engineer,
9 and, quite frankly, Ricky Johnson, our vice president of the
10 union, said he wants it to be escalated to him. So it's --

11 MR. LLOYD: Okay.

12 MR. MORRISON: And we generally do not have a whole lot of
13 problems. Occasionally you will have a dispatcher get a little
14 ignorant, but once it's escalated to the first level, that
15 generally fixes it.

16 MR. LLOYD: Okay. Oh, good. Thank you.

17 MR. GORDON: Thank you for that, Union.

18 BY MR. GORDON:

19 Q. Okay. So speaking of the special inspections for weather, do
20 you remember -- just a ballpark, you know, not holding you to it,
21 but just a ballpark number of notifications that you guys had on
22 the RF&P the week prior? Were you getting --

23 A. I don't have a specific number on that.

24 Q. Okay. But were you getting -- I mean, it's not --

25 A. There had been some.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. But to know the limits of what they were, I can't recall
3 that.

4 Q. Just this time of the year, you know, it's not uncommon, I
5 guess, to get these notifications and --

6 A. That, and with the amount of rainfall we've had --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. -- you know.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. My thing was making sure I had guys rested, that they had
11 hours that we could be able to respond in a timely manner.

12 Q. Okay. And do you remember, for the day of the accident was
13 there -- were there any notifications out, to your knowledge?

14 A. That morning, not that I recall.

15 MR. GORDON: All right. Okay. So I'm going to look around
16 the room one more time. I think everyone has asked their
17 questions.

18 John, I like to always end the interview with -- you know,
19 you're out there, you're tasked with maintaining or helping these
20 guys, supporting them in maintaining all this track. Anything
21 that you can think of as far as a safety improvement that may
22 prevent these kind of things in the future?

23 MR. BLEDSOE: I think what we had was just a freakness, at
24 this derailment.

25 MR. GORDON: Yeah, and it's -- you know, sometimes you can

1 be, you know, you can be inspecting -- and we talked about this
2 with the guys in the field yesterday. Could have had an inspector
3 go through that area, you know, 10 minutes prior to the train and
4 everything may have looked fine. So --

5 MR. BLEDSOE: Yeah.

6 MR. GORDON: You know, understanding that, you know, you're
7 out there battling the elements all the time, if anything comes to
8 mind -- you know, as you're looking back on this thing, if
9 anything comes to mind, reach out to me or Randy and pass that
10 information along, and Randy will get it to the rest of the
11 investigative team.

12 From time to time, when we go back -- and when I send you the
13 transcript for review, I'll be looking at them as well --
14 sometimes there's a question that we think, man, we should have
15 asked this question. Is it okay with me -- or with you, if I
16 follow up with you with a phone call?

17 MR. BLEDSOE: Yes, sir.

18 MR. GORDON: Okay. And I've got your contact information.
19 So, with that, I'd just like to thank you for taking the time to
20 come in and help us with the investigation.

21 And we'll go off of the record.

22 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: CSX FREIGHT TRAIN DERAILMENT
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA
MAY 19, 2018
Interview of John Bledsoe

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD18MR007

PLACE: Alexandria, Virginia

DATE: May 20, 2018

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.



Jane Gilliam
Transcriber