

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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DERAILMENT OF CSX TRANSPORTATION
TRAIN K42911 WITH SUBSEQUENT
HAZARDOUS MATERIALS RELEASE
IN DRAFFIN, KENTUCKY,
ON FEBRUARY 13, 2020

Accident No.: RRD20FR002

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Interview of: STEPHEN HENDRIX, Engineer
CSX Transportation

Community College Library
Mountsville, Tennessee

Sunday,
February 16, 2020

APPEARANCES:

TOMAS TORRES, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ZACH ZAGATA, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

BARRY STAMPER, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

MICHAEL EDWARDS, Local Chairman
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

JASON CLARK, Investigator
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen
Safety Task Force

RANDY FANNON, Inspector
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

JEFF MITCHELL, Investigator
SMART Transportation

STEVEN AMMONS, Director Train Handler Rules & Practices
CSX Transportation

TONY THOMAS, Director Safety & Operating Practices
CSX Transportation

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. TORRES: This is an NTSB informal interview. My name is
3 Tomas Torres, T-o-m-a-s, T-o-r-r-e-s. Today's date is
4 February 16, 2020. We're located at Mountville, Tennessee,
5 Community College Library, interviewing an engineer in connection
6 with an accident that occurred on CSX milepost 123.8 on
7 February 13, 2020. The NTSB accident number is RRD20FR002.

8 The purpose of the investigation is to increase safety, not
9 to assign fault, blame, or liability. NTSB cannot offer any
10 guarantee of confidentiality or immunity from legal certificate
11 actions.

12 A transcript or summary of the interview will go in the
13 public docket. The interviewee can have one representative of the
14 interviewee's choice.

15 You have somebody, correct?

16 MR. HENDRIX: (No audible response.)

17 MR. TORRES: Do you understand that this interview is being
18 recorded?

19 MR. HENDRIX: Yes.

20 MR. TORRES: Okay. Please state your name and spell it.

21 MR. HENDRIX: Stephen Hendrix, S-t-e-p-h-e-n, H-e-n-d-r-i-x.

22 MR. EDWARDS: I'm Mike Edwards, M-i-k-e, E-d-w-a-r-d-s, the
23 BLET Local Chairman.

24 MR. AMMONS: Steven Ammons, S-t-e-v-e-n, A-m-m-o-n-s, CSX
25 Transportation.

1 MR. ZAGATA: Zach Zagata, Z-a-c-h, Z-a-g-a-t-a, NTSB
2 Investigator.

3 MR. MITCHELL: Jeff Mitchell, SMART Transportation,
4 J-e-f-f-r-e-y, K. Mitchell, M-i-t-c-h-e-l-l.

5 MR. CLARK: Jason Clark, BLET Investigator, J-a-s-o-n,
6 C-l-a-r-k.

7 MR. FANNON: Randy Fannon, BLET. That's R-a-n-d-y,
8 F-a-n-n-o-n.

9 MR. STAMPER: Barry Stamper, B-a-r-r-y, S-t-a-m-p-e-r,
10 Federal Railroad Administration, Operating Practices Inspector.

11 MR. TORRES: Okay. Tomas Torres with NTSB. Oh, I forgot one
12 person.

13 MR. THOMAS: Tony Thomas, CSX Transportation, T-o-n-y,
14 T-h-o-m-a-s.

15 MR. TORRES: Thank you.

16 Tomas Torres with NTSB.

17 INTERVIEW OF STEPHEN HENDRIX

18 BY MR. TORRES:

19 Q. Stephen, we'll start first with a brief history. Can you
20 tell us a brief history of your -- with CSX, when you hired on?

21 A. Yeah. I hired on in --

22 MR. THOMAS: 1994.

23 MR. HENDRIX: -- '94. July 11, 1994.

24 BY MR. TORRES:

25 Q. Okay, and how long have you been an engineer?

1 A. Went to engineer school in 1996. I guess I worked up in
2 1997.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Been running the engines since '98 till they shut the
5 railroad down and cut me back to conductor for 6 weeks, I think it
6 was. So basically, I've been an engineer since 1998.

7 Q. Okay. And this is your territory? You've always operated on
8 this territory?

9 A. Yeah. I've always operated on this territory, from Shelby to
10 Kingsport.

11 Q. And what's the division?

12 A. The KP and the BR.

13 Q. Okay. So you've been an engineer since '98 pretty much.
14 That's when you got certified.

15 A. That's when I got marked up and never cut back until 2016,
16 whenever they cut me back for a short time. Yeah.

17 Q. And this is the only territory that you've operated?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Okay. For -- on the day of the accident, can you tell us
20 what time you went on duty?

21 A. Yeah, 0050 on duty at Kingsport to deadhead over there.

22 Q. Okay. So that was February the 13th at 12:50 a.m.?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Okay. And you reported at what, a terminal?

25 A. Reported at Kingsport, Tennessee.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. To taxi to Shelby, Kentucky.

3 Q. All right. So when you reported to the yard office -- like,
4 can you tell us a little bit of what took place in the yard office
5 or?

6 A. Spoke to the conductor and checked to see if we had a taxi
7 and got a taxi.

8 Q. Okay. And did you have any paperwork, like your train
9 consist, your bulletins?

10 A. No. We get all that in Shelby.

11 Q. At Shelby? Okay. So you reported there --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. -- and then you were transported via taxi to Shelby.

14 A. That's right.

15 Q. And the purpose -- how come you deadheaded up there?

16 A. Deadheaded up there to get on the train.

17 Q. Was it -- were you on a relief crew? Was that --

18 A. No. That's the way it's done. We deadhead up, get on the
19 train there, and take it to Kingsport.

20 Q. And how many miles is that?

21 A. On the train?

22 Q. Yeah, rail, rail miles.

23 A. It's 110 miles.

24 Q. 110 miles.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. So you arrived at Shelby --

2 A. Approximately 2:30 in the morning.

3 Q. About 2:30?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. And that's where you received your paperwork?

6 A. We got our paperwork. We then called Peach Creek yardmaster
7 and let him know we were there. And we were then notified that
8 the train was going to be late, that they might put us to bed
9 because we was going to wait on the train because it had hit a
10 slide.

11 But it turns out it wasn't the one the hit the slide. It was
12 blocked because another one had hit a tree, sent a slide or
13 something out there next to Prestonsburg. And I think they were
14 reluctant to put us to bed because the train would have to sit
15 there until we got rest. So --

16 Q. Right.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. So it was delayed due to another train?

19 A. I don't think it was -- best to my knowledge, because I
20 talked to the engineer that brought the train in, I was looking at
21 the front of the engine, and I said, it don't look like you hit
22 it. You didn't do any damage when you hit this.

23 And it turned out it was another set of locomotives, I think,
24 that they were meeting that had, had the trouble, had downed
25 trees, partial slide or something there. They were up underneath

1 the -- they had to cut it out from under the engine to move that
2 so that my train could get in through there.

3 Q. Okay. So it was some other engines going on the opposite
4 direction.

5 A. Yeah, supposedly, I guess, going on the opposite direction
6 and -- or in front of them. One or -- I don't know what, you
7 know, the details on what happened, other than I do know that the
8 other engine had trees under it, and they had to cut the tress
9 out.

10 And my understanding was that they had put in my train
11 history, the TMCI, on them -- not mine, but them -- that they had
12 hit the slide, but there was no damage. He said he didn't hit
13 nothing, and it was another -- they were just blocked because of
14 another train.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. I don't know which direction the other train was going.
17 Somewhere around Prestonsburg. I want to say it was milepost CMG
18 77, but I don't know that for sure.

19 Q. And that's Preston?

20 A. I think it was Prestonsburg is where they was at, yeah.
21 Somewhere around Prestonsburg, I think. You can check with CSX
22 and verify that. I don't know --

23 Q. All right. And you mentioned --

24 A. -- something I don't know all about.

25 Q. You mentioned TMC. What's that?

1 A. It's just where you pull up a profile of your train. It's
2 called TMCI.

3 Q. And it shows the delays there?

4 A. It shows delays there, yeah.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Mostly I pulled it up to see where the train was at. That
7 gives us kind of an idea on maybe how long it's going to be before
8 they get there. And of course we were going (indiscernible). We
9 pulled the train up, showed us what milepost it's at. So we had
10 done that and knew that it was, knew that it was still far out,
11 yeah. And so, anyway, we were waiting on the train there at that
12 point.

13 Q. So once you were told that your train was going to be
14 delayed, you got your paperwork, right?

15 A. That's right. Got our paperwork, called Peach Creek, talked
16 to them -- got our paperwork, went over our paperwork.

17 Q. Yeah. What did you see on the paperwork? What were the
18 contents? Like, bulletins?

19 A. Yeah, yeah. The paperwork showed what we had on the track,
20 you know? Such as between Shelbiana, Kentucky, and where I
21 derailed, we had to look out for slide through Marrowbone, which I
22 did, because I knew where the other slide was because I hit the
23 top of it previously, the trees, before it come in all the way.

24 But anyway, and there was a new area that -- to look out at.
25 I can't really remember the area, but I went through there at

1 about 5 mile an hour. It was at the 2 -- 3 miles from where I
2 derailed. It was at the 212. Had nothing, you know, no flood
3 watch, no flood warnings, nothing like that on my course. And I
4 guess, the next thing would have been at the 10.7, which I never
5 made it there so --

6 Q. So on the bulletins you had warnings of potential slides
7 or, or --

8 A. Through Marrowbone. It's been on there since -- it's been on
9 there for 4 or 5 months, yeah.

10 MR. THOMAS: At least 6 months.

11 MR. HENDRIX: Yeah, yeah. It's been there. And the other
12 one is a fairly new order. It was at the --

13 MR. THOMAS: 120 --

14 MR. HENDRIX: 121.3. No, 121.7 or something.

15 MR. THOMAS: It was 120.8 and --

16 MR. HENDRIX: Okay.

17 MR. THOMAS: 120.9.

18 MR. HENDRIX: Okay. Yeah. And I went in there looking
19 roughly about 5 mile an hour. Once I got by that, yeah, I put the
20 TO back on. The TO was running.

21 MR. TORRES: Okay.

22 MR. HENDRIX: Yeah.

23 BY MR. TORRES:

24 Q. And you say it's been there for about 5, 6 months?

25 A. The one through Marrowbone.

1 Q. Marrowbone.

2 A. It's the --

3 Q. And is it --

4 A. -- the whole signal-to-signal through Marrowbone is what
5 they've got on the orders.

6 Q. And --

7 A. Got a copy there.

8 Q. -- is it due to weather or is it something that's kind of --

9 A. It's due to a slide. It --

10 MR. THOMAS: It was a very similar slide to this one. You
11 can see it all the way from the top of the mountain when you go by
12 it.

13 MR. TORRES: We'll have to let him speak.

14 MR. THOMAS: I'm sorry.

15 MR. HENDRIX: It -- yeah. I actually found that slide -- we
16 found that slide, and it was trees. First I thought it was dead
17 trees. I couldn't stop there either even though it was daylight
18 and stuff; there wasn't no shooting them or nothing.

19 And just the top of the trees was covering the main line, and
20 I clipped them off. Done a little damage to the engine. I then
21 hit my counter, and got the rear by the slide in case it come on
22 in, which it did. It come on in. I reckon it was massive --
23 behind me, it come in. And I stopped, checked the engine of
24 course, and went on.

25 But anyway, I knew where that spot was at. When I come

1 through all of Marrowbone, looking out, yeah. Because we had, had
2 torrential rain, and I figured that might be, you know, it might
3 be on the rail. So I come through there looking out, yeah.

4 BY MR. TORRES:

5 Q. I guess what I'm trying to ask, since they've been on there
6 for 5 or 6 months, is it because of weather conditions? Like, is
7 it from mostly for rain or is it -- do you still have --

8 A. I got no idea why it's --

9 Q. Do you still have slides, you know, landslides or mudslides?

10 A. Well, I guess it's got the potential of coming on in, or they
11 think it could have been another one somewhere down through there.
12 I don't know. They put the whole signal-to-signal in Marrowbone
13 on a slide watch, so that's nothing new. We've had that before
14 other times.

15 And, of course, I get the train down, went in there looking
16 out. You don't go in there at no speed. Especially if it's
17 pouring rain, you don't go in there at no speed. So I had the
18 train under control between the signal-to-signal in Marrowbone and
19 the lookout for the other slide -- potential slide.

20 Q. So when the train arrives, you get on it, right?

21 A. Oh, yeah.

22 Q. You get --

23 A. Get on the train --

24 Q. You relieve the crew, and then you initialize Trip Optimizer?

25 A. No, not at that point. I wanted to get off the crossings

1 back there. We talked to the LE dispatcher. We then got
2 permission to move our train, because we're on a main line, and we
3 can't move the train without his permission. I get permission to
4 move the train and to leave on signal indication, and then we pull
5 the train down. Then I initialize the Trip Op.

6 I had to go back and put the third engine on line because we
7 were close on tonnage. I needed all three engines on line because
8 we had no pusher, and I knew it was going to be tough, probably
9 impossible, to make Elkhorn anyway. So I had three engines on
10 line. I had to go back there and do that. Then I come back, and
11 I initialized Trip Optimizer and got it going.

12 Q. So the dispatcher authorizes train movements through a signal
13 indication? Right?

14 A. Well, yeah. What it is, is at Shelby -- the LE dispatcher's
15 got to the east end of Shelby on the main line. If you're in the
16 yard limits, you've just got to talk to the FG dispatcher. So I
17 had to -- you know, it's protocol; you've got to talk to them
18 before you move if you're on a main line. And it's a new crew, so
19 it's like any other relief job or anything else. You've got to
20 talk to him before you move.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. So we contacted the LE dispatcher before I pulled the train
23 down, and then once I got initialized and got the fuel readings
24 and everything else they're requiring now, and got that third
25 engine on line, checked water on the engines, then we contacted

1 the FG dispatcher for permission to take a signal, leave, and all
2 that.

3 Q. Okay. So you set up the Trip Optimizer -- so as you're
4 operating from departure to the accident, the derailment, it was
5 under Trip Optimizer?

6 A. It was under Trip Optimizer after I looked out for the second
7 place where there could be a slide. I knocked the Trip Optimizer
8 out all the way from the -- wherever I started slowing down. That
9 would have been before we got to Marrowbone. And with the
10 momentum of the train, I think I actually used the brake before I
11 got to Marrowbone just to, you know, make sure I had it down for
12 that area. And then I drug it through -- basically I didn't get
13 the speed back up maybe 10 mile an hour till I got to the other
14 slide place.

15 Then after that, after I got cleared -- my head end cleared
16 that, then I put the TO on, let the TO run. And initially, about
17 another mile down the road, I would have took it out of TO because
18 TO just don't work on a hill. It wants to slow the train down,
19 and I needed it to be in eight throttle when I hit that hill, six
20 throttle, whatever the TO is going to do. So I was planning on
21 taking it out at probably about the 124.5, 124.9, somewhere in
22 there -- about Dunleary signal is where I was going to take it
23 out, take it over.

24 Q. So when you depart, you are manually operating the train,
25 right? Because you're --

1 A. Oh, yeah.

2 Q. Because you're looking for that slide.

3 A. Well, I've got to get the speed up and then --

4 Q. But you're --

5 A. -- don't put it in TO until I got to a certain point, and
6 then I took it out of TO to go in the lookout place, yeah.

7 Q. And then once you saw that it was clear, you put it back TO,
8 Trip Optimizer?

9 A. Once I had my head end clear of --

10 Q. Right.

11 A. -- potential slide, I went ahead and put it back in TO, used
12 it some before I had to take it out and go up the hill, yeah.
13 Yeah, I try to use it where I can because it's required, so, yeah.

14 Q. Right. So once you hit the hill, you manually take over?

15 A. On some trains. Not all trains. This train was only 2 --
16 250 under tonnage, I think, or something like that. So I knew
17 that it was going to need number eight throttle to get up the
18 hill.

19 Q. So --

20 A. But I was in TO when it derailed. TO was --

21 Q. Yes.

22 A. -- track, yeah.

23 Q. So you get up the hill, and then you put it back to TO or
24 what happened?

25 A. No. I never, I never got to the, I never got to the hill.

1 The hill was at --

2 Q. Oh, you were preparing to take it off TO so you can go up --

3 A. Well, I would have done that about another mile down the rail
4 probably.

5 Q. Okay. So -- okay, so as you're -- can you describe the
6 territory, you know, the layout of the rail, terrain?

7 A. Well, it's pretty much river grade till you get to Elkhorn
8 City, which is milepost Z1.0, whatever. When you get to Elkhorn
9 City, it's straight up. But the other territory is basically, you
10 know, you probably run it in three throttle depending on your
11 weight because it's just river grade. It's just pretty much
12 level. Got a lot of curves and stuff, but it's level.

13 Q. All right.

14 A. Yeah. Might be a little bit of incline there, but not much.

15 Q. But as you're coming to derailment, you know, what is that
16 like? Is there -- are there curves? Are there a series of
17 curves? Is it straight track?

18 A. Oh, you got curves, I guess, and I don't know if I was in
19 straight track or not. The fog was so thick and the rain that by
20 the time I, time I see the slide, yeah, it was -- we're there,
21 yeah. Yeah, because it was foggy and rainy.

22 Q. So you didn't see the debris on the rail?

23 A. I seen --

24 Q. I mean, was --

25 (Simultaneous speaking.)

1 A. -- the slide. I seen the slide.

2 Q. Oh. You saw it come, you saw it come down? Or was --

3 A. No.

4 Q. -- it already there?

5 A. It was already there.

6 Q. It was already there.

7 A. The rail was covered. Both, both rails was covered. I
8 realized that I was blocked. I placed the train in emergency.
9 Yeah.

10 Q. You placed it in emergency?

11 A. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. That's all I had time to do, and then
12 we hit it. Yeah.

13 Q. But, you know, like, how deep was it?

14 A. The rail was blocked -- it was as high as the engine, yeah.
15 Because I started to get to the floor, but I didn't have time.
16 And I remember kind of turning my head because I didn't know if
17 that stuff was going to come in the windshield or not, you know.

18 Q. So it was pretty high?

19 A. I didn't know what was going to happen. I ain't never hit
20 one that big.

21 Q. So it was pretty high?

22 A. It was a high as the engine for sure, probably.

23 Q. Like the hood?

24 A. Well, it was as high as the nose of the engine. It was big.
25 I mean, all I could see was nothing but slide. The whole rail,

1 both rails was blocked. Yeah.

2 Q. So then you start getting -- you guys veered off the track.

3 A. We must have went through the slide part of it, and then it
4 must have raised the engine up. I felt the engine, I felt the
5 engine go left, and I just remember saying, we're derailling. I
6 might have said a cuss word in there, but anyway -- I said a few
7 cuss words.

8 And then, and then I felt us going this way, and I thought it
9 was going to roll on the side. And I probably skipped two or
10 three heartbeats right there because I thought it was going to go
11 on the side. We stayed upright though, and it was -- well, the
12 engine was sitting like this once we hit the water. And then I
13 remember saying, are we in the damn river? And he said, yeah,
14 we're in the river. So --

15 Q. (Indiscernible.)

16 A. Or a flooded river, yes.

17 Q. And did any water come in?

18 A. Water was coming in on the nose, and it was coming into the
19 very front of the engine. And so I called the emergency channel
20 and talked to the dispatcher and told him, you know, what was
21 what; we had derailed. By this time, we knew there was fire on
22 both sides.

23 By this time -- the time I got off with him, the river's on
24 fire on both sides. And honestly I can't swim. So we first
25 thought we'd swim across the river, but it's raging river. I

1 said, we'll die if we do that. I said, we're not on fire yet. I
2 said, let's wait and see.

3 And I did remember to call 911. And of course we have to
4 keep our phones off. My phone was off. I don't know how long it
5 takes to fire up a phone, but it took a minute. And then I was
6 able to get enough signal. She couldn't hardly understand me to
7 start with, and I stepped out more closer to the nose of the
8 engine and give her as much detail as I could to try to maybe get
9 help quicker, you know. And that's what I done there.

10 Q. But you also contacted the train dispatcher, right, via
11 radio?

12 A. Oh, yeah. I contacted him first thing and give him as close
13 a milepost as I could give him and told him what happened. Like I
14 said, I'm in panic mode by then a little bit. And I'm trying to
15 think of what I need to do, and I do that. And then, like I said,
16 we went to -- we was going to go out the back of the engine, and
17 we realized that it could be blocked where we couldn't get off,
18 plus everything's on fire. The river's on fire, and we couldn't.

19 And anyway, we -- yeah, I called 911 and give that
20 dispatcher, 911 dispatcher, by road. I knew we was about 5 miles
21 from Elkhorn City, and I give her -- and I said, look, you'll see
22 the flames -- they'll see the flames. We just need help. We need
23 a, we need a boat or a helicopter. We need help. We need help.

24 Q. Right. And when you guys derailed and everything came behind
25 you, did it ignite right away or --

1 A. I'm sure it did because not enough time had went by before
2 Chris came around behind me and, you know, was -- I was talking to
3 dispatcher, I guess, and he come around and he said, we're on
4 fire; there's fire behind us. So yeah, everything was on fire
5 pretty quick, yeah.

6 I think that there was another locomotive maybe on its side
7 about there. We took one impact when we went in the river, and
8 then we took another impact, I guess, the engine coming in hitting
9 us, threw stuff up against the back of that engine too, yeah,
10 yeah. And so we were blocked. We were blocked, couldn't go out
11 the back, and so that's why we were in the nose of the engine.
12 And worse come to worse, I was going to get in the river, which I
13 did. So yeah.

14 Q. All right. So how long were you out there on the platform?

15 A. Oh, I'm going to say 30 to 40 minutes.

16 Q. 30 to 40 minutes.

17 A. Oh, yeah, before we finally got in the water. When I
18 realized I left the inside door open, and I kept looking back, and
19 which -- I was trying to keep my head. I kept looking back and --
20 to see if there was smoke in the cab. When I seen smoke in the
21 cab, I then shut that inside door. And if I'm not mistaken, I
22 told Chris, it's time. We've got to get in the river; we're on
23 fire. And that's when we got in the river.

24 Q. Did anybody show up? Anybody respond?

25 A. Oh, the fire department was everywhere. They just couldn't

1 get to us. They're trying to figure out where to launch a boat or
2 something, I reckon. Which they came down river by the time we
3 got to the bank, then the boat had showed up. I think it was a
4 volunteer fire department with the boat, yeah.

5 Q. Anybody from the CSX?

6 A. Yes. James Collins, trainmaster, had walked in to the
7 tracks. Didn't realize who was over there yelling at us. I guess
8 he was telling us -- he probably figured we didn't know. He was
9 telling us, I guess, to get off. I don't know what he was saying.
10 I never could hear him because of the -- everything burning and
11 the raging river. I couldn't really hear what he was saying.

12 He finally -- at that point we made the decision to get in
13 the river anyway. I remember saying, hell, somebody's walked in
14 here, didn't even bring a damn rope. I mean, I do remember saying
15 that.

16 Q. So he walked out to you or --

17 A. He walked up to the derailment, and he come down the bank.
18 No, we still had to get in the river and go 25 foot to get over
19 where he was at. And then I think he did get in the river because
20 he thought I wasn't going to be able to get out, but what happened
21 is I had a vine wrapped around my leg, and I couldn't move. And,
22 luckily, I had my knife. I pulled my knife out, cut the vine, and
23 then persevered to get out the river.

24 Q. So you said you applied the emergency brakes just as --

25 A. That's all I had time to do was put the big brake on. I

1 applied the emergency brake as soon as I realized the rail was
2 blocked and we had a slide.

3 Q. When you're operating under Trip Optimizer, how does it
4 control the train? Is it just power and dynamics or power and air
5 brakes? Does it control everything?

6 A. It don't control the air brakes. Once you put the brake on,
7 you've got to go to manual. And so I don't know -- if you, if
8 you're running the train and you've got it in power and you have
9 to put it in emergency, it goes to idle.

10 Now, with the TO running it, got no idea what -- somebody
11 might know, but I don't know what it -- what happens when you,
12 you're in TO. I asked that question back when they first started
13 talking about this. I have no idea, I have no idea what the
14 throttle does. All I know is all I had time to do was shoot
15 before we hit the slide.

16 Q. Right. So once you derailed, did you take any other action
17 with the locomotive?

18 A. I put the independent brake on. That's all I could think to
19 do. By then, like I said, we was trying to figure out -- like
20 trapped rats trying to figure out how to get off that damn thing,
21 that's all. That's all I done. I don't know. I guess, the
22 throttle was in eight where I had it in TO. I don't know. I
23 don't know.

24 Q. And as far as the, like, the emergency fuel shut off?

25 A. No.

1 Q. You didn't touch that?

2 A. No. Well, I looked back up there at it and started to walk
3 back up there and do that. I think the engine was already dead;
4 I'm sure the engine was dead. It wasn't running, I know. And
5 then, honestly, I was afraid to walk back up there. At this point
6 we were in the nose and looking at whether we was going to get in
7 the river, so -- but I don't think the engine was even running. I
8 think the engine died when it happened. I'm sure the engine died.

9 Q. And I just want to ask you your experience with Trip
10 Optimizer. How does it, how does it interact with you as a
11 person? Like, does it take your focus off the --

12 A. Not this time, no. My focus was on the rail.

13 Q. So you were --

14 A. I was wide awake. My focus was on the rail.

15 Q. Okay. So you --

16 A. And when I seen the slide, I placed it in emergency. If it
17 had took my focus off of it, we'd had hit it without me putting it
18 in emergency. No, I had my focus on it.

19 Q. Yeah, so you were really focused.

20 A. Yeah. I try to stay focused even with that, yes.

21 Q. And you were focused due to the foggy conditions?

22 A. Oh, yeah. Well, I'm focused, period. I try to stay focused
23 even if it's running. And I try to watch the speed on it, make
24 sure it don't go over speed because it's happened that it goes
25 over speed sometimes. It just don't -- I mean, not always. I

1 mean, it might run 1 mile an hour over, 2 mile an hour over,
2 something like that. But, no, I was focused on the rail. Like I
3 said, it was foggy, but as soon as I seen it, I placed it in
4 emergency.

5 Q. So when you're speeding and dynamics don't hold it --

6 A. I'll have to take it over, yeah.

7 Q. Does it give you a message?

8 A. It gives you a warning after it's already speeding, but yeah,
9 it does give you a warning. And by the time it gives you the
10 warning, you know, there have been times that I've had to put the
11 brake on because we was already -- momentum has already built up,
12 and it's already (indiscernible) to eight dynamics maybe.

13 And it will go 1 or 2 mile an hour over, and I've had to put
14 the brake on and try to control it from there. There's certain
15 areas I try not to even let it run. I just knock it out, and run
16 it myself because I know it's not going to be able to handle it
17 even though the screen shows it's going to handle it. Not
18 necessarily.

19 Q. Okay. Just for clarification, from the time you got on the
20 train to the time you got on derailment, that segment of track is
21 a series of curves pretty much?

22 A. It's level, river grade. Got curves, got few straightaways.
23 Couldn't tell you if we was in a straightaway or curve because of
24 the fog. I think we was, we was probably in some curve in the
25 track there. I probably just come around a curve, yes. It wasn't

1 -- the slide was not in a curve. It was in -- but by the time I
2 seen it through the fog, yeah.

3 Q. And there was vegetation?

4 A. Vegetation?

5 Q. Yeah. Like trees or anything that might have obstructed your
6 view?

7 A. Well, it's a mountain railroad. Nothing really -- the trees
8 didn't obstruct it. It was more of the fog.

9 Q. The fog?

10 A. Yes. The fog and the rain, darkness, yes. But I'm looking
11 straight ahead, and I see it, but by then, we're there. And I
12 placed the train in emergency. Seconds later, we hit it.

13 MR. TORRES: Okay. At this time I'll pass it on to Steve.

14 MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons, CSX.

15 Mr. Hendrix, first of all, thank you for coming in today and
16 talking to us. I know that was quite a traumatic event that you
17 went through, so I appreciate you being here today. I hope you're
18 doing, doing okay.

19 I just got a couple questions. Tomas answered -- or asked
20 and you answered a lot of the ones I had to ask you, so -- but
21 since he went into some questions about Trip Optimizer, I just
22 wanted to ask a couple follow-up questions with that.

23 BY MR. AMMONS:

24 Q. How long have you been running Trip Optimizer? Any idea?
25 Years, months, weeks?

1 A. Years. I was in the yard when they implemented it, but I was
2 kind of forced out of the yard, I guess, and went back to the road
3 running on the south end of Blue Ridge, and so -- yeah. I've been
4 running it, yeah. I really wasn't trained. I kind of had to --
5 of course, (indiscernible) was cutting back conductors. I had to
6 figure it out. I mean, it's not -- nothing I couldn't figure out.
7 But yeah, I've been around it, yeah.

8 Q. You'd describe it basically as a cruise control --

9 A. That's what I think it's called, yeah.

10 Q. -- kind of feature?

11 A. Cruise control, yeah.

12 Q. And on the Trip Optimizer screen there on the locomotive,
13 isn't it true that there is, there is a trip plan that shows you
14 what Trip Optimizer is planning to run, and along with that trip
15 plan, that line there that reads left to right, there's another
16 line that shows what you're actually doing as far as your speed of
17 your train?

18 A. Oh, yeah.

19 Q. And so you can see what the plan is and whether or not your
20 speed is meeting that plan, or close to that plan, correct?

21 A. That's right.

22 Q. Okay. So you can see -- how many miles ahead can you see on
23 Trip Optimizer?

24 A. Five, I think.

25 Q. Okay.

- 1 A. Roughly.
- 2 Q. And there are rules in place -- correct me if I'm wrong --
3 that require the locomotive engineer to take control --
- 4 A. That's right.
- 5 Q. -- if Trip Optimizer is not planning properly or acting
6 properly. Is that correct?
- 7 A. That's right.
- 8 Q. Okay. Do you recall -- you said Trip Optimizer was running
9 the train at the time of the derailment.
- 10 A. That's right.
- 11 Q. And what is the main track speed there?
- 12 A. 25 mile an hour.
- 13 Q. Do you recall what the speed of the train was?
- 14 A. 24 or 25. It was round the speed limit right there, pretty
15 sure.
- 16 Q. Okay. Do you recall if that was the trip plan? Was it
17 running according to the plan?
- 18 A. I think so, yeah, yeah.
- 19 Q. Okay. Have you attended any safety training rules classes in
20 the past year or two? Can you talk about your --
- 21 A. My engineer recertification, yes.
- 22 Q. Okay. When did you do that?
- 23 A. January. I don't remember what day it was.
- 24 Q. January of 2020?
- 25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Oh, okay. So you --

2 A. They recertified me.

3 Q. You just recently recertified. Okay. Great. Great.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Do you recall -- I know your focus as soon as this accident
6 happened -- you know, and you guys, you described going towards
7 the front there; that looked like your only safe passage. Do you
8 recall what paperwork -- did you guys get any paperwork, anything,
9 and bring it off the train with you? Or do you -- was there --
10 was, like, the train's consist paperwork left back in the
11 locomotive?

12 A. It's in the locomotive.

13 Q. It's in the locomotive. Okay.

14 A. Yeah. I had my orders right there in front of me on the
15 clipboard. I didn't take time to grab my orders, no.

16 MR. AMMONS: I believe that's all I've got at this time.
17 Thank you again for your cooperation today.

18 MR. ZAGATA: Zack Zagata, NTSB.

19 To reiterate, thanks again for coming in. I hope you're
20 doing all right.

21 BY MR. ZAGATA:

22 Q. So you've been on that territory your entire time as an
23 engineer?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. Okay. And you said you've encountered a slide previously in

1 that territory?

2 A. I didn't realize it was a slide at the time, but Marrowbone,
3 we hit the top of some trees and the side -- I was going down the
4 main. The side was to the right, and there was a slide there,
5 yeah.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. That was actually a slide. We hit the tops of the trees, and
8 I reckon once I got by, evidently the rest of the mountain fell
9 off and come in there, yeah.

10 Q. And how long ago was that?

11 A. Six months I guess, something like that. I don't know.
12 Maybe longer.

13 Q. So would you say in that territory there, is it common to see
14 slides or --

15 A. Well, I mean, I've worked out there 25 years. I don't
16 remember a slide being through Marrowbone, no. They've had a few
17 slides, I guess, on towards Elkhorn. But the area these two
18 slides come in, no, it's not really common, I guess, out there.
19 Yeah.

20 MR. ZAGATA: All right. That's all I have for now.

21 MR. MITCHELL: Jeff Mitchell, SMART. I really don't have any
22 questions. Pretty much answered everything. I guess, with the
23 fall and everything, you said you put the train in emergency at
24 the last second; there was nothing you could have done?

25 MR. HENDRIX: Yeah, that's all I could have done at that

1 time, yeah. That's all I had time to was hit the big brake and
2 brace myself for the impact. Yeah.

3 MR. MITCHELL: I appreciate you keeping a cool head and
4 calling 911, doing everything you're supposed to and --

5 MR. HENDRIX: Yeah. I was trying to keep my head --

6 MR. MITCHELL: -- appreciate you coming in.

7 MR. HENDRIX: -- in a bad situation. Trying to keep my head,
8 trying to figure out how I was going to get out of that situation.
9 Yes.

10 MR. MITCHELL: I can't imagine, but I --

11 MR. HENDRIX: Yeah.

12 MR. MITCHELL: -- appreciate you coming in. Hope you're
13 doing good.

14 MR. HENDRIX: Thank you.

15 MR. CLARK: Jason Clark, BLET.

16 Again, thanks for coming in. I just have a couple questions.
17 Most of them were asked by the previous gentlemen so far.

18 BY MR. CLARK:

19 Q. Did any of the windows break out in the impact?

20 A. No, not on impact. I don't know if my window was open when
21 it happened, the derailment, but I think I opened my window, and
22 then I realized, no, I don't need my window open, and I shut the
23 window back. Now, whether any of them blew out from the heat, I
24 don't -- couldn't tell you because, like I said, once smoke got
25 inside the cab of the engine, I shut that door. I knew then that

1 the only possible way to get off was into the river. So I knew we
2 was on fire; I knew that engine was on fire.

3 Q. As you guys were attempting to get onto the nose, were any of
4 the doors bent or lodged with debris or difficult to open?

5 A. No. We was able to open the front door. The river was --
6 basically the river was coming in that door, but we didn't have
7 any problem. I did take the chain off of the front as an escape
8 route because there was too much damage on the right side of the
9 locomotive. So I took the chain off. Water was so swift the
10 chain was floating. I then took the chain, wrapped it around
11 where I could go out that way and get off. We needed an escape
12 route.

13 Q. All right.

14 A. Didn't want to go out the left side because I would've been
15 in the swifter part of the river.

16 Q. All right. Did anybody temporarily lose consciousness in
17 either of the impacts from the initial crash or the engine coming
18 in afterwards?

19 A. I don't think anybody lost consciousness. No, I was -- I
20 think I was -- I don't think I went out, no.

21 Q. Did anyone take their grips or did you guys leave your grips
22 behind?

23 A. I took my backpack for a reason. I took my backpack to use
24 it as a float.

25 Q. All right.

1 A. Hoping it'd help me stay above water because I can't swim.

2 Q. All right.

3 A. So I did take my backpack. Never thought -- (indiscernible)
4 was on there. I could have dumped all the -- that out, and maybe
5 used that as a floatation device, but I wasn't thinking. I did
6 think about whether I could take the seat apart, and I thought,
7 no, the engine's on fire. I ain't got time to take no seat apart
8 and use it for a float.

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. Yeah. So I did leave my backpack on hopefully to float. I
11 didn't strap it off in case I needed to dump it in the river.

12 Q. All right.

13 A. But I was hoping it would keep me above water, yeah. Which I
14 don't know if that helped, but that was my thought.

15 Q. Do you think you guys might have benefited from having
16 potentially more cover cars on top of that train as opposed to
17 just the one?

18 A. I don't think that would have helped. I don't know that
19 would've helped on this, this incident. I know that during the
20 fire, I think it was a ballast -- load of ballast that we had on
21 the head end for a cover car, I think. I know during the fire it
22 was -- I guess, the fire got so intense there was rocks popping
23 and flying. One of them hit Chris on the shoulder. It was just
24 rocks flying everywhere. And I don't know if that was from the
25 rail or from the car itself that, that was happening, but I do

1 know there was rocks flying, yeah.

2 MR. CLARK: All right. That covers it for my questions.

3 Mr. Fannon?

4 MR. FANNON: Randy Fannon, BLET.

5 Thanks again for coming in. Everybody else is reiterating
6 that.

7 BY MR. FANNON:

8 Q. But you've lived here all your life?

9 A. I've lived in Tennessee since I was 10 years old, yeah.

10 Q. All right. In the last year, in your thinking process here,
11 has the weather -- has it rained a lot above normal?

12 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah. It's a little above normal here. I think
13 it's set to set another record for February for the wettest month
14 maybe, yeah.

15 Q. And the last 2 weeks -- heavy, heavy rain in the last 2 weeks
16 since --

17 (Simultaneous comments.)

18 A. -- yeah.

19 Q. -- in this area?

20 A. Yeah, in this area. Especially in Unicoi County ,the
21 Nolichucki River, it really gets up. We run alongside it. And
22 yeah, we've had a lot of rain, the whole area.

23 Q. And the mountains can only take so much. It's got to come
24 out.

25 A. This is true, yeah.

1 Q. Okay. So on the -- you'd said that during this trip it was
2 raining. Did it rain in the taxi when you left Kingsport to go?

3 A. It rained in the taxi. It rained the whole time we was
4 waiting there. As a matter of fact, it got some hard rain in the
5 period of time from the time we got to Shelby Yard to the time we
6 got on the train. The rain actually had slacked up a little bit.
7 It was still raining, if I remember right, but it slacked up a
8 little bit when we did get on the train. But it was still
9 raining, yes.

10 Q. You may not know the answer to this question, but have you,
11 have you seen any track inspectors out due to the weather?

12 A. No, no. I'm sure there was track people up there cutting
13 that out from under that engine, you know. I'm sure --

14 Q. Right.

15 A. -- if it was CSX people. I don't know whose track people it
16 was. To my knowledge, there was no track inspector running the
17 track that night, or he would have found it. So --

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. -- my theory he would have found it.

20 MR. FANNON: I have no further questions.

21 MR. STAMPER: Barry Stamper.

22 BY MR. STAMPER:

23 Q. Steve, were you working your regular assignment?

24 A. I worked the extra board out of Kingsport. I've been first
25 out all day. Since I got out the bed that morning, I was first

1 out. I think I slept 9 hours previous, 10 hours previous that
2 night. Stay in the bed as long as I can because I don't know
3 what's going to be the future. But I did lay down to sleep again
4 because I seen there was big potential I was going to get out. So
5 I had, had some sleep before I got on this trip.

6 Q. Okay. Once you're on the train, did you make any pickups or
7 setouts?

8 A. Oh, no. No, we didn't. It was a run-through train.

9 Q. After you departed from Shelby Yard, did you make any stops
10 before you hit the slide?

11 A. No, no stops.

12 Q. What track was your train on when you got on it?

13 A. Main track.

14 Q. Did you get the train directly from the inbound crew or was
15 it tied down?

16 A. No. We got the -- we relieved them right there in front of
17 the yard office. They got off, we got on.

18 Q. Did you receive all the paperwork that you should have had
19 for the train and your type of train that it was?

20 A. Yes. We had all the paperwork. If I remember correctly, the
21 work order went on through. I remember my conductor asking that
22 question to Peach Creek, but we had all the paperwork we needed,
23 yes.

24 Q. I'm going to ask you if the incident is the territory where
25 you normally work. You work both directions out of Kingsport?

1 A. I work everything. I cover everything.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. I worked that for years, Vagler (ph.), when I was forced up
4 there, and later went to it for a little while. I stayed
5 qualified on that territory, and basically it's my territory. I'm
6 on the extra board. I work all the territory.

7 Q. Is there one side you work more than the other? Is it 50/50?

8 A. It's luck of the draw really, but I'm going to say I spend as
9 much time working that as I do working the south end, yes. I work
10 a lot, stay marked up, so --

11 Q. Okay. At the time of the accident, were you running on
12 signal indication?

13 A. Yes. Running on clear signals.

14 Q. You've already said Trip Optimizer was in use.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. What was the last signal you passed before the derailment?

17 A. The drafting signal.

18 Q. Drafting signal?

19 A. Drafting's what we call it, yeah.

20 Q. You already said that was a clear. You said all three
21 locomotives were on line?

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. Were your locomotives or cars inspected before leaving Shelby
24 or did they require inspection at that point?

25 A. At that point I don't think it required inspection. There's

1 no carmen at Shelby. They don't inspect trains at Shelby. I did
2 walk through the units, made sure they had water on them so I
3 wouldn't lose one of them, and got off and looked at the brakes
4 and stuff, signed off on it, and went from there.

5 Q. Did you take any exceptions to the way the radios functioned
6 during, during this day?

7 A. No. No, the radio was working fine far as I know.

8 Q. Okay. Any exceptions to any safety devices at all?

9 A. Other than I don't know what happens when you put in
10 emergency for TO. Other than that I don't -- I don't have a clue
11 what happens as far as what goes on when that happens. You know
12 what I'm saying? This is new technology. I've never had to place
13 it in emergency with TO on, so --

14 Q. Any exceptions to the way the train handled prior to --

15 A. No.

16 Q. -- prior to the --

17 A. No. It seemed to be handling all right.

18 Q. Were your headlights and ditch lights all on and working?

19 A. Yeah, working.

20 Q. Were your headlights and ditch lights at a normal or usual
21 level of brightness?

22 A. Yeah. The ACs don't have as good headlights as the new DPs,
23 but, you know, I was visibly able to see with the headlights. It
24 was the fog that was causing the problems that night as far as the
25 visibility and how far you could see.

1 Q. Understood.

2 A. That's pretty much why I went so slow through Marrowbone and
3 the other place. You couldn't see far.

4 Q. As far as how far you could see, could you put a number on
5 it? How --

6 A. No, not really.

7 Q. -- in terms of feet or --

8 A. Not really. I'm going to say, I'm going to say maybe you
9 could see five car lengths when, when I did see the derailment, I
10 don't know if you could see five car lengths. But, like I said,
11 as soon as I seen it, boom, yeah.

12 MR. STAMPER: That's all I've got for right now.

13 MR. TORRES: Okay. Tomas Torres with the NTSB.

14 I just want to ask you some basic questions.

15 BY MR. TORRES:

16 Q. Do you recall the last -- the previous three days what kind
17 of rest or what kind of work cycle you were in?

18 A. Previous three days?

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. Oh, god. I don't know. Like I said, I slept that night
21 probably a good 10 hours. And then I went back to bed, and I
22 slept -- you know, what's the best you're going to do if you go to
23 bed at 6 o'clock after you slept all night the night before? I
24 slept another 2 hours probably. So I don't really think -- even
25 though I've been up all night, it's something that our bodies kind

1 of get used to. I won't say you ever get used to working a night
2 job, but --

3 Q. Right.

4 A. -- yeah, but they tend not to run them on daylight for some
5 reason. As far as previous to that, the export had slowed down.
6 Trying to think when the last time -- I don't have my time book.
7 I don't have my backpack. I lost all of that, had to throw all
8 that away, but anyway -- it was because of the diesel. We could
9 go back to my work history, I guess, and see when I worked last.
10 I really -- it all runs together out here sometimes, yeah.

11 I don't think I had worked. I think I'd been home, I think
12 I'd been home 24 hours when I got called out on this. Maybe
13 longer. Like I said, I woke up that morning -- several times out
14 on export, but I sleep as long as I can in case I do get called.
15 I woke up, looked at it, first out I think one had dropped his
16 turn, several had calls with, you know, materials that night, in
17 the morning. And so I was first out all day.

18 Q. Okay. Is there anything you would like to add?

19 A. Wish high rail had run the rail. Other than that, no.

20 Q. So maybe run a high rail ahead of you?

21 A. They do it for a presidential train and the Santa trains. I
22 mean, I'm just saying. You know, I guess their life's more
23 important. I don't know. I'm literally serious. If they had run
24 a high rail that night -- we had torrential rain; they knew they
25 had trouble at Prestonsburg. Had they run a high rail that night;

1 that's my only thinking. Had they run a high rail, it wouldn't
2 have happened because I'd have had -- there'd have been a slide.
3 They would have found it. Yeah.

4 MR. TORRES: All right. I'll pass it on to Steve.

5 MR. AMMONS: I don't have any other questions.

6 MR. TORRES: Any follow-up?

7 MR. STAMPER: I've got a few.

8 BY MR. STAMPER:

9 Q. Let's see, Steve, you said you done a walk-through. Did you
10 also complete the daily inspection?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. Were there any mechanical issues at all with the
13 train?

14 A. No. No. I checked the (indiscernible) panels, the computers
15 on them, make sure there wasn't no foul-ups, anything that was
16 going to hinder me from making that hill. Because if you had
17 anything, like such as the dynamics, automatic cut-out that
18 cuts -- they say it cuts the power to the others. But you're
19 going to have a hard time if you have anything like that. So I
20 had nothing to report to dispatcher on nothing I found, no. No
21 mechanical issues.

22 Q. Did you note any deficiencies at all? Anything?

23 A. No, sir.

24 Q. No issues with the braking of the train? Don't sound like
25 you used it much. You say you --

1 A. I used the brake before I got to Marrowbone to get the
2 momentum built up. Just went ahead and put five pound, you know,
3 minimum service, then went ahead and put 10 pound to condition the
4 brake, and then knocked it off and used dynamics to ease into
5 Marrowbone and --

6 Q. It all worked like you expected it to?

7 A. Oh, yes, sir. Yes, sir. It all worked like I expected it
8 to. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. Do you have any pertinent info to add about the
10 locomotive cars or braking system at all?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay. As far as -- getting back to the hours of service
13 part, you're rested under hours of service? You had all, all
14 required rest?

15 A. Oh, yes, sir. Yes, sir. I had all required rest, yes.

16 MR. STAMPER: Okay. That's all I have.

17 MR. TORRES: Okay. Tomas Torres with the NTSB. I have no
18 further questions. This will conclude the interview. Thank you
19 very much.

20 MR. HENDRIX: Thank you.

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

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

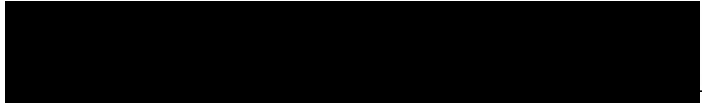
IN THE MATTER OF: DERAILMENT OF CSX TRANSPORTATION
 TRAIN K42911 WITH SUBSEQUENT
 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS RELEASE
 IN DRAFFIN, KENTUCKY,
 ON FEBRUARY 13, 2020
 Interview of Stephen Hendrix

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD20FR002

PLACE: Mountsville, Tennessee

DATE: February 16, 2020

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.



Katherine Motley
Transcriber