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September 7, 2018

National Transportation Safety Board  
Office of Railroad Investigations  
c/o Don Rhine  
Railroad Accident Investigator  
490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20594

In Re: *NTSB Accident Number DCA17FR011 –Submission of CSXT*

Dear Mr. Rhine,

CSX Transportation, Inc. (“CSXT”) hereby makes the following Submission as part of the NTSB’s investigation into the August 2, 2017 CSXT derailment that occurred in Hyndman, Pennsylvania, which NTSB has designated Accident No. DCA17FR011. The events leading to the Hyndman derailment are detailed in various submissions to the NTSB, including in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen’s Final Submission, dated June 15, 2018. However, CSXT summarizes those facts briefly below.

On August 2, 2017, the Q38831, a 178-car train with 128 loads and 50 empties traveling east from Connellsville, PA to Cumberland, MD on CSXT’s Keystone Subdivision, began experiencing issues with its airbrake system as it traversed a descending grade toward Hyndman. After stopping the train to troubleshoot the issue, the Q38831’s conductor tied handbrakes on the first twenty-five (25) cars as well as cars 34 through 64 (56 handbrakes in total). The conductor skipped tying handbrakes on cars 26 through 33 because the brake wheel on those cars was located near the top of the car. Tying handbrakes was required by a Keystone Subdivision timetable instruction requiring the crew to apply 30% of the train’s handbrakes to hold the train on grades of 1% or greater.

Ultimately, the conductor determined that the 159th car was leaking air and mechanical department carmen were called to fix the issue. Upon repairing the car, the crew –a new crew who had relieved the initial conductor and engineer – prepared to depart. At the time of the incident, the timetable instruction included language indicating that “if needed, handbrakes may be left on the train to supplement air brakes while descending the rest of the grade. Avoid leaving hand brakes on any empty cars.” The crew initially attempted to depart with all 56 of the handbrakes tied down. Unable to initiate movement, the conductor released handbrakes on the first twenty-five cars, leaving handbrakes on thirty-one cars (cars 34 through 64). The 34th car was an empty. The Q38831 then initiated movement down the descending grade toward Hyndman, derailing at milepost BF 193.7.

CSXT exhaustively investigated this derailment. It concluded that the derailment's probable cause was excessive tread buildup on the 34th car, which was caused by the handbrake remaining applied to that empty car. To help clarify the Keystone Subdivision's timetable instruction and avoid future incidents, CSXT changed the timetable verbiage from "avoid leaving handbrakes on any empty cars" to the following:

Hand brakes must not be left on empty cars in mixed manifest train service but may be left applied to empty cars of empty unit trains. Hand brakes must only be left applied on the head end of the train.

Before departing, train crews must notify the train dispatcher that hand brakes are applied to descend the grade. Train dispatchers must not crossover trains that have hand brakes applied.

After clearing the control point at Hyndman trains must stop and release hand brakes. The wheels must be inspected for tread buildup on cars that had handbrakes applied.

CSXT made similar changes to the Mountain Subdivision timetable, which also includes grades of 1% or more.

CSXT is aware that other parties to this investigation have suggested additional factors may have contributed to or caused the Hyndman derailment, including train make up combined with trailing tonnage causing high buff forces, and excessive train length. As part of its accident investigation, CSXT considered these identified factors and conclusively determined that they did not contribute to the derailment. In particular, CSXT's accident recreation did not show high buff forces as the train descended toward Hyndman. There has been no evidence proffered to support conjecture that the Q38831's length – 10,612 feet – contributed to the derailment.

Quite simply, all evidence suggests that tread buildup on the 34th car caused the train to derail. And CSXT has amended its timetable instructions in the hopes of avoiding similar incidents in the future.

CSXT appreciates the opportunity to submit its findings for the NTSB's consideration. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions about CSXT's submission.

Very truly yours,

Steve Ammons