

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

* * * * *

Interview of: GREG MELLISH, Chief Engineer
CSX Transportation

Holiday Garden Inn
Pikeville, Kentucky

Saturday,
February 15, 2020



I, [REDACTED], have read the foregoing pages of a copy of my testimony given during a follow-up interview stemming from NTSB's investigation of the collision of CSX's unit ethanol freight train derailment with hazardous materials release and fire on February 13, 2020, at about 6:54 a.m. in Draffin, KY and these pages constitute a true and accurate transcription of same with the exception of the following amendments, additions, deletions or corrections:

<u>PAGE NO:</u>	<u>LINE NO:</u>	<u>CHANGE AND REASON FOR CHANGE</u>
<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>spent not spend</u>
<u>10</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>Fill not cut</u>
<u>13</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>he'll hit rail at least these locations > from</u>
<u>14</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>recognize latent damage that</u>
<u>14</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>can cause potential problems</u>
<u>14</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>water, but hasn't rained recently, that could be</u>
<u>14</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>delete "say" DANGEROUS</u>
<u>14</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>Substitute ask for that</u>
<u>15</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>delete "than" after slides</u>
<u>16</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>"stable" not table</u>
<u>18</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>curvy not curve</u>
<u>18</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>delete one of the "reactive"</u>

I declare that I have read my statements and that it is true and correct subject to any changes in the form or substance entered here.

Date: 3/11/20

Witness: [REDACTED]

APPEARANCES:

RICHARD HIPSKIND, Track and Engineering Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

JOE GORDON, Assistant Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

LOU TOMASSONE, Deputy Regional Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration

DANIEL WILSON, Track Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

BEN CROSSMAN, Assistant Regional Engineer
CSX Transportation

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Greg Mellish	
By Mr. Hipskind	5
By Mr. Wilson	17
By Mr. Gordon	19
By Mr. Hipskind	23

I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. HIPSKIND: Again, good afternoon everybody. My name is
3 Richard Hipskind, and I am a Track and Engineering Group Chairman
4 for NTSB for this accident. We are here today on February 15,
5 2020, at the Hilton Garden Inn in Pikeville, Kentucky, to conduct
6 an interview with Mr. Greg Mellish, who works for CSX
7 Transportation, or CSX, in their Engineering Department.

8 This interview is part of NTSB's effort in conducting a
9 series of follow-up interviews to understand the track inspection
10 process and procedures and oversight of environmental risk on
11 CSX's Kingsport Subdivision.

12 The interview is a routine follow-up to NTSB's investigation
13 of a collision of CSX Train K42911 that contacted a mudslide that
14 obstructed the safe passage of the train on February 13, 2020, at
15 Mile Post CMG 128.3 on CSX's Kingsport Subdivision near Draffin,
16 Kentucky, in Pike County. The NTSB accident reference number is
17 RRD20FR002.

18 Before we begin our interview and questions, let's go around
19 the table and introduce ourselves. Please spell your last name,
20 and please identify who you are representing and your title. I
21 would remind everybody to speak loudly and clearly enough so we
22 can get an accurate recording, and also be mindful to only one of
23 us speaking at a time. I'll lead off and then pass off to my
24 right.

25 Again, my name is Richard Hipskind. The spelling of my last

1 name is H-i-p-s-k-i-n-d. I am the Track and Engineering Group
2 Chairman for NTSB on this accident.

3 MR. WILSON: Daniel Wilson, W-i-l-s-o-n. FRA Track
4 Inspector, Knoxville, Tennessee, Region 3.

5 MR. CROSSMAN: Benjamin Crossman, C-r-o-s-s-m-a-n, Assistant
6 Regional Engineer, Southeast Zone, for CSX.

7 MR. GORDON: Joe Gordon, G-o-r-d-o-n, NTSB, Assistant
8 Investigator in Charge.

9 MR. HIPSKIND: And, Mr. Mellish, would you put yourself on
10 the record?

11 MR. MELLISH: Greg Mellish, M-e-l-l-i-s-h, Chief Engineer,
12 CSX.

13 MR. HIPSKIND: And also with us today is our -- go ahead,
14 Lou.

15 MR. TOMASSONE: Lou Tomassone, T-o-m-a-s-s-o-n-e, Deputy
16 Regional Administrator, FRA, Region 3.

17 MR. HIPSKIND: All right, thank you, Lou. Lou is here
18 posting the interview. Okay, thank you again, everybody.

19 INTERVIEW OF GREG MELLISH

20 BY MR. HIPSKIND:

21 Q. Mr. Mellish, do we have your permission to record our
22 discussion, our interview with you today?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. And do you wish to have a representative with you at this
25 interview?

1 A. No.

2 Q. And, Mr. Mellish, do you mind if we proceed on a first name
3 basis?

4 A. No.

5 Q. All right, thank you, Greg. You've been sitting here
6 supporting the Track Group effort, and so you kind of know the
7 drill here. Would you please go over a synopsis of your work
8 experience and hit the high tops and take us up to how you are in
9 your current position, and let us know how long you've been in
10 that position.

11 A. Okay. I've been on the railroad for 42 years. I was hired
12 in 1978 on the Conrail side. I was hired as a trainee then. I
13 spent a year training, and then I moved around as Assistant
14 Roadmaster, Roadmaster, Production Gang Supervisor, Assistant
15 Division Engineer, Division Engineer in five divisions; Albany
16 Division, Baltimore Division, Florence Division, Louisville
17 Division, and Nashville Division. In 2011, I moved to
18 Jacksonville as Assistant Chief Engineer, and I've been Chief
19 Engineer for about 4 -- 4 to 5 years now in Jacksonville.

20 Q. All right. And what about characterizing all of your duties
21 and responsibilities?

22 A. I like to say I'm in charge of safety. I mean, safety is the
23 number one element here at CSX. I break safety down into two
24 parts; one is personal safety. One of my biggest goals is to have
25 the safest railroad and the safest department every year. So I

1 spend a lot of time on personal safety, making sure that our
2 people out there are following the rules, and they're not getting
3 hurt.

4 The other part of safety is, in my opinion, is derailment
5 safety, making sure that we do whatever we can to minimize
6 derailments, overseeing the geometry car information that we get.
7 Oversee the Sperry information we get. I'm involved in the
8 frequency of Sperry testing. I oversee where we're going to work
9 production. So by analyzing all the data, I basically decide
10 where our tie gangs are going to put ties the following year,
11 where the rail gang is going to put rail, what was on the surface,
12 what turn-outs we're going to put in.

13 And I also oversee the budget, obviously. And I think those
14 are my main functions that I do. I spend a lot of time overseeing
15 production, although they don't report directly to me, making sure
16 they get appropriate time to work the work windows and get mega
17 blocks and that we're efficient in our productivity.

18 Q. You know earlier when I was talking with Aaron, I asked him
19 if it was like it was 30, 35 years ago, you live and die by
20 production. Do you hold that same philosophy or do you look at it
21 differently?

22 A. Oh, no, I absolutely believe that we live and die by
23 production.

24 Q. All right. But the day-to-day challenges, track inspection,
25 the policies, procedures and all that, I know you don't have the

1 day-to-day, but how do you look at that globally from your
2 position on the railroad? I mean, how do you influence that or
3 how do you encourage that to be the best it can be?

4 A. As far as track inspections?

5 Q. Yes.

6 A. Well, make sure that people are trained right. I go out, I
7 would say, once a year and try and talk to all my managers
8 wherever I'm at. I just finished talking to all my managers in
9 Atlanta and Nashville about railroading. I spend a day talking to
10 the managers about personal safety, inspecting track, explaining
11 how you find warp and rock-offs and things like that. So that's
12 almost an entire day that I spend with my managers, and I do that
13 on a yearly basis. And then we just oversee the geometry car
14 information and things like that.

15 Q. So like many of the people who report to you, even at your
16 level there's an element of mentoring, tutoring, educating?

17 A. Yeah. Absolutely. I mean, I enjoy that, and I like to do
18 it, and I have a lot of experience. So I like to go out, and talk
19 to my people, and try and educate them and mentor them as much as
20 I can. I think that's an important part of my job.

21 Q. Okay. Is there anything else that you want to convey to us
22 about duties and responsibilities?

23 A. No. I think I've covered everything.

24 Q. Okay. Well, let's talk about the topic of the day and the
25 investigation. So mudslides, rock falls, things coming off of

1 slopes, coming off of mountains, coming off of benches or bluffs
2 and the fall-shorts, and they're over in the ditch line. Somebody
3 finds them. Somebody takes care of them. May be an item. May
4 be something somebody sees, and they take care of it. But how --
5 from your position of seeing a broader piece of the railroad, how
6 would you characterize this topic, this problem? How do you see
7 it or what are the numbers like across the system for train
8 strikes of objects, train strikes of mudslides or rock falls that
9 actually cause an event, an incident? Maybe not as like what
10 we're seeing out here on this 123.8, but how often do those
11 notifications come across your desk to your attention?

12 A. So there's all types of slides as far as degree. I mean, I
13 get in the office in the morning, and we have what we call a log;
14 a 5 a.m. log that kind of summarizes what happened the 12 hours
15 prior. And there's also one at 5 o'clock at night that summarizes
16 what happened in the 12 hours prior. I always read the logs. And
17 if it's anything engineering related, I take notice of it.

18 But when there's something on the logs such as a mudslide, it
19 could be something as simple as some train went by and saw some
20 mud on the side of the track and reported it, and there may not
21 have been a pebble on top of the track at all or on top of the
22 rail. So it's hard to differentiate what I read on the logs from
23 being a minor problem or what degree of mudslide it really is. As
24 far as a mudslide so bad to derail a train, I mean, this is
25 probably one of the worst I've been on as far as magnitude.

1 Q. We're talking easily what, 4 decades?

2 A. Yeah. Yeah.

3 Q. Okay. So --

4 A. I mean, I can't remember one as great a magnitude as this as
5 far as this much mud and debris being on top of the tracks and it
6 coming down from so high an area up and things like that.

7 Q. Was this area, this Kingsport Subdivision, was it on your
8 radar, your personal radar as a concern for something like this
9 happening where it happened?

10 A. No, not really. We know it's kind of a mountainous area, but
11 we have a lot of mountainous area. So I'm not aware of anything
12 specifically here. You want to be aware if it is a mountainous
13 area, and be more apt to high-rail a mountainous area than you
14 would one with a big cut section like it is in some of your other
15 places, but there isn't anything in particular about this area
16 that I knew about.

17 Q. Okay. So, Greg, when I was talking with Ben, I was trying to
18 get from him how he thinks about whether they're going to have
19 contractors out at different locations, ongoing mitigation or
20 whatever. So from your perspective of a much larger area, how
21 would you characterize what CSX does on an annual basis, either
22 committing dollars to it or projects? How should I understand
23 that part of it?

24 A. Well, when we get complaints from the field, they go up to
25 Roadmaster, the Director of Track, the Assistant Regional to

1 Regional Engineer. We have a Design and Construction Department
2 that kind of oversees the hydrology portion of this and the
3 stabilization of this. And that's run by Todd Eckler (ph.).

4 And if we see we've got problems, we'll send some of those
5 representatives out to take a look at it and see how we want to
6 correct it or whether it's correctable or how we do it. Whether
7 we can build a shelf or install a slide fence or something like
8 that. So it's kind of overseen by the Design and Construction
9 Department, CSX.

10 Q. So if we -- in pursuit of this investigation, if we wanted
11 some more accurate numbers or frequency or dollars spent on those
12 kinds of mitigation projects, we could ask CSX to kind of generate
13 those numbers?

14 A. Yeah. We could try and get them from our Design and
15 Construction Department.

16 Q. All right. And I want to be clear. I'm not making a formal
17 request for that, but if in consultation with the IIC, if he wants
18 to follow-up on that, I will reach out to you and we'll try and
19 see where that goes. Okay?

20 A. Okay.

21 Q. So let's talk about -- you're not going to send a contractor
22 out and do something that you haven't identified. So we're kind
23 of back into this risk-identification thing. So who is at work
24 doing that? And you've heard some of my thoughts on the
25 ergonomics of riding down the rail and high-railing and all this

1 and that.

2 But here's an element that we haven't talked about, and it's
3 kind of -- it starts out like on a dark stormy night. Whoever
4 your weather contractor is calling in to the dispatcher, we know
5 how that goes. Dispatcher calls out into the field. But I think
6 a lot of people think that when we were talking -- when people are
7 out there inspecting the track daylight hours, they can see the
8 track in front of them. They can look up the hill, limited
9 vision.

10 But how challenging is it if we're sending track inspectors
11 and roadmasters out there on the dark stormy night? Weather is
12 in, downpour of rain, got to go over the track. Do they have a
13 prayer of seeing up the slope or seeing what's out of their
14 vision?

15 A. Well, usually there's some type of evidence. There might be
16 already a little bit of debris on the ditch line, and if they see
17 that, they should be looking further up with flashlights or
18 whatever they can, or they should come back in the daytime and get
19 a better assessment of it.

20 Kind of how it works right now is we have a, what we call a
21 weather alert, a warning system. So AccuWeather transfers to us
22 information electronically basically to tell us when there's a
23 warning. And they contact Jacksonville Transportation Office, and
24 the Transportation Office contacts what we call our signal desk in
25 Jacksonville. And when the Weather Bureau contacts Jacksonville,

1 they put out an order to the trains, and it basically tells them,
2 from mile post to mile post on this sub we've got a warning, and
3 you're not to go past 40 miles an hour, looking out for high
4 water, and go restricted speed as necessary. And advise the
5 dispatcher if you see high water.

6 So that's the message that goes out to the trains. And then,
7 of course, the same message gets transferred to our signal desk,
8 and they'll call usually the track inspector out. They have the
9 list. If they get the track inspector -- or if they don't get the
10 track inspector, they'll call the roadmaster. If they don't get
11 him, they'll call the Director of Tracks. So it keeps going up
12 until somebody has been contacted so that we can get somebody out
13 there to inspect the track.

14 Now, this not only includes mudslides but washouts, because
15 washouts are also a concern. And then the inspector will get out
16 there, and he'll test at least these elements from Point A to
17 Point B as notified by the Weather Bureau until the alert is done.

18 Q. Okay. And here's a thought I have about that, and I'll ask
19 you in the form of a question. Do you think the weather
20 contractor notification of a specific storm in a specific area
21 notifying the dispatcher, the dispatcher to the train's dispatcher
22 to the roadmaster or track inspector, how do you think that's
23 working up to now?

24 A. I think it works pretty well, but I don't think it's an exact
25 science. And I think as a result of this derailment that we

1 had -- we've had this system in effect for a long time. I'll go
2 back, and I'm going to look at the thresholds that the Weather
3 Bureau uses. I think, obviously, they use quantity of rain per
4 hour is probably the most common threshold they have.

5 But I think something that this highlighted is sometimes it's
6 not all -- it's presently raining right now, and it's raining
7 hard, but it doesn't really recognize latent damage or latent
8 potential. Like, hey, it rained for 10 days in a row and the
9 hillside is filled with water, and that could be a damage or that
10 could be a problem. And maybe we need to increase our frequency
11 on that. So the weather alert to me is real time. Okay. You got
12 a lot of rain right now, and you may have a washout.

13 Q. Right. Right.

14 A. But it doesn't do a whole lot for, what have you had there
15 for the last 10 or 15 days that could create a potential problem?
16 So we'll go -- I'll go back, and I'll find out what they're using
17 for thresholds and see if there's anything we can do to perfect
18 the system. Because when I look at any derailment, I like to say
19 that how could I have prevented it? Because we want to prevent
20 every one. And some are a lot harder than others, and this is one
21 of the harder ones. But we're going to look at what we can do to
22 maybe perfect the system.

23 Q. I agree with everything that you've said there, and you
24 actually took the thought right out of my head. I'll make this
25 request to you. I think you're moving in the right direction. I

1 would just ask that you follow-up with us or keep us cut in on the
2 outcome of whatever you do with your weather reporting or this --
3 I think you're spot-on with this idea of there's the event in real
4 time --

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. -- and there's worth to protecting your assets, your track
7 and all that, increase safety. But I'm totally onboard with this
8 concept of a cumulative. And I'll just bet that what you've asked
9 of your weather contractor probably doesn't address that right
10 now. And I don't know if that's a CSX issue, data collection or
11 weather, and how you address that. But I think there's merit in
12 it, I guess, is --

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. -- what I'm saying. So I appreciate your discussion on that.
15 The other thing I have on my mind, and you kind of probably got a
16 pretty good sense of it, is the Kingsport Subdivision is one
17 thing. And we've got a moderate number of trains, a moderate
18 number of annual tonnage. But do you have greater concerns over
19 on your Amtrak passenger portions of your railroad? And what do
20 you envision doing different there or is it the same application
21 everywhere?

22 A. Yeah. Some of our Amtraks are more apt -- routes are more
23 apt to slides than -- and washouts than others. I've run Amtrak,
24 you know, we run it from Boston to Chicago. And I see -- I hardly
25 have any problems in there with any types of slides or washout.

1 We go through the Berkshires there in Massachusetts, which is
2 pretty curvy territory, and that's built in the mountainside.
3 It's table. I mean, I don't -- I can't hardly remember a slide or
4 anything that we've had in that area. So I'm pretty comfortable
5 from Boston to Chicago.

6 And then you go, you've got the Pittsburgh line going west --
7 or going east to Baltimore, and that's a little more curvier, and
8 you've got some concern there. But probably the worst line is
9 the -- the one of most concern is the one that Ben has because
10 it's kind of very mountainous, and I think they're closer to the
11 railroad. There's less right-of-way and things like that.

12 So on the Amtrak routes we -- for the most part, if they
13 carry more than 10 million gross tons, we inspect more frequently.
14 So if we're carrying 10 million gross tons or over 10 million
15 gross tons, we're inspecting track three times a week. So when
16 you're inspecting track more frequently, you have the opportunity
17 to find these problems with a track inspector not a train. And so
18 I would say that minimizes the risk on most of the Amtrak
19 derailments. I mean, it doesn't eliminate it, but the more
20 frequently you can get over the track and find it with a track
21 inspector, the more you're going to minimize the risk.

22 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay. All right. I appreciate your support
23 and involvement with our Track Group. That's all I've got for
24 this first round. Let's see what's on Danny's mind.

25 Danny?

1 MR. WILSON: Yes.

2 BY MR. WILSON:

3 Q. The operating rule, I think it says -- you talked about when
4 there's severe weather the train has to either slow down to 40
5 miles an hour or restricted speed. Who determines which one
6 you're doing on that? Is that a --

7 A. They do slow down to 40 within the limits of the mile posts.
8 So we have an Operating Rule 301.7 --

9 Q. Right.

10 A. -- and it tells the trains if there's a warning between Mile
11 Post 100 and 200 that you're going 40 miles an hour, and you're
12 looking out for high water. And if you see high water, then you
13 go restricted speed to it.

14 Q. Okay. So --

15 A. And you must report it to the dispatcher.

16 Q. Got you. So they go 40, and if they see high water or
17 something of concern, they'll go restricted speed past that?

18 A. That's correct.

19 Q. Got you.

20 A. And where we had this is only 25, so the 40 really doesn't
21 come into much play.

22 Q. Right.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. What about, I asked Ben, CSX working on any new technology to
25 address any kind of special inspections or any type of washouts or

1 slides or anything?

2 A. I don't know of any new technology but, obviously, there's
3 things we're going to look at here. We have -- everybody's talked
4 about the slide fences on the Kingsport. We do have 15 on the
5 Kingsport in our database. Most of them aren't in this area, but
6 they're in the curve area in the Kingsport. As far as new
7 technology, I don't know of any new technology. Slide fences to
8 me are kind of, you know, I can put up a slide fence at this
9 incident, but that's kind of a reactive, reactive type of
10 management.

11 I like to be proactive. So we're going to look at the
12 weather alerts. We're going to look at whether we need to
13 increase inspections overall. We can look at some hydrology
14 studies. I think I'll talk to other railroads and see what they
15 do. We're not so fragile that we're not going to take the best
16 idea, so we'll talk to the three other railroads. We'll ask them
17 what they do on their weather alerts. Maybe they have a better
18 system; maybe they don't. And we'll have our standards group get
19 into that.

20 But, you know, if we can confirm this is an abandoned mine,
21 which we think it may be but it's not proven, we can look into
22 that and see if certain areas got a lot more abandoned mines than
23 others, whether we can do something differently like put in slide
24 fences in the area of abandoned mine or not.

25 MR. WILSON: That's all I got.

1 MR. HIPSKIND: Thanks, Danny.

2 Ben, do you have anything?

3 MR. CROSSMAN: No questions.

4 MR. HIPSKIND: Joe?

5 MR. GORDON: Joe Gordon, NTSB.

6 BY MR. GORDON:

7 Q. A lot of what you've been talking about, and I don't want to
8 open Pandora's Box, but talk just a little about safety
9 management, safety management systems. You've had a long career
10 in the Engineering Department. You've seen a lot of changes over
11 the years, I'm sure. As far as we haven't always -- we haven't
12 coined it as SMS in the freight railroad world or industry, but is
13 it safe to say understanding the SMS principle safety assessment,
14 identifying your risk, safety policy, remediating the risk that
15 you identify, and then follow-up safety assurance, and following
16 up to make sure that those remediations, safe to say that, that's
17 been in operation in the freight railroad for quite some time?

18 A. Sure. Yeah.

19 Q. Any recent changes that you've seen within CSX as far as more
20 to a safety management systems approach, or is it just kind of new
21 terminology for something that's been in play for a long time?

22 A. Well, no. We're trying to improve technology in a lot of
23 ways. You want to get outside of the mudslide area. We have
24 automated -- autonomous vehicles that are pulled by trains. So we
25 have three of them working right now. We have one that goes from

1 North Bergen on the River Line into Albany, into Chicago. And
2 we're testing our mainline sometimes as much as one week with a
3 geometry car. And that information is e-mailed right to the
4 roadmaster if there's any type of defect, and we go out. So we're
5 using that type of technology.

6 We have two other cars. We have one that tests the Chicago
7 coming south to Nashville, to Chattanooga, to Jacksonville route.
8 That one is in effect too. And we got one we just put in effect
9 from Philadelphia to Jacksonville. So we're testing our core
10 routes with these autonomous vehicles, which is great because
11 they're under load. And you're talking -- you're measuring gauge,
12 like, every week on some of these lines.

13 So in the past sometimes there's been derailments where one
14 week the gauge was good, and then all of a sudden you had seven
15 spikes break out in a row and you had a wide gauge problem, and
16 we're finding that kind of stuff now. So we have three of those
17 working. They work great. I love them. And we're going to buy
18 two more this year; we have AFEs to get two more in operation this
19 year, so we're going to be covering our railroad with five of
20 them.

21 And we're also doing the continuous test, and the continuous
22 test has been very good for us. We've been -- we're going to
23 enhance the continuous test. It's kind of been in a delay a
24 little bit because the FRA has made us apply for a waiver every
25 place we want to do a continuous test, and we can't -- we want to

1 go to Sperry and say build us more continuous test cars, but
2 Sperry says you won't give me a commitment for 10 years to run
3 them. So we don't want to do that. And we're sitting here saying
4 that, well, we're waiting for the FRA to take it off a waiver and
5 approve it on a permanent basis. Because you wouldn't want to buy
6 them, and then all of a sudden FRA says, well, we're not going to
7 approve the waiver any more.

8 But I think the FRA is getting very close to approving them,
9 and so hopefully here shortly we won't have to run them on a
10 waiver. We can just tell Sperry, build us three more, and we're
11 going to test the track more frequently, and improve the railroad.

12 So those are two of the technology things. And I would like
13 to add that on CSX we had the best rate on mainline derailments
14 last year in the United States of the four major railroads on FRA
15 reportable mainline derailments. And in 2019, we became the first
16 railroad in history not to have a FRA reportable broken rail
17 derailment on a main line. So we're moving in the right
18 direction. Our FRA derailments are way down. We cut them from 50
19 percent last year, and overall derailments are down 25 percent.
20 So we're moving in the right direction. And we also have the
21 safest railroad in the industry. We were number one in safety on
22 the American railroads in 2019. And, like Dick said, a big part
23 of that is the capital program. I'm a big believer in the
24 capital. And OE isn't what's going to save the railroads. It's
25 capital. Because that's where you get the most bang for your

1 buck. You can put in more ties with a tie gang, 3,000 a day, than
2 you can with a backhoe.

3 Q. Exactly.

4 A. So we've had a pretty good, robust capital program that I'm
5 pleased with, and overall our railroad is getting better every
6 year.

7 Q. Great. As far as the, kind of the first step, the risk
8 assessment, do you have programs in place? Because understanding
9 that those kind of start from the ground level, you've got to get
10 the boots-on-the-ground, day-to-day operation identifying
11 potential hazards and passing those up. Is that a -- do you have
12 programs in place?

13 A. Is there any particular area of risk that you're talking
14 about? I mean, I can talk about --

15 Q. Just as far as training, training your employees either be it
16 in worker safety or track inspection, even looking out into the
17 areas like identifying some of the broader programs. Do you have
18 programs training the employees on risk identification?

19 A. Yeah, we do. We have quarterly programs. We do, like, CAR
20 training twice a year, which is taught by our Assistant Regional
21 Engineers. They sit all the craftsmen down in the fall and in the
22 spring. And in the fall they talk about the problems of adding
23 too much rail when you change out a rail in the winter and the
24 problems that, that can create when summer comes.

25 And if you don't do it right, you increase the potential for

1 a heat kink. So we use reference lines for that; we document it
2 in the computer. And if there's any place we added rail because
3 it was too cold, and we couldn't -- could not avoid adding rail,
4 it's in our computer, and we know to get that out before it gets
5 warm.

6 And then we have one in the spring, and that's mostly
7 discussing how to properly slow water the track and the limits to
8 what you're allowed to do to the track so you don't disturb the
9 track to the point that you're going to create any type of heat
10 kink problem when it gets into the middle of the summer and you're
11 getting into 90- and 100-degree days. Yeah, we do that. We do
12 that type of training.

13 We have safety training on a quarterly basis. We have
14 operational rules training. And our track inspectors take a
15 yearly test, and they're trained on a yearly basis, and they have
16 to pass a test. And there's also an assessment that is done by
17 the Director of Track once a year to make sure they're keeping up
18 to snuff with our policy and requirements and that they're
19 qualified to do the job.

20 MR. GORDON: Okay. All right. I think that's all I have
21 right now, Dick.

22 MR. HIPSKIND: All right, thanks, Joe.

23 BY MR. HIPSKIND:

24 Q. So, Greg, I'm going to bounce around a little bit, so just
25 forgive me on that. Is what we've seen out there once it's

1 cleaned up, equipment's out, you repaired the track and all that,
2 does this location at 123.8, has it hoisted itself up as a slide
3 fence candidate?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. But is there more that you want to do there other than just a
6 slide fence?

7 A. Well, we'll have it studied. I mean, we'll -- we want to see
8 what it does here in the next few weeks and whether it's
9 stabilizing itself. I don't know what -- how deep we can dig, but
10 it also helps to dig the deep ditch line if you can so --

11 Q. The reservoir --

12 A. -- reservoir for a place if any soil comes down. And we'll
13 keep an eye on it next week. But right now, I -- we're leaning
14 towards putting a slide fence in there. So our slide fences are
15 tied into the dispatching system, so any time something contacts a
16 slide fence, you get a TOL, Track Occupancy -- the dispatchers,
17 and they notify the trains immediately.

18 Q. Well, it's not my intent to load you up on to-dos, but as you
19 progress and finalize and go forward with whatever you decide for
20 that area, can you drop us an e-mail, keep us apprised of what
21 you're planning to do, your action plan?

22 A. Sure.

23 Q. Okay. And one thought I had was when you brought up about
24 the mines, and everything that I -- we heard this from the track
25 inspector. We heard it from the roadmaster. We heard it from

1 Aaron. Everybody that lives around this area knows about the
2 mines, the water, following the path of least resistance, empty
3 mines filling up with water, blow-outs, all that kind of stuff.

4 Have you considered -- when you guys have a good discussion
5 about this back in Jacksonville, have you considered any outreach
6 to, like, states like Kentucky where they've got a formal
7 Abandoned Mine Lands Division to get their input? And here's what
8 I'm thinking. My god, we have no idea right now how much of this
9 is out there, right? And I know you don't care about every mine
10 that's not adjacent to your railroads.

11 A. All right.

12 Q. But I'm thinking they might be able to provide some
13 information or data on that which is close to you guys.

14 A. Yeah. Yeah, I have that down as a point to study the
15 abandoned mines --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- and see if we can get some records and maybe which ones
18 are close to the railroads and take a look at that.

19 Q. Okay. And here's another minor to-do. Could somebody
20 provide -- and I don't need this right away, but can somebody
21 provide me a list of the fence locations on the Kingsport
22 Subdivision?

23 A. Sure. I can give it to you today.

24 Q. Okay. That's great. The other thing. I know over the years
25 a lot of different railroads, when they have some of these unusual

1 events, sometimes it's an employee fatality, sometimes it's a --
2 some peculiar event, sometimes it's a weather-related event. Is
3 what we're looking at here, is this something that's going to
4 generate discussion, like, at ramp-up meetings or quarterly safety
5 meetings? Is this a topic of awareness to the field forces?

6 A. Yeah. Yeah. It is going to generate discussion.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Because I think we've got to look at whatever we can to
9 prevent it. I mean, I don't think anybody can sit here and say we
10 can prevent all of these, but I think if we study it and take a
11 look at all the variables, we may be able to minimize some of
12 these, which would be our goal.

13 Q. So you agree that there's -- there are opportunities. The
14 more eyes we put on those things, and maybe where there might --
15 where you might be a little bit susceptible, sooner or later
16 somebody is probably going to catch one of these things when it's
17 in the beginning roll-out phases of things. Is that what you're
18 thinking?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. All right. When I was talking with Ben, and a little
21 bit with Aaron, I think we were trying to capture some kind of
22 frequency or some kind of significant event numbers. And by
23 significant event, I'm going to say it this way, not trees, not
24 the fall-shorts that lay in the ditch and you remove them.

25 But do you think -- I want you to get back with me, but do

1 you think there's some characterization that we can put on the CSX
2 system on where blockages created a ticket or where there were
3 train strikes or where there were derailments? We know we've got
4 this one. I don't -- I'll ask you, do you know of any others that
5 are like this where we actually ran a train into something, an
6 obstruction, and derailed?

7 A. Well, Ben mentioned one. I can't remember too many of them.
8 But if there's damage to the train, it should be in the database.
9 So we will look for that and see how many we can find.

10 Q. Okay. And I'm not asking for a lot of detail. Generate some
11 initial numbers, and let's make it for the last 10 years. And I'm
12 thinking there's not going to be all that many, but let me know
13 what you guys put together. And I will tell you, you let me know
14 how much time you need to do that.

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. And that's nothing I need right away.

17 A. Okay.

18 MR. HIPSKIND: That's pretty much all that's on my mind right
19 now.

20 Danny, do you have anything else?

21 MR. WILSON: No, sir.

22 MR. HIPSKIND: Ben?

23 MR. CROSSMAN: No.

24 MR. HIPSKIND: Joe, you've got to have at least one more
25 question.

1 MR. GORDON: No, I don't.

2 MR. HIPSKIND: All right.

3 BY MR. HIPSKIND:

4 Q. So, Greg, do you want to -- are you ready to close out?

5 A. I'm ready.

6 Q. All right. Let me go through the questions. I'm stalling to
7 give Joe some time to come up with another question. I'm sure
8 he's got one.

9 Just like we ask everybody else, Greg, is there anything that
10 we talked about that you want to change, modify? Anything like
11 that?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Okay. Are there any questions that we should have asked or
14 topics to cover but that we did not that were on your mind that
15 you thought we should have talked about?

16 A. No. I can't think of any.

17 Q. All right. And I think I know the answer to this, but I'll
18 give you another shot at it. Do you have any suggestions for
19 preventing a reoccurrence? And I'm not talking about just there.
20 I'm talking about the kit and caboodle, everything that you look
21 at.

22 A. Well, I mentioned some. I think I mentioned the ones -- the
23 ideas that I had. Like I say, I don't think you can take
24 something like this and say you know that you're going to stop it.
25 But I think there's opportunities to minimize the quantity that

1 there is.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Like when I talk about inspection. We inspect special
4 inspections in the heat and we inspect special inspections in the
5 cold and we inspect special inspections with weather alerts. And
6 like I preach to my people, when you're out inspecting for heat,
7 the roadmaster shouldn't be in the vehicle with the track
8 inspector because that -- say that roadmaster has 50 miles, that
9 means that track inspector has to go from 50 miles in the heat,
10 and then he has to go back 50 miles, and then he keeps going back
11 and forth until the heat order is off.

12 So it's a lot more efficient to have them in different
13 vehicles. All right, roadmaster, you've got 25 miles, and okay,
14 track inspector, you got 25 miles. So now you're over this twice
15 as frequently because you're in different vehicles. If you're
16 over twice as frequently, to me, you've got twice the opportunity
17 to find a heat kink.

18 Same thing with cold patrol. You've got twice the
19 opportunity to find a problem with a pull-apart or something like
20 that in cold patrol if the roadmaster is in his own vehicle. So I
21 think -- we talk about that all the time, but we may have to work
22 at improving that. And the same thing with special inspections.

23 Q. Is that some of that old, simple math stuff?

24 A. Yeah, that's math. That's simple math. Anybody can follow
25 that math.

1 Q. All right. And I know you mentioned Todd and his department
2 and some of the things that they're doing, and I want to let you
3 reach out to them. But is there anyone else who we should
4 interview?

5 A. No, I don't think there's any need to interview anybody else.

6 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay. Gentlemen, anything else?

7 (No audible response.)

8 MR. HIPSKIND: Well, Greg, thank you very much for the
9 support thus far, and I appreciate a lot of the dialogue that we
10 had here today. Again, I know I loaded you up with some to-dos,
11 but just keep us cut in on what you're finding out and some of the
12 action plans and some of the initiatives that you want to put
13 together. And communication is a wonderful thing, so keep us in
14 mind, okay?

15 MR. MELLISH: Okay. Will do.

16 MR. HIPSKIND: Thank you so much for all your efforts.

17 (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: DERAILMENT OF CSX TRANSPORTATION
 TRAIN K42911 WITH SUBSEQUENT
 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS RELEASE
 IN DRAFFIN, KENTUCKY,
 ON FEBRUARY 13, 2020
 Interview of Greg Mellish

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD20FR002

PLACE: Pikeville, Kentucky

DATE: February 15, 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