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**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD**  
**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**SURVIVAL FACTORS GROUP CHAIRMAN FACTUAL REPORT**

Attachment 5 -Witness Interview Summaries

(4 Pages)

**Interview:** Executive Director, Houston Executive Airport

**Date:** October 21, 2021

**Location:** Houston Executive Airport

**Start Time:** 0915

**Present:** Emily Gibson (NTSB), Amanda Taylor (NTSB), and Bruce Wallace (Boeing)

During the interview the director stated the following:

He had been the Executive Director of the Houston Executive airport since its construction in 2005. The airport was a privately owned airport, which was not subject to FAA or state inspections except for the approaches. Since the public could potentially land on the airport the approaches were subject to FAA oversight. The director stated the airport was operated “as close to a Part 139 airport as possible”. The airport had an operation manual, a safety inspection checklist, and a wildlife hazard program they followed.

There were two cameras located on the terminal that captured part of the taxi and take off, both located on the canopy structure, one for the taxiway and one for runway. The runway camera was 35 feet high and 1800 feet from the runway. The airport pavement could handle up to 101,000-pound airplane on a regular basis, and larger airplanes on an infrequent basis. The runway had a class B safety area which was 600 feet from the end of the runway to the airport fence line, which he stated was “built to FAA standards”.

The day before the accident the director had spoken to the mechanic about removing the sister ship (N986AK) from the airport as it was not being used per the agreement when the two MD-87s were brought to the airport.

On days the airplane (N987AK) was scheduled to fly, the mechanic would come out a day or two before to service and prepare the airplane for flight. The director stated he would guess there was around 4,300 total gallons of fuel on board at the time of the accident, they added 2000 gallons the day before and an additional 200 gallons after running the APU.

On the day of the flight, the passengers gathered inside the terminal and were walked out to the airplane to board. The director had no interaction with them. He was outside under the canopy talking on the phone when the airplane began to taxi out to the runway. He walked out to the far side of the ramp to film the take off. While on the ramp he observed the airplane transition from taxiway Charlie then onto Alpha, where it was second in line to take off. He heard the engines spool, the airplane move into position, and at that point, he stated everything looked normal.

As he filmed the takeoff, towards the end of his view, he realized the airplane was not rotating as expected, and said to himself “pull, pull, pull.” When the airplane was about halfway down the runway, he did not see the nose come up and thought “why is it not up yet?” Shortly after that thought it disappeared from his view behind the hangers. He said he could not hear anything, just waited to see if the airplane would rise above the terrain. He never saw it reappear but observed a fireball and large cloud of smoke. He believed it was about fifteen to twenty seconds between his loss of visual and the fireball. The video he provided from his iPhone started at approximately 0959 and was approximately 37 seconds.

Immediately upon seeing the fireball he ran into the terminal yelling to call 911. He grabbed a radio and got in his company truck with one of the line mechanics. While traversing the airport, he stopped to allow another employee, who was mowing the field between the taxiway and the runway, to jump in the bed of the truck. He drove down taxiway alpha and into the grass past the runway to a canal past the airport fence. The truck could not cross the canal. Once stopped, he could see 10 or 11 passengers outside the airplane. Other personnel from the airport arrived at the canal and they crossed on foot to the gate of the pasture that was across the street directly north of the airport. The gate was locked and since the pasture was part of the property, they had several combinations they typically use, but the lock was frozen. The airport director worked with a road grader to force the gate open.

Shortly after opening the gate, the maintenance supervisor from the airport arrived, and the director sent him to open the east gate for emergency services. Two employees from a company that is housed on the airport, went to help passengers as emergency response had not arrived yet. As the gate was opened, the director could remember hearing sirens, but the fire trucks were not close to the airplane because of the heat from the fire. They had decided to run the water lines to the fire from the road to the airplane.

The director had no contact with any of the passengers. The airplane's mechanic, who was not on the airplane, said there were 21 on board and that is how the director knew everyone was off. The director stayed on scene until about 1600 or 1700 hours. He went back to the airport and walked the runway to look for skid marks. He checked for FOD and did a safety check. Later he went back to the airplane and assisted the FAA in removing the black box.

The two MD-87s were purchased and moved to Houston Executive Airport in the 2017 or 2018 timeframe. The plan had been they would operate as a part 135 charter and use approximately 8,000 to 10,000 gallons a month. The sister ship (N986AK) had not flown since it arrived in 2017. Its only movement had been about 100 feet from its parking spot to the hanger and back. The sister ship needed engine parts, landing gear, and other work completed but had not been accomplished.

**Interview:** Maintenance Supervisor, Houston Executive Airport

**Date:** October 21, 2021

**Location:** Houston Executive Airport

**Start Time:** 1340

**Present:** Emily Gibson (NTSB), Amanda Taylor (NTSB), and Bruce Wallace (Boeing)

During the interview the maintenance supervisor stated the following:

He was the maintenance supervisor for Houston Executive Airport. He started the morning in the maintenance shop (HC201) to assist in a delivery for a tenant of the airport. He heard someone yell "there is a crash" and jumped into the tenant's company car to get to his airport truck. He stated when there was an emergency, his responsibility was to open the main gate, to allow

emergency services onto the airfield. He received several calls during that time that he ignored to focus on getting the gate open. Once the gates were open, he spoke to the airport executive director, who was trying to open a gate at the pasture across the road north of the airport. The maintenance supervisor gave him the three primary gate codes, however none worked. He was told to use the bolt cutters and go to the pasture gate to open. As he pulled out of the airport heading north, he saw lights from emergency services behind him. When he got to the pasture gate it was already open and he could see passengers west of the airplane, by a tree line forward of the nose of the airplane

He was told by the director to open a gate located at the east end of the pasture to allow firefighters to cross the field to the airplane from that direction. He was unable to open the lock with the gate combinations and used bolt cutters to open. A brush pump vehicle arrived, and he jumped into that truck and rode to the scene toward the tail of the airplane. When they arrived, the right engine was still running, but started spooling down a couple minutes later as the firefighter was “prepping the pump.” The firefighter asked if the airplane was going to “blow up,” he replied, “I don’t know but I’m going to stay behind the truck.” The pump did not have any foam, so the maintenance supervisor ran down the access road to get foam to bring to the pump at the direction of the firefighter.

The maintenance supervisor did not see any passengers. He assisted in “running lines” from the engines to the airplane and felt like it took a long time to run those lines. After assisting in the trucks, he was sent to emergency services because he was breathing hard. He did not see any evacuation slide but heard popping noises like tires heating and popping.

**Interview:** Maintenance Technician /Groundskeeper

**Date:** October 21, 2021

**Location:** Houston Executive Airport

**Start Time:** 1405

**Representative:** Declined

**Present:** Emily Gibson (NTSB), Amanda Taylor (NTSB), and Bruce Wallace (Boeing)

During the interview the groundskeeper stated the following:

He was a groundskeeper and maintenance technician for Houston Executive Airport. On the date of the accident, he was mowing on “island 1” which was toward the north side of the runway on the east side of the alpha taxiway. He was in a closed cab tractor with an earbud in one ear and the radio in the other ear. He did not hear any airplane noises.

He was facing north when he noticed the airplane closer to the end of the runway. He observed the flaps down, the nose gear approximately two feet off the ground, and the airplane traveling “full speed.” Shortly after, he observed the reverse thrusters deploy and a puff of smoke from the tires. He lost sight of the airplane as it rolled off the end of the runway, over a ditch, past the tree line and across the road. Moments later he saw smoke and heard what he described as “wreckage.”

As the airport director approached in the truck, he jumped in the back, and they drove to the canal at the north side of the runway. He did not hear a lot of noise but could see passengers and about 150 feet away from the airplane. He stated one of the engines was still running. He could see a male passenger with what appeared to be some injuries laying on the ground with his eyes closed. Most passengers seemed calm and in shock while they waited for emergency services to arrive.

**Interview:** Road Grader

**Date:** October 22, 2021

**Location:** Hilton Garden Inn, Katy, Texas

**Start Time:** 1730

**Present:** Katherine Wilson (NTSB), Amanda Taylor (NTSB)

During the interview the road grader stated the following:

He was working on Morton Rd, moving west from CR2855 towards Cardiff Rd. He was sitting high in the road grader and saw the airplane just before it hit the airport perimeter fence. He was about 50-70 yards from the airplane. He heard a loud screech and did not know what was causing it. He could see the airplane coming and at first thought the airplane was flying low; he did not think it was crashing. It all happened fast. The airplane was quickly in front of him and crashed through a barbed wire fence. The airplane was facing north as it crossed the road, possibly leaning slightly. It hit the power lines and stretched them; there were explosions and the airplane started to yaw after hitting the power lines. There was fire from when the airplane wing busted open until it stopped. He could feel the ground shake during the accident sequence.

He drove up to where the airplane crossed Morton Rd and then parked. His phone was next to him, and he called 911. He stopped in line with the airplane's path and his coworker arrived from the opposite direction in Morton Rd. By that time, he looked to his left and saw a white pickup truck parked near the airport perimeter fence. The man from the pickup ran through the brush and jumped over the pipe gate; he was on the phone and tried to unlock the gate but was unable. The road grader asked him if he wanted him to bust it open and the man said, "bust it". He then pulled his road grader up to the gate, busted the lock and pushed the gate with his vehicle until it was opened fully. By that time, at least three other cars had arrived. A Waller County Animal Control vehicle was blocking his vehicle and he asked him to move it so he could move the grader out of the way. Then he began taking photos and videos between 1005 and 1024 CDT which he provided to the NTSB. He started hearing sirens. He did not see any passengers evacuate because he had been opening the gate.