

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: AARON LEASE, Director of Track
CSX Transportation

Holiday Garden Inn
Pikeville, Kentucky

Saturday,
February 15, 2020



I, Aaron R. Lease, 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>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>"Kaiser" is spelled "Keyser"</u>
<u>7</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>"EMBB" sub should be "EandBV" sub</u>
<u>9</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>"Foreby" is spelled "Forby"</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: 3/13/20

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

GREG MELLISH, Chief Engineer
CSX Transportation

BEN CROSSMAN, Assistant Regional Engineer
CSX Transportation

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. HIPSKIND: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Richard
3 Hipskind, and I am the Track and Engineering Group Chairman for
4 NTSB for this accident. We are here today on February 15, 2020,
5 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Pikeville, Kentucky, to conduct an
6 interview with Mr. Aaron Lease, who works for CSX -- or 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 with a mudslide that obstructed
14 the safe passage of the train on February 13, 2020, at Mile Post
15 CMG 128.3 on CSX's Kingsport Subdivision near Draffin, Kentucky,
16 in Pike County. The NTSB accident reference number is RRD20FR002.

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

24 Again, my name is Richard Hipskind. The spelling of my last
25 name is H-i-p-s-k-i-n-d. I am the Track and Engineering Group

1 Chairman for NTSB on this accident.

2 MR. WILSON: Daniel Wilson, W-i-l-s-o-n. I'm the FRA Track
3 Inspector out of Knoxville, Tennessee.

4 MR. CROSSMAN: Ben Crossman, Assistant Regional Engineer.
5 I'm with CSX, Southeast Zone.

6 MR. MELLISH: Greg Mellish, M-e-l-l-i-s-h, Chief Engineer for
7 CSX.

8 MR. GORDON: Joe Gordon, G-o-r-d-o-n. NTSB, Assistant
9 Investigator in Charge on this accident.

10 MR. HIPSKIND: And, Mr. Lease, will you put yourself on the
11 record?

12 MR. LEASE: Yes. I'm Aaron Lease, L-e-a-s-e, and I am the
13 Director of Track for the Southern West Zone, Northeast Region,
14 CSX.

15 MR. HIPSKIND: And I want the record to reflect we have --
16 Lou, would you put yourself on the record?

17 MR. TOMASSONE: Lou Tomassone, T-o-m-a-s-s-o-n-e, Deputy
18 Regional Administrator, FRA.

19 MR. HIPSKIND: And Lou is here with us today. He's been
20 supporting the Track Group, and he will be posting the meeting.

21 So let's proceed.

22 INTERVIEW OF AARON LEASE

23 BY MR. HIPSKIND:

24 Q. Mr. Lease, do we have your permission to record our
25 discussion, our interview with you today?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. And do you wish to have a representative with you at this
3 interview?

4 A. No.

5 Q. And, Mr. Lease, do you mind if we proceed on a first name
6 basis?

7 A. No, not at all.

8 Q. Thank you, Aaron. Aaron, could you give us kind of a
9 synopsis of your work experience, railroad-related, and take us up
10 to your present assignment, and let us know how long you have been
11 in your current position?

12 A. Okay. I hired on with CSX as a track worker on system
13 production teams in January 2006. I worked on system production
14 teams for 4 to 5 years, then went to basic force back at home in
15 Cumberland, Maryland, where I became a foreman. I worked foreman
16 jobs on and off on floating teams and basic force in the Hump
17 Terminal there at Cumberland for 5 years -- 4 to 5 years also.
18 Then I went into management. I went to the Internal Management
19 Trainee Program in 2016. I became an assistant roadmaster. Then
20 I became a roadmaster in Kaiser in 2017. Then I was promoted to
21 general roadmaster, which covered from Huntington to Cumberland,
22 Maryland. And then I was promoted to Director of Track in my
23 current position now, which I've been in since June of 2019, so
24 approximately 8 to 9 months.

25 Q. Okay. Aaron, it sounds like you've worked an awful lot of

1 the system on CSX. Is it fair to say that?

2 A. Yes, that's correct.

3 Q. And is this area of the country, is this what you call home?

4 A. No -- yes. Well, I'm actually -- I live in Kingsport,
5 Tennessee, now but I'm from up around Cumberland, Maryland.

6 Q. Okay. All right. I'll circle back to that a little bit
7 later on. So, Aaron, the other thing I think that we want to know
8 is in your current position, can you describe geographically the
9 area of your responsibility in general terms? And then kind of
10 give us -- paint the picture of those who are direct reports or
11 work underneath you.

12 A. Okay. I cover -- my territory covers from Spartanburg, South
13 Carolina, and it goes up to Ashland, Kentucky, and then I cover
14 from south Portsmouth on the Kentucky side. So it would be South
15 Shore, Kentucky, over to Cincinnati. And then I also cover the
16 EMBB Sub out towards Patio Yard in Winchester, Kentucky.

17 I have a question. Can I?

18 Q. Go ahead, sure.

19 A. Okay. I just want to -- do you want to know just the names
20 of my direct reports or kind of --

21 Q. However you want to describe it is fine with me. But for
22 what you've answered thus far, can you give us some kind of a
23 general ballpark, how many hundreds or thousands of miles of track
24 are we talking about that you kind of oversee or manage?

25 A. I have approximately 1,150 mainline track miles and between

1 2- and 300 yard track miles. And what else? What else did you
2 want to know? I'm sorry.

3 Q. Well, in terms of the next level below you, is that the
4 roadmaster level?

5 A. Yes. Yes. So I have five roadmasters now currently under
6 me. And yeah, that's it, five that report to me.

7 Q. Fair to say that keeps you busy?

8 A. Yes. Yes, very busy.

9 Q. Okay. And in executing all that you have to see and
10 communicate with the five different roadmasters, give us a little
11 more insight. How do you accomplish that? What are the
12 frequencies of either communicating or traversing your territory?
13 Give us some kind of insight on that part of it.

14 A. Okay. It's required that I do get across every section of my
15 territory once every 6 weeks. Typically, on a normal workweek, I
16 normally leave Monday, and try to travel Monday and Tuesday and
17 Wednesday. And then I'll try to get back Wednesday evening
18 towards -- in my local area. Then I'll high rail somewhere close
19 to home. I don't have an exact science of what I do just because
20 there's always something that comes up.

21 As far as my schedule with my roadmasters, I spend a little
22 more time in this area with Nate and John Smith because they're my
23 younger roadmasters. So I spend a lot of time with them. And I
24 just really oversee just making sure that they're following up
25 with what their guys are doing in the field. I ensure the

1 training is done for the men each quarter. And I'm -- when I'm
2 high railing, I'm just inspecting just like they are. Or maybe I
3 have some more -- little bit of knowledge and be able to -- so I
4 get out of the vehicle a lot more here with the new guys than I
5 would with George Terry, who has been on the rail -- or been a
6 roadmaster for 10 years.

7 So typically I'm inspecting just like them. When I'm
8 inspecting, I might get out, like I say, and do a little extra
9 with the newer guys. And that's about it.

10 Q. Are you the only one in your position? Do you have an
11 assistant? Or it's just you and the five roadmasters?

12 A. Just me and the five roadmasters.

13 Q. Okay. One of the themes that we've heard from the track
14 inspector and the roadmaster in the previous interviews is this
15 expectation that they get out and get over their territory.
16 Obviously, the track inspector once or twice a week over his
17 assigned territory, roadmaster over all of his territory at least
18 once a week. And I didn't -- I kind of slipped up. I didn't ask
19 them about train rides. But at your level, is there any
20 expectation that you take train rides to see how the equipment is
21 interfacing with the track or anything like that?

22 A. Yeah. Yeah, well, so on -- so George Terry now -- I used to
23 have Chad Foreby (ph.), but I no longer do. But anyway, on their
24 railroads, so passenger and above Class 2, I have to do train
25 rides on them.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. So I'm -- yes, I'm required to do that.

3 Q. So how many hundreds of miles are we talking about, that
4 commitment or expectation?

5 A. So now I'm only committed to train ride on George. So 100
6 and 100 -- from the 543 to the 650. So 107 miles.

7 Q. Okay. And for everything you described, the number of direct
8 reports, the volume of territory, and all of that, is that
9 manageable? Too much? Not enough? Looking for more? How --

10 A. No. It's manageable. I mean, it's --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- and I'm young in my position. So it gets a little more
13 comfortable all the time. It was overwhelming at first, but once
14 you get a schedule and try to stick to it, it's -- I mean, it's
15 definitely manageable. I think it's the right amount.

16 Q. At your level, do you have a lot of input on decisions
17 regarding where production will come and visit your territory?

18 A. Yes. That's a big part of my job is I go out and look for
19 where we need ties. I input my own capital work from year to
20 year. And like I say, this is only my -- be my second year of
21 capital, inputting that. But yeah, I look -- I measure all my
22 rails. I look at the ties. And yes, I input all of the capital
23 work, so I have a lot of say. And then, of course, I'll pass it
24 up to Mr. Daniels, and he has the final say, and then Mr. Mellish.

25 Q. Well, just to share stories, I know 30 years ago in my career

1 the old adage was you live or die by production. Have things
2 dramatically changed or is that still applicable?

3 A. Yeah. It's more so now. We live by production, yes.

4 Q. Okay. All right. Is there anything else you want to add on
5 the questions I've asked you so far?

6 A. I don't think so. No, sir.

7 Q. All right. Let's change over to the track inspection
8 process. We learned from the roadmaster that basically the
9 electronic records go from the track inspector up to the
10 roadmaster.

11 A. Um-hmm.

12 Q. Do you get involved in any of that review? Do you have any
13 responsibilities after the roadmaster?

14 A. It's my overall responsibility to ensure that they're doing
15 their job and going through and checking those inspections. So I
16 may do follow-ups, but I'm not technically required -- I don't
17 approve guys' tracks -- track inspections.

18 Q. That's important. That's some of the questions we're asking.
19 So if FRA comes out on the property, do you know where they're at
20 and what their activities are? I mean, does that filter up to
21 you?

22 A. If FRA comes out on the property on my territory, do I know?

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. Yeah. Oh, yeah. My guys would typically tell me when FRA
25 was going to be around, yeah.

1 Q. Okay. If, because of an inspection, somebody says they need
2 to address some kind of track condition or something that's --
3 that needs more attention than what is available locally to the
4 roadmaster, do those kinds of things get filtered up to you?

5 A. Absolutely. Absolutely.

6 Q. And then how do you address them? Do you have the
7 wherewithal or do you have to make communication to somebody above
8 you?

9 A. I mean, I have a set amount of assets I use. So if Nate
10 would call and say he needs the Grade-All or a ditcher I would,
11 you know, if it's not something that needs done right now, I would
12 make arrangements to get that to him. So I kind of set a schedule
13 up for my ditcher and my Grade-All where they're going to be. So,
14 obviously, when stuff like this happens, they're going to get off
15 schedule. But, yeah, when they pass things up to me, if I can
16 handle it, I'm going to handle it with my own equipment. If not,
17 I'm going to pass it up to my Assistant Regional Engineer, and
18 then on to Mr. Daniels and Mr. Mellish for major things.

19 Q. Okay. Last couple of things I want to talk about, and then
20 I'll pass it off to Danny to talk to you about special inspections
21 or whatever he wants to talk about. I'm curious how -- you've got
22 more territory. And we've kind of looked at the Kingsport Sub and
23 what's going on out there with the accident and whatnot, and
24 frequency of people seeing stuff come down the slope or off the
25 mountain, whatever. So if you've got a greater amount of

1 territory, help me to understand, how should we understand how you
2 characterize rock falls, mudslides on a greater amount of
3 territory that you have?

4 A. Well, it's like I say, I can't -- my roadmasters are going to
5 be, obviously, the front and foremost who are going to recognize
6 those things. And we're all trained to recognize those things.
7 So as far as me having a big part in that, I can look for
8 evidences of slides like the ground cracking or excessive water or
9 not having proper drainage. I can look at those things just like
10 anybody else. But, I mean, is that kind of what you're asking?

11 Q. Well, and let me just follow on with just one bit of
12 clarification. If there is an incident of an obstruction down in
13 the ditch line or on the track obstructing a train, something of
14 that nature, does that bubble up to you each and every time, or do
15 you think that there are occasions where, if it didn't foul the
16 operating down below for the main track, you might not hear about
17 them? I'm just trying to see how -- how is it that some of these
18 things get tracked is really what I'm after.

19 A. Yeah. So if it doesn't block the mainline, I very possibly
20 may not hear about it. We have trees fall. Now, I'll see the
21 TCIS ticket, so I'll know it happened. But if we don't hold
22 anything up, I may not hear about it. Now, if a train gets
23 stopped because of a slide or a tree, it's definitely going to get
24 passed up to me. But, yeah, typically on day-to-day operations
25 when it doesn't foul the mainline or hinder a train I'm -- I could

1 possibly not hear about it. I mean, I keep in regular contact
2 with my guys, so -- but there's definitely things that they're not
3 going to say, hey, I had a tree down or -- unless it held
4 something up.

5 Q. But is it fair to say the bigger events or actual blockages
6 of the main track, are you made aware of those?

7 A. Yeah, absolutely.

8 Q. Okay. So I'm not going to hold you to this number, but what
9 do you think you're looking at on, say, on a yearly basis, an
10 annual basis? What's the number that I should be thinking about?

11 A. Blockages for slides, that nature or just any type of --

12 Q. Slides, rock falls --

13 A. -- trees.

14 Q. -- trees. A block is a block, right?

15 A. Oh, gee, I'd be lying if I even took a guess. So I've been
16 here 8 months, and I mean, trees fall all the time.

17 MR. GORDON: Yeah. Take trees out of the equation.

18 MR. LEASE: Okay. Yeah. I mean, we have trees down about
19 every day, especially with this weather.

20 MR. HIPSKIND: I agree. Good point, Joe. Let's take trees
21 out of it.

22 MR. LEASE: So rockslides and mudslides, here lately even
23 small ones it's been a little more frequent. So, gee, in a year's
24 time maybe five to eight. I mean, I really couldn't --

25 BY MR. HIPSKIND:

1 Q. We're not going to hold you to that.

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. I just wanted to know if it was a big number or a
4 single-digit number?

5 A. No. Yeah. Typically, to actually stop a train doesn't
6 happen very often. I mean, we might have a little slide that a
7 train actually made it through.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And then we'll go out and finish cleaning it up. And same
10 way with trees. They'll blow through them half the time. We
11 clean them up. So I've only had a couple instance, which one of
12 them was 60 miles north of here, where we had a rockslide. Train
13 hit it, didn't derail, and we got that cleaned up. And so it's
14 not very, it's not very frequent.

15 Q. Have you seen a bigger slide or blockage than what we've got
16 out there at 123.8 in your career?

17 A. No.

18 Q. It's at the top of the list?

19 A. That's at the top of my list, yes. I've never seen anything
20 quite that big.

21 MR. HIPSKIND: Danny, you ready?

22 MR. WILSON: Yeah. I don't have much.

23 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay.

24 MR. WILSON: You've covered a lot of it.

25 BY MR. WILSON:

1 Q. Just to touch back on that. From the -- so from the 102 to
2 128, they're only covered once a week, and that's -- that does
3 meet the --

4 A. Twice a week.

5 Q. Well, they're covering from 84 to the 102 twice a week, but
6 they're only covering the 102 to the 128 once a week because it's
7 less than 10 million tons, which does meet FRA, and it is
8 compliant. But my question is that doesn't mean your guys or you
9 or -- I mean, you could -- you're empowered to inspect it 30
10 times, you know, if you --

11 A. Right.

12 Q. -- is that something -- did you know that, or did you know
13 they were only looking at it one time a week or is that something
14 that you think you should start looking at twice a week with
15 the --

16 A. I mean, they -- when I went back through the inspections,
17 they typically get across it, especially between the roadmaster,
18 two to three times a week.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. But, yes. I see no reason why a track inspector shouldn't be
21 able to get across his territory twice a week. And same way for a
22 roadmaster. We're once every 2 weeks, but typically as long as
23 nothing is going on, they can usually get across once a week.

24 MR. WILSON: That's all I have.

25 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay, Danny.

1 Benjamin?

2 MR. CROSSMAN: No, I don't have any. No questions.

3 MR. HIPSKIND: You've got it, Greg.

4 MR. GORDON: Joe Gordon, NTSB.

5 BY MR. GORDON:

6 Q. I want to talk a little bit about the weather. We've talked
7 to everybody about the weather reporting and how you guys get
8 notice of when you need to go out and do special inspections. Are
9 you -- is it a kind of a simultaneous notification? Do you get
10 the notification the same time the roadmaster does?

11 A. I get no notification.

12 Q. You don't get the notifications on those? That's handled at
13 the roadmaster's level?

14 A. Right.

15 Q. We heard from the roadmaster on the territory that we spoke
16 with earlier that they're pretty specific with the -- and you've
17 been a roadmaster in the past.

18 A. Um-hmm.

19 Q. Probably under the same type of weather reporting special?

20 A. Right, um-hmm.

21 Q. So they're pretty specific with the location that they want
22 you to inspect. They'll give you mile post to mile post. And
23 then, I think, what probably -- I didn't realize when we were
24 speaking with him they don't have -- they have to continually
25 patrol that for X number of hours.

1 A. Until the expiration time.

2 Q. Until the expiration --

3 A. Um-hmm.

4 Q. -- of that event. So have you guys ever run into or, I
5 guess, have you ever had experience with it either in the previous
6 job or your job now where there's a special event, you've got a
7 set location that they've called you out for, do you have the
8 resources available if you wanted to cover outside of the limits
9 of that specific area? So if you wanted to branch out and look
10 further, understanding that you have to have this person
11 patrolling this smaller portion, has there ever been a time just
12 because of the weather event in the area that you went further
13 than what AccuWeather had stated that you needed to?

14 A. Yeah. Oh, yeah, absolutely. So, I mean, I've gotten flood
15 warning calls for 3 miles of track. So that's pretty -- no one is
16 that accurate, especially the weather people.

17 Q. Right.

18 A. So yeah, I mean, any time you go out and you're high-railing
19 for a flood run, you're -- I always expect my guys, as a
20 roadmaster -- now this is kind of, like I say, new to my position,
21 I just expected them to run basically their segment of territory.
22 Just their whole track. Because if it's raining harder in that
23 one location, our territories are usually -- now, this is really
24 spread out, so here you might not have that. These territories
25 are 140 miles long, just Nate alone. So if he has 60 miles of

1 track, he may -- that be all he runs. But we are always empowered
2 to do the right thing. If it's -- if you had a flood run to the
3 60, and you get to the 60, and it's beating down rain at the 60,
4 keep going. So just common sense railroading is what we expect.
5 But just the mile posts are required for us. But yeah, we
6 definitely go outside the mile posts.

7 Q. Okay. Yeah. And I think you hit on a good point there. If
8 you get a 3-mile territory, how could they be that accurate --

9 A. Right.

10 Q. -- from wherever they're at and you're here?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. You see what's going on.

13 A. Right.

14 MR. GORDON: So, okay. Thank you for that. Let me make sure
15 I'm not forgetting anything.

16 Dick, I think that's all I've got right now.

17 MR. HIPSKIND: That's fine.

18 BY MR. HIPSKIND:

19 Q. Aaron, you good to go? We're going to do a second round real
20 quick here. I want to come back to -- you've got your things to
21 do, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but let me take a
22 stab at -- you've got a lot to look after. Is it fair to say
23 you're depending on your roadmasters to cover the day-to-day?

24 A. A lot.

25 Q. Is that the way you look at it?

1 A. Yeah, absolutely.

2 Q. And you think that's the expectation of the people that you
3 report to?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Okay. All right. And you spoke about training. Are there
6 assessments that you make about the roadmasters and some of their
7 employees about training you think they need, or is it a matter of
8 CSX has a training program that runs everybody through on a
9 periodic basis?

10 A. We have a training program that we go through first quarter,
11 second quarter, third quarter, fourth quarter. Requirements that
12 we have to meet. And then my team when they -- we have monthly
13 overlaps where we allow our guys to go through their trucks, look
14 at their paperwork. We go over safety for that month with the
15 employees. And then my guys, you might go out to a segment of
16 track and teach your team how to streamline or you might go out
17 and show your men, you know, just do a refresher on track
18 disturbances and how we -- the five things we put on the rail and
19 how we do that. So we probably do a little bit more than we have
20 to, but CSX requires a lot of training that we have to do too.

21 Q. Well, I'm going to introduce my term for what I just heard.
22 You do a lot of mentoring. You have to recognize where you need
23 to impart some of your experience and education to other
24 employees.

25 A. Um-hmm.

1 Q. Is that things that you assess on a regular basis?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Definitely.

5 Q. All right. I want to shift gears now, cover two things real
6 quick. When Joe was asking you about weather moving through --
7 and it's constant just because of geographically where you guys
8 are located. General weather patterns, south to north, west to
9 east. They aren't things that you're not unaccustomed to, but
10 over the time that you've been around, has anybody handed down to
11 you or have the roadmasters discussed with you, say, a list of hot
12 spots? If it rains an inch, 2 inches, 3 inches, we have to be at
13 this place, this place, this place.

14 A. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I would say so. Like Nate, for
15 instance, they have a message out for a slide that had occurred
16 here. So obviously, that's on the list, and they're going to
17 watch that one. When they have a downpour, they're going to go
18 check that one out. So I would say every roadmaster that I have,
19 except for George Terry, he doesn't have many slide issues, but
20 the rest of my roadmasters have places, yes, that we know about
21 that we monitor that has normal regular silt runoff and things
22 like that, that we watch, yes.

23 Q. Should I think about some of those spots -- and I'm not
24 taking that to be every place that's ever -- but you do have some
25 spots that are, say, more active than other ones?

1 A. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

2 Q. Reoccurring.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. So it's my understanding Kingsport, we shouldn't think about
7 slide fences because I don't think there are any. Am I correct on
8 that?

9 A. We have slide fences on the Kingsport, on the Kingsport Sub.

10 Q. A lot or a little or --

11 A. Yeah, we have a fair amount on further south than Nate. Now,
12 I don't think Nate has any on the -- he's only got 14 miles on the
13 Kingsport.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Then there's another 140 miles of the Kingsport, and there's
16 some slide fences down that way.

17 Q. All right. Thanks for that clarification. That helps out.
18 So I'm guessing in the aggregate on 1,100 miles you might have a
19 few dozen slide fence locations?

20 A. Probably. Yeah. Probably, I probably have a total of a
21 dozen, maybe two dozen slide fence locations.

22 Q. Okay. Well, here's where I'm going with this. I'm not so
23 much interested in the number or where they're at or why they're
24 there. What should I know or understand about whether you had
25 slide fences activated? In other words, there was probably an

1 event, and as part of the remediation or mitigation, a slide
2 fence -- somebody said, we need to put a slide fence up here.
3 What I kind of want to understand is where in those locations has
4 the slide fence paid off? In other words, there was another
5 event, and it helped to know, and it set the signal off, and it
6 slowed or stopped the train movement.

7 A. Surprisingly, most of our slide fences are by rock cliffs
8 where trees are going to be up -- now, this is in my instance.
9 I'm not --

10 Q. I understand.

11 A. I don't know --

12 Q. I understand.

13 A. -- other people. But, like, something that's happened here
14 that I couldn't even, I could -- I wouldn't even have looked at
15 that spot to me, and said, we need a slide fence here. So that
16 was kind of a -- so that came from so high. Now the spots we know
17 about that slide, we can visually see them. They're here, and we
18 can see them. We can watch them. And they're not going to --
19 they're never going to be catastrophic. I don't want to say
20 never, but they fall and maybe cover one rail.

21 So I think something of that magnitude that comes from that
22 high, that's very hard to determine. I mean, my railroad, my
23 whole railroad runs through a river and a cliff the whole way for
24 the most part of it. So I mean, that's hard to determine where to
25 put slide fences. But I do see where slide fences -- mostly a lot

1 of times for trees on my territory.

2 Q. Okay. All right. And thank you for the characterization
3 about it's either I've got a bluff on one side of my railroad or
4 I've got water on the other side.

5 A. Um-hmm.

6 Q. And I don't think we had that characterization until now, so
7 that's very helpful. The other thing I want to talk about real
8 quick is you have a portion of your territory that -- where you
9 operate passenger trains.

10 A. Um-hmm.

11 Q. So what's -- is there a greater emphasis -- help paint the
12 picture. Is that territory just like all the rest of your
13 territory, bluff on one side, river on the other side, going
14 through a cut with bluffs on both sides? How should I understand
15 that portion of your territory?

16 A. No, on my section it is not. On the Cincinnati Sub we run
17 passenger trains, and it follows the Ohio River but does not run
18 along the mountain. So we have a lot of soft fills, places that
19 will just fall off a lot that we monitor. So that place has its
20 own demons, but it doesn't have slide issues or mountain façade or
21 anything.

22 Q. So totally different set --

23 A. Yes. That's my --

24 Q. -- of challenges?

25 A. -- only section of track that I do not deal with, with slides

1 and rocks and stuff.

2 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay. All right. That's all I've got.

3 Danny, anything else?

4 MR. WILSON: No, sir.

5 MR. HIPSKIND: And Benjamin?

6 MR. CROSSMAN: No, sir.

7 MR. HIPSKIND: Greg?

8 MR. MELLISH: Nothing.

9 MR. GORDON: I've got nothing.

10 BY MR. HIPSKIND:

11 Q. See how quick that was?

12 A. Wasn't bad at all.

13 Q. Are you ready to do some of the closeout now?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. All right. I don't mean to make this go long, but if we do
16 need to talk more about stuff, don't get in a hurry, okay?

17 A. No, yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

18 Q. All right. So is there anything, Aaron, that you'd like
19 to add or change to anything we've talked about here this
20 afternoon?

21 A. I don't think so. No.

22 Q. Okay. And are there any questions that we should have delved
23 into and asked you but we did not?

24 A. No. I thought you was very thorough.

25 Q. Okay. And do you have any suggestions for preventing a

1 reoccurrence at this specific location, 123.8? What would you
2 like to see happen there? I know you want to get the mud out of
3 there. I know you want to repair the track, get the equipment out
4 of there. But when it's all said and done, then what?

5 A. I think this has opened my eyes to where this is -- two
6 different basically -- almost like, you have that little valley
7 there, and that, to me, I'll pass on to my roadmasters, and we'll
8 monitor them locations more closely and maybe get out and look
9 harder at those. But as far as remedial, I mean, slide fences, I
10 guess, would help, but you'd almost have to put them everywhere.
11 But yeah, so --

12 Q. Okay. I forgot to ask this earlier, and I don't want to
13 dwell on it, but you can put yourself in the seat of a track
14 inspector. You high-rail all the time, right?

15 A. Um-hmm.

16 Q. Or you high-rail with people. How should we understand the
17 challenges, the ergonomic challenges of being in a cab of a truck
18 and being able to assess or view slopes and higher positions
19 elevated away from track level?

20 A. Yeah. Well, you're not going to see them. See, that's what
21 a -- typically you're going to see something low that triggers
22 your mind, like if someone would have saw a new stream of water
23 coming down. And a track inspector or roadmaster might notice
24 something like that. Then you might get out and look up. But
25 typically I don't get out and look up at mountains unless I see

1 something down low that catches my attention. So yeah, it's --
2 you're not going to see up that high out of a vehicle, no.

3 Q. Okay. And are you familiar with terms like roll-out,
4 slippage, vegetation bending angling down?

5 A. Um-hmm, um-hmm.

6 Q. Okay. Do you consider that something that would be an
7 indicator of something that you would keep your eye on or what?

8 A. Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely.

9 Q. Okay. Is there anyone else that -- who we should interview?
10 You know we're going to interview Benjamin and Greg later on. Is
11 there anybody else?

12 A. No, I don't think so.

13 MR. HIPSKIND: All right. Gentlemen, do you have any more
14 questions for Aaron?

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

16 Aaron, thank you very much for helping us out with this
17 accident.

18 MR. LEASE: Yes, sir. Thank you, Dick.

19 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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21
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23
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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 Aaron Lease

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