

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

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HOUSATONIC RAILROAD WORKER FATALITY \*

IN NORTH CANAAN, CONNECTICUT \*

Accident No.: RRD21FR002

ON OCTOBER 14, 2020 \*

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Interview of: HARRY BECKWITH, Trackman  
Housatonic Railroad, Connecticut

Via Microsoft Teams

Monday,  
October 19, 2020

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HOEPF  
National Transportation Safety Board

TROY LLOYD  
National Transportation Safety Board

OWEN SMITH, Investigator in Charge  
Federal Railroad Administration

GREG DIPIETRO  
Federal Railroad Administration

ERIC BOARDMAN  
Housatonic Railroad

P.J. BAILLY  
Housatonic Railroad

JOHN YOUNG, Attorney  
(On behalf of the owners of the Housatonic Railroad)

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I N T E R V I E W

## INTERVIEW OF HARRY BECKWITH

BY MR. SMITH:

1 A. -- well, they call it a log truck. I just call it -- it's a  
2 regular truck but it's got a flat deck on it. But that came in,  
3 so we were looking at that and whatnot and went through that just  
4 because it just came in and the guy dropped it off from the  
5 company. And from there we went, we just went, got all our stuff  
6 and went to the switch and tore it all out. The train did its  
7 thing in the morning; they went up the hill to switch out  
8 (indiscernible) minerals. And then after that we came in and, you  
9 know, we talked about what's going to happen, and we started to  
10 take -- you know, started tearing it apart. And then we -- they  
11 started digging it out down to grade.

12 It's kind of the more -- like not much happened because, I  
13 mean, other than the switch that's all. That was our thing for  
14 the day. A lot of it was digging it out because once we had  
15 everything unbolted and everything they just, I guess you could  
16 say, packed it up, you know, all the ties and everything, put  
17 those together, picked them up, took that away, and then we dug  
18 out all the old material. And then it was about -- I think it was  
19 like after 2:00 and then that's when we were done and we were  
20 ready to put the rest of the -- it would be the rest of the  
21 switch, I guess you call it, right like, pull it in.

22 And that's when the incident happened. They were making

1 measurements, like just make sure every -- I mean, it was already  
2 measured, but they wanted to make sure everything was right before  
3 we put it together.

4 Q. When you say they, who was, who was they?

5 A. Warren, he wanted to measure it out quick. The guy that  
6 measured, you know, he knew he measured already, but he was  
7 wanting to, you know, double check before he put it on.

8 Q. Measure twice, right?

9 A. Yeah.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Or more than twice.

11 MR. BECKWITH: So and then --

12 BY MR. SMITH:

13 Q. So Warren and --

14 A. Matt dug it out and then Warren measured it like just to make  
15 sure from -- it would be the east, east where we took it apart to  
16 the west end where it was going back, like the new stuff was  
17 going. So they did that, put that and they measured it, and  
18 that's when it all happened.

19 Q. Now, when they -- did you actually witness them measuring it,  
20 did you see them do that?

21 A. Yeah, I was -- well, like it was like -- I don't know how to  
22 put it. Like if I was here, they -- we dug out what would be in  
23 front of me, and then all the new stuff was -- would -- I don't  
24 know --

25 Q. Be left behind you, I guess.

1 A. Would be to the left of me.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. And they were putting -- that's where like the already made  
4 switch was was down there between the two sets of tracks. And  
5 then they measured what was in front of me, and I was like, well,  
6 it's a tape measure, you know, I mean, only two people can operate  
7 a tape measure at most. So they went to measure it, and I was  
8 like, well, I -- and then they had the transit, but the transit  
9 was set up like to my right.

10 And I was all done, and I was looking over there, and I was  
11 like, oh -- I picked up and then I was like, oh, wait a minute,  
12 and I realized there was a truck. We had a truck parked off to  
13 the side. I was like, well, I wonder if I should shut that off;  
14 it had been running for a little while. I was like, oh, well, I  
15 won't touch it. You know, I was trying to -- you know, the day  
16 was winding down. So I was like I was thinking of things to pick  
17 up and whatnot.

18 Then I heard a yell from behind me. I turned around, I  
19 looked and I saw Tom walking toward where Warren -- like the  
20 machine, Tom was east, Warren would be west-ish kind of, and then  
21 Matt was in the machine next to him. But when I, but when I  
22 turned and looked, I didn't see Warren, and I saw Tom walking to  
23 where Warren was, and I was like, all right, I don't know what  
24 happened. So I walked over and I was like, do you need -- is  
25 there anything I can do? Like then -- because then, when I walked

1 over, I saw Warren on the ground, and I was like, is there  
2 anything I should do, help him? Like I don't know what you want  
3 me to do. And Matt's like, well, we already called 911, so we're  
4 just going to wait on -- like, you know, wait on them. You know,  
5 they were -- everybody's a little freaked out a little bit, you  
6 know.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. And then 911 showed up and then, I mean, I just went off to  
9 the side to stay out of their way.

10 Q. I made kind of a rudimentary sketch here of the scene.

11 A. Right.

12 Q. This is the track that goes to the north.

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. This is where the machine's parked, this is the switch panel,  
15 and here's the hole. Could you kind of point to me there roughly  
16 where you thought you were standing when that happened?

17 A. I was standing here.

18 Q. All right.

19 A. I was more over here.

20 Q. So your view of Warren would have been obstructed by the  
21 machine?

22 A. I was -- like you could probably -- I could probably see his  
23 head if he was standing there kind of a little bit.

24 Q. Yeah. But you'd have to like physically kind of do a lot to  
25 see that?

1 A. Right. But no, I was standing there because they stepped  
2 over there, and I was like, well, I'm not going to walk over  
3 there. I mean, I don't feel you need to run a tape measure.

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. So I was like, ah, and I looked over and -- because the  
6 transit was here and that's -- 44 would be right there, the road.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. And then the truck was here on the side of the road, and the  
9 transit would be at like that corner.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. The other truck was there, and then the transit would be on  
12 this side of it. But it was all like off to the side like because  
13 there's a box that all the stuff comes in.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. I was like, I wonder if I should pick that up. And I was  
16 like, you know what, I'm not going to touch it, because if I put  
17 it away, they're going to be like, oh, we want to check one -- you  
18 know what I mean?

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. Anytime you put something away it's like, oh, why did you put  
21 that away, we didn't tell you to. So I was like, I'll give it a  
22 minute, and that's when I heard --

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. -- them yell from behind me. And the machine would be like  
25 right in here, I guess.



1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. I don't know, somewhere in there. And then I -- and Warren  
3 would be back here and Tom was up here, and so that -- and I  
4 didn't see Warren, so I walked over to see what happened.

5 Q. Now, the whole time you saw the machine, was it facing  
6 forward the whole time like that or was it --

7 A. Yeah, it was facing that way.

8 Q. Okay, yeah.

9 A. So Warren would almost be next to it to behind it kind of.

10 Q. Yeah, kind of in the potential blind spot area?

11 A. Yeah. So and then Tom was in front of it.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, and then the accident happened.

13 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

14 Q. And you were here kind of doing non-machine --

15 A. Right.

16 Q. -- non-measurement stuff, you were kind of --

17 A. Right, because they --

18 Q. -- dealing with some of the other auxiliary stuff?

19 A. -- they measured. They were measuring from the end of the  
20 track here next to Route 44 to where we'd be bolting up the new  
21 piece.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. So I was like, all right, whatever. So they measured that,  
24 and then they went back to measure the piece that was going in  
25 just to double check, and that's when it happened. And then I

1 walked over and they're like, oh, well, we already got ahold of --  
2 like contacted 911 --

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. -- and all that stuff. So and then I was like, well, there's  
5 nothing -- if there was something I could do, then I would. But  
6 then once I saw the incident, I was like, well, there's nothing I  
7 can do, so I stepped --

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. You know, I stepped away because I was like, well, I'm not --  
10 I don't really --

11 Q. Want to stare at this?

12 A. Right. So I stepped away, and then they showed up, and the  
13 cops and everybody did their thing, and they took Warren away.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Wow. Do you have any other questions?

15 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

16 Q. No. I meant to ask Tom as well, I know the speed swing was  
17 being used earlier that day, do you know if it was moved off of  
18 the track and parked before all this went on?

19 A. Yeah, it was not on the track because I remember when we --  
20 like after the whole incident we picked every --

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. -- you know, all the tools they were just laying there. So I  
23 picked those up, and I remember because Matt's truck was like  
24 where this would be like here. It was like way over here but it  
25 was off the grass.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. It's like kind of near that brewery parking lot.

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. It was over there.

5 Q. It is parked over, yeah. Yeah.

6 A. Yeah, I don't know if they moved it or not, but when we were  
7 picking stuff up, I remember seeing it there since you asked. But  
8 yeah, that was over there parked off to the side.

9 Q. Yeah, we saw it parked and we saw some skid marks in the  
10 grass showing --

11 A. Yeah. Yeah, we used it the day before. Well, they used it  
12 to move the car too.

13 Q. Yeah.

14 A. The dump car. But it was out -- it wasn't -- I mean, it was  
15 parked for the rest of the afternoon.

16 MR. SMITH: Troy, do you have any questions or --

17 MR. LLOYD: No, I don't, Owen. Thank you. I don't. Mike  
18 may. Mike?

19 MR. HOEPF: Yeah, I don't think -- you know, I appreciate the  
20 time. I don't think that there's really much I could ask that,  
21 you know, given the role -- you know, I'd be curious if you could  
22 talk anymore about the work process, just any details that you  
23 think might be pertinent or relevant, but given your role, I'm not  
24 sure if there's anything else you could add. But if there's any  
25 other details you think might be pertinent just about the physical

1 environment and, you know, what was going on, I'd be curious to  
2 hear them.

3 BY MR. SMITH:

4 Q. Yeah, I can hit on some of the boilerplate questions here.  
5 So, you know, because it involves human --

6 A. Right.

7 Q. -- behavior, there's a bunch of questions that, you know,  
8 might be offensive, but don't be offended by them.

9 A. Right, no, I understand.

10 Q. It's more just to establish state of mind and, you know, we  
11 ask everybody the same thing, you know. So, and actually we kind  
12 of hit on some of it already.

13 A. Right.

14 Q. So we can skip those if we did. You answered what was going  
15 on at the time of the accident. Were there any challenges that  
16 day that would have made the job more difficult than normal, wet  
17 weather, hot weather, noise?

18 A. No, it was actually -- as I told Tom, it was like -- there  
19 was kind of -- there was only four of us there that day and I was  
20 like, wow, it's actually pretty quiet and peaceful --

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. -- I mean for work being peaceful it was. Because it was a  
23 nice day; it wasn't -- usually it's a million degrees, but it was  
24 -- I don't know, it was a nice day. Everybody was -- everything  
25 was going smoothly, and it was calm and quiet and peaceful, I

1 guess. I know it was because I even said something to Tom, I was  
2 like, wow, it's pretty quiet here today, like it was a nice day.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good thing, yeah.

4 BY MR. SMITH:

5 Q. It was a beautiful day.

6 A. Yeah, other than that, no, everybody was in go mode, I guess.

7 Q. Applicable procedures, you know, the job that you were doing  
8 that day, did you feel like you were getting clear instructions on  
9 stuff like you knew what you were supposed to be doing?

10 A. Yeah, no, it was pretty straightforward. I mean, we knew  
11 what everybody was doing, so it wasn't too bad.

12 Q. Yeah, your anecdote about, you know, taking the transit away  
13 or whatever made me laugh, because I know that's like, well, I  
14 didn't instruct you to do it, and then you are thinking about --

15 A. Right, yeah.

16 Q. -- how to do the -- what the next step is of the job.

17 A. Right, yes, because they were just measuring that and then  
18 from there it was going to be, you know, get the rebuild switch  
19 over.

20 Q. Now, these are some questions, not insinuating or accusing  
21 anybody of anything, but these are just --

22 A. Right.

23 Q. -- boilerplate ones. Any cell phones, did you see anybody on  
24 a phone or otherwise distracted?

25 A. I did not.

1 Q. Yeah. Just by the way, the company, do they have rules about  
2 personal cell phones here, like do you carry them on you routinely  
3 or do you --

4 A. I usually have mine in my lunchbox at least, you know --

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. -- whatever, but nobody was on it.

7 Q. Just in case.

8 A. I mean, we were just in the middle of transitioning because  
9 we just dug that whole thing out. So it's kind of like, all  
10 right, well, now we're waiting because we had the car loaded. So  
11 it's kind of like, well, we were trying to remove the car so we  
12 could get set up for our next big movement. I don't know how  
13 to -- the right words but the --

14 Q. Next big step.

15 A. Yeah, the next big step. It was kind of transitioning from  
16 tearing it all apart, digging it all out, to getting all the new  
17 stuff back in.

18 Q. Yeah, you were in phase two actually -- basically you were  
19 right at the top of the hill and you were then going to start  
20 going down the hill, if you think about it.

21 A. Yeah. We were pull that in, button it up, and then get the  
22 train through it. And then, since it was closer to the end of the  
23 day, I mean, we would have got the train, you know, it would have  
24 been good, the train would have been able to go through for the  
25 morning and then just come back and --

- 1 Q. Finish it up.
- 2 A. -- clean it up. Make the little (indiscernible) day.
- 3 Q. Anybody -- did you notice either yourself or observations of  
4 Warren that you guys appeared to be fatigued, sick, ill?
- 5 A. No, everybody seemed -- I mean, everybody seemed to be, I  
6 mean, as happy as you could be for at work for the most part, I  
7 mean, nobody was hot-headed, nothing like that. Everybody was  
8 pretty calm.
- 9 Q. No emotions?
- 10 A. Yeah.
- 11 Q. Just a normal day pretty much?
- 12 A. Yeah, yeah, it was pretty easygoing.
- 13 Q. Any alcohol or drug usage? Again, you know --
- 14 A. No.
- 15 Q. I mean, we do drug tests anyway, so --
- 16 A. Right.
- 17 Q. Health issues that impact work performance? Just to kind of  
18 follow-up with the earlier question.
- 19 A. Right. No.
- 20 Q. You said everybody seemed pretty healthy?
- 21 A. Yeah, everybody was fine, nobody had any -- like sometimes  
22 you see somebody struggle picking something up, but no, nothing.
- 23 Q. Nothing that indicates being ill?
- 24 A. Yeah, I don't know, like I said before, it was pretty  
25 peaceful. Yeah, I don't know, like everybody was calm.

1 Everything was going good and then just stupid things happened, I  
2 guess, I don't know.

3 Q. And then the last question, enough time to perform work? Did  
4 you feel like you were on schedule, behind schedule, doing well?

5 A. We were doing all right, I guess. I mean, I didn't -- I  
6 don't know, we don't do a lot of -- I haven't done -- we haven't  
7 done a switch in a while, so I didn't know if we were behind or  
8 not, couldn't tell you. I mean, everything stayed steadily  
9 moving.

10 Q. You know, that's interesting you say that, because that --  
11 you know, that sounds like you're not being pressured or  
12 somebody's cracking a whip on you.

13 A. Right.

14 Q. (Indiscernible).

15 A. Yeah, no, it was pretty -- like, all right, we're going to do  
16 this, this is how we're going to do it. Then just go with the  
17 flow, I guess.

18 Q. Yeah.

19 A. I don't know how to --

20 Q. Yeah. No, that's -- you know, because I guess that's kind of  
21 the questions about somebody --

22 A. Right, yeah, if somebody's (indiscernible) back on something.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. But no, it was like, oh, we're digging this out with the car  
25 (indiscernible). Yeah, it was kind of like a down point, I guess,



1 like because it was in the middle of going from one -- the one big  
2 step to the next big step.

3 MR. SMITH: All right. I'm good. Again, thank you for your  
4 time.

5 MR. BECKWITH: Right, yeah, no problem.

6 MR. SMITH: And we can go, shut this thing off now and we can  
7 let you go.

8 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

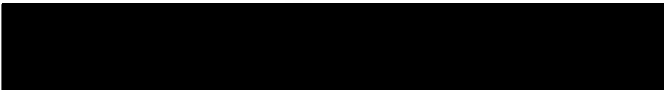
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  ON OCTOBER 14, 2020  
  Interview of Harry Beckwith

ACCIDENT NO.:                       RRD21FR002

PLACE:                               Via Microsoft Teams

DATE:                                October 19, 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.



Cheryl Farner Donovan  
Transcriber