

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FRANCIS SCOTT KEY BRIDGE *

COLLAPSES AFTER VESSEL * Accident No.: DCA24MM031

COLLISION IN BALTIMORE, *

MARYLAND ON MARCH 26, 2024 *

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Interview of: RUEL SABELLANO, Manager, Structures Engineering
Maryland Transportation Authority

via telephone

Wednesday,
April 24, 2024

APPEARANCES:

DAN WALSH, Highway Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

SCOTT PARENT, Highway Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

RYAN BOUNDS, Assistant Attorney General
State of Maryland

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I N T E R V I E W

(1:00 p.m.)

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3 MR. WALSH: Today is Wednesday, April 24th, 2024, the time is
4 about 1:00 p.m. Central Daylight Time. This interview is in
5 regard to the Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore, Maryland, that
6 occurred on March 26th, 2024. My name is Dan Walsh, D-a-n
7 W-a-l-s-h, highway factors investigator in the NTSB's Office of
8 Highway Safety. And with me is Mr. Parent.

9 MR. PARENT: Hello. Scott Parent, S-c-o-t-t P-a-r-e-n-t. I,
10 too, am a highway factors investigator with NTSB in the Office of
11 Highway Safety.

12 MR. WALSH: Mr. Bounds.

13 MR. BOUNDS: Good afternoon. Ryan Bounds, R-y-a-n
14 B-o-u-n-d-s. I'm an assistant attorney general with the state of
15 Maryland.

16 MR. WALSH: And Mr. Sabellano.

17 MR. SABELLANO: Yeah, my name is Ruel Sabellano, R-u-e-l
18 S-a-b-e-l-l-a-n-o, and I'm the structures engineering manager at
19 MDTA.

20 MR. WALSH: Thank you.

INTERVIEW OF RUEL SABELLANO

21 BY MR. WALSH:

22 Q. And Mr. Sabellano, how long have you been employed with the
23 Maryland Transportation Authority?
24

25 A. I've been employed with MDTA since 2015, so about -- about

1 nine years.

2 MR. WALSH: Okay. Thank you. Mr. Parent will continue with
3 the questioning.

4 MR. PARENT: Dan, I'm going to defer to you and then if I
5 have any questions, I will follow up.

6 MR. WALSH: Okay, thank you.

7 BY MR. WALSH:

8 Q. Mr. Sabellano, did the Francis Scott Key Bridge have a bridge
9 warning system that minimizes the loss of life that may occur in
10 the event of a catastrophic collapse of a bridge due to a vessel
11 collision?

12 A. Yeah, Mr. Walsh, as far as I know, we don't have any, but
13 this idea, intelligent warning systems are usually handled by our
14 electrical group, the ITS electrical department should -- you
15 know, usually have all these intelligent systems.

16 Q. Okay. Are you aware of other bridges owned and operated by
17 the Maryland Transportation Authority that have bridge warning
18 systems?

19 A. I would say the same, the same response, as far as I know.
20 But again, I'll defer that to our electrical ITS department for --
21 there might be some other information that I may not know.

22 Q. Okay. Do you know if the Maryland Transportation Authority
23 has contemplated using bridge warning systems in the past on
24 bridges they own and operate?

25 A. As far as I know, I -- I do not know, no.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I do not know (indiscernible).

3 Q. Okay. In terms of pier monitoring systems, did the Francis
4 Scott Key Bridge have a pier monitoring system that provides
5 warnings if the pier protection has been impacted by a vessel?

6 A. It's the same response as my previous, previous questions, as
7 far as know, I don't think we have, but I would defer that
8 question to our electrical ITS group.

9 Q. Please discuss any Maryland Transportation Authority training
10 that was given to Brawner Builders before concrete repairs began
11 on the bridge deck.

12 A. As per my capacity as the structures engineering manager, my
13 answer to that is I do not know that the training -- once the --
14 because once the contract is out and it's awarded, it would be
15 administered by our construction group. Those trainings should be
16 part of -- in the contract documents, all the required training
17 should be part of the contract, contract documents that Brawner
18 must fulfill.

19 Q. Okay. Do you know if any of the training entailed the
20 potential for bridge strikes?

21 A. Can you repeat the question again, sir?

22 Q. Sure. Do you know if any of the training entailed the
23 potential for bridge strikes?

24 A. As far as I know, and based on the contract that I prepared,
25 you know, this particular contract, we don't have that, that kind

1 of training. But in the contract it mentions all the trainings,
2 you know, hazardous materials, BPs (ph.), all trainings and
3 everything that is needed for the kind of situations. I think
4 it's in the -- it's in the contract, it's the contractor's
5 responsibility to make sure that their staff are trained before
6 they do the job and before they do the job, they're required to
7 submit a -- what we call a safety plan and the safety plan, that
8 should be submitted by -- by the contractor, should identify all
9 those hazards and along with it all the trainings that may come
10 with it.

11 Q. In light of this collapse, does the Maryland Transportation
12 Authority have any plans to improve the pier protection on bridges
13 they own and operate?

14 A. Based on the experience that -- you know, with this incident,
15 I believe there will be some considerations. Again, I'm not in
16 the capacity to say yes or no to that for sure, it's because, you
17 know, I'm a mid-level manager. However, again, based on this
18 incident, based on the lessons learned, we will look into that and
19 there will be some considerations.

20 MR. WALSH: Okay. Mr. Parent will continue with the
21 questioning.

22 BY MR. PARENT:

23 Q. Yeah, just on the pier protection, kind of following up with
24 Dan, have you guys decided whether or not you're going to evaluate
25 the protection provided by whatever pier protection there might be

1 at the other bridges that are owned by MDTA? Or have you -- or
2 have the evaluations started?

3 A. Yeah, we are in the process of -- you know, based on this
4 experience right now, you know, like I mentioned earlier, the
5 lessons learned from this incident, we'll also try to look into
6 what we can do with the other bridges.

7 Q. Do you know how that evaluation is going to happen, like what
8 are you going to use to evaluate the level of protection provided
9 -- how many bridges do you have, four?

10 A. There are tunnel-bridges that -- that have navigable waters?

11 Q. Yeah, MDTA, how many -- how many bridges --

12 A. MDTA.

13 Q. -- does MDTA --

14 A. So we have the Key Bridge, the Bay Bridge -- about five
15 bridges including -- including -- including the Key Bridge. We
16 have Key Bridge, Hatem Bridge, Tydings, and we also have the Bay
17 Bridge and Nice Bridge, yeah.

18 Q. And so what type of evaluation are you going to do? How are
19 you going to look at the level of protection that would be
20 provided, for instance, the pier protection at the Bay Bridge?

21 A. Right now I do not know, but we are in the process of doing
22 that. You know, I can't tell you the details, but we are -- you
23 know, based on this incident, we are looking into this to make
24 sure we -- you know, we apply all the lessons learned.

25 Q. And if during that evaluation it's determined that a higher

1 level of pier protection might be needed, what are some of the
2 pitfalls that you might encounter as far as installing more robust
3 pier protection?

4 A. What might be some --

5 Q. Like, you know, would there be funding issues, like --

6 A. Funding issues.

7 Q. -- how would you overcome issues that you might encounter as
8 far as making more robust pier protection around the bridges, at
9 least that MDTA is responsible for?

10 A. Yeah, funding is always going to be a challenge, there's
11 always competing priorities within each agency, like MDTA, and
12 things like this are very important, you know, we do consider all
13 available funding sources, if there's anything. You know, that
14 the federal can lend a hand with, that would probably be the --
15 like grants, all those other stuff coming from -- from the Feds,
16 from the FHWA, that will be greatly appreciated, yeah.

17 Q. Regarding the Bay Bridge, what type of pier protection is at
18 the Bay Bridge currently?

19 A. The pier protection at the Bay Bridge, yeah, we do have some
20 fender systems right now around, around the piers.

21 Q. Are there dolphins similar to the ones at the Key Bridge?

22 A. I can't remember for sure (indiscernible), you know. Yeah.
23 So I don't know.

24 MR. PARENT: Okay. I don't think I have any other questions,
25 Dan. I think that pretty much covers it for me.

1 MR. WALSH: Okay, thank you. The time is now 1:10 p.m.
2 Central Daylight Time, we are going to go ahead and conclude the
3 interview. Thank you very much, Mr. Sabellano, for your
4 participation.

5 MR. SABELLANO: Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

6 MR. PARENT: Thank you very much, appreciate it.

7 (Whereupon, at 1:10 p.m., the interview concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FRANCIS SCOTT KEY BRIDGE COLLAPSES AFTER
 CARGO VESSEL COLLISION IN BALTIMORE,
 MARYLAND ON MARCH 26, 2024
 Interview of Ruel Sabellano

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA24MM031

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: April 24, 2024

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.

A black rectangular redaction box covers the handwritten signature of the transcriber.

David A. Martini
Transcriber

National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Highway Safety

Washington, DC 20594



Interview Clarification Form

Sheet 1 of 1

NTSB Interview of: RUDEL SABELLANO, Manager, Structures Engineering Maryland Transportation Authority

Date of Interview: April 24, 2024

NTSB Case Number: DCA24MM031

INSTRUCTIONS: After reading the transcript or summary of your interview, please note any clarifications or additions on this sheet. If additional space is needed, make as many additional copies of the second page as necessary. When completed, please sign the bottom of each sheet. DO NOT make any marks or notations on the actual transcript.

If there are no changes, please check this box and sign the bottom of this sheet.

Page: 7

Line: 2

Now reads: you know, hazardous materials, BPs (ph.), all trainings and

Should read: you know, hazardous materials, PPEs, all trainings and

Reason for Change: Meant to say PPE instead of BPs (ph)

Page: _____

Line: _____

Now reads: _____

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Reason for Change: _____

Page: _____

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Page: _____

Line: _____

Now reads: _____

Should read: _____

Reason for Change: _____

I declare that I have read my foregoing interview transcript or summary and, together with any clarifications and/or additions made above, the facts stated herein are true.

Name: Ruel Sabellano

Sign

Date: 05/24/2024