

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

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CSX FREIGHT TRAIN AND SEPTA \*

TROLLEY COLLISION \*

IN DARBY, PENNSYLVANIA, \* Accident No.: RRD22LR004

ON DECEMBER 9, 2021 \*

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\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: JEFFREY SESSA, Train Conductor  
CSX Transportation

Philadelphia, PA

Sunday,  
December 12, 2021

APPEARANCES:

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National Transportation Safety Board

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Federal Transit Administration.

STEVE HAMER, Locomotive Engineer  
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Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

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I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 MR. BUCHER: Okay, this is David Bucher, rail accident  
3 investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board. It's  
4 December 12, 2021. This is the interview of the conductor for the  
5 CSX freight train involved in the Darby, Pennsylvania accident of  
6 December 9, 2021, NTSB number RRD22LR004 and we're located at the  
7 Septa headquarters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We'll go around  
8 the room, everybody give their name and spell it. We'll start  
9 with myself, David Bucher, B U C H E R. To my right?

10 MR. HERBERT: Philip Herbert, H E R B E R T, with the Federal  
11 Transit Administration.

12 MR. WHITMAN: Steven Whitman, W H I T M A N, CSX road  
13 foreman.

14 MR. GRAHAM: Charles Graham, G R A H A M, system director,  
15 transportation sector.

16 MR. EDWARDS: Robert Edwards, E D W A R D S, director of  
17 safety and operating practices for CSX.

18 MR. QUILLEN: Joshua Quillen, Q U I L L E N, Federal Railroad  
19 Administration.

20 MR. HAND: Anthony Hand, H A N D, manager of all rail trains.

21 MR. WILLIAMS: Seth Williams, accident prevention  
22 investigation, I'm a safety officer here with Septa, Williams,  
23 W I L L I A M S.

24 MS. BONINI: Hi, Elizabeth Bonini, B O N I N I, with PennDot  
25 State Safety Oversight.

1 MR. HILL: Don Hill, safety taskforce with the BLET, H I L L.

2 DR. GARCIA: Anne Garcia, G A R C I A, I am the human  
3 performance group chair for the National Transportation Safety  
4 Board for this investigation.

5 MR. HAMER: Steven Hamer, Smart Transportation Division,  
6 investigator.

7 MR. SESSA: Jeffrey Sessa, S E S S A, CSX conductor and  
8 engineer.

9 INTERVIEW OF JEFFREY SESSA

10 BY MR. BUCHER:

11 Q. Okay, thanks, Jeffrey. As I mentioned, we're going to start  
12 our just asking you to give us an overview with your day,  
13 beginning the day of the accident -- how your day began and then  
14 take us through the accident and the follow up?

15 A. Okay, well, Thursday, 12-09-21, Mr. Johnson and myself were  
16 at Philadelphia, it's our away-from-home terminal at the pool that  
17 I'm working. This is my regular pool as of right now.

18 Mr. Johnson got called off the engineers extra list to fill a  
19 vacancy. So, we were called at 4:45 in the morning for an on-duty  
20 time of 6:45 after being in a hotel for the IO3309 and we sat at  
21 the yard office for a little bit waiting for the train to come in.

22 I think the train came in just before 8:00 in the morning. I  
23 have us leaving RG at 8:15 -- RG is the yard office in  
24 Philly -- RG Tower. The train -- you know, engine up front,  
25 engine in the back is our DPU, the train was 47 loads, one empty,

1 55/55 on the tonnage, 84/64 on the length. Did our required job  
2 briefing with the train dispatcher before leaving. Went over our  
3 messages; it wasn't a whole lot, we had -- I think we had one work  
4 authority that we were sitting in that we had to -- before we got  
5 going. Clear signals and I have us at -- let's see, 8:26 hitting  
6 the Septa trolley at Darby at Main Street.

7 So, basically, come around the curve westbound at Darby, go  
8 from double track to a single track at Main, and as we enter the  
9 curve, there's two crossings. I think it's 1st -- 5th or 6th and  
10 then Main Street and we see the trolley up ahead on the second  
11 crossing -- on the Main Street crossing. We see it and it looks  
12 like it's fouling our right of way, but it's not on entirely  
13 across the tracks, it's just kind of, like, maybe hanging out on  
14 the -- I guess it would be the north side of the tracks. I think  
15 we both kind of -- just kind of were like oh, this looks good.  
16 Pretty much immediately coming across the first road crossing, I  
17 said I think you better take some air and Chuck started taking  
18 some air out of it, blowing the horn. You know, is this guy going  
19 to move, is it even close enough to -- for us to hit? And  
20 finally, we hit it and I have it down as 8:26 roughly.

21 We came to a stop about 10 car lengths west of the crossing,  
22 I said okay, we need to go to dispatcher's channel, make the  
23 emergency tone. So, Chuck dialed up the dispatcher using the  
24 emergency tone and I said yeah, we've hit a trolley at the grate  
25 crossing at Darby and then I started suiting up to go back there

1 and figure out what I could figure out. So, I kind of threw  
2 myself together and ran back there and by the time I got back  
3 there, there were already first responders on the scene. So, I  
4 was just kind of milling around, trying to figure out who I need  
5 to speak with because, you know, I'm sure they're going to start  
6 asking me questions. There was a police officer that approached  
7 me and asked if I was on the train and I said yes and spoke to him  
8 a little bit (indiscernible).

9 And from that point on, it just became me kind of shuttling  
10 back and forth between the head end and the cab and the grate  
11 crossing talking to police, talking to CSX officials that showed  
12 up, talking to my engineer. Just kind of going back and forth to  
13 answer whatever questions anybody had, writing a statement to  
14 the -- CSX police took our statements. So, let's see, I have us  
15 proceeding westbound at walking speed at 10:19 in the morning.  
16 That's when we were cleared to leave the scene and get the train  
17 out of the way.

18 We were instructed to take the train to East Feltonville,  
19 which is a control point where it's double track and we're kind of  
20 out of the way. So, I take the train to East Feltonville, secure  
21 the train, tie it down. At that point, we were waiting a little  
22 bit, got in a taxi, and made the taxi ride to Richmond. I believe  
23 they downloaded the locomotives at East Feltonville, I  
24 don't -- they didn't download the engine at the scene of the  
25 crime. I don't think they had the cable or something like that to

1 download with the laptop. So, I guess, you know, we're just kind  
2 of -- after the incident happened, it was just a matter of, you  
3 know, whatever anybody needed in terms of questions -- you know, I  
4 spoke to people, engineer spoke to people, although he remained in  
5 the cab of the engine. We had people coming and leaving the cab  
6 of the locomotive and that's pretty much all that happened as far  
7 as the meat and potatoes of it. I record all my -- every trip I  
8 write down everything that happens.

9 Q. Okay, great. Just a couple follow-up questions on my part.  
10 What -- you said you went on duty at 5:45 a.m.?

11 A. 6:45.

12 Q. 6:45?

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. Okay, that's great, thank you. And the train arrived in  
15 Philadelphia from -- it originated in North Bergen?

16 A. Yeah, it originates in North Bergen, so it got to RG shortly  
17 before 8:00.

18 Q. Okay, and -- okay, I got the consist. You did a job briefing  
19 with the train dispatcher and he gave any special instructions?

20 A. No special instructions.

21 Q. No special?

22 A. (Indiscernible).

23 Q. Okay, great. Okay, do you remember approximately when you  
24 started blowing the horn, was it as you came around the curve and  
25 saw something was going --



1 A. Well, we started blowing for the first road crossing coming  
2 into the curve. We had just -- there was another work authority  
3 just west of the location and I know we had had some trouble  
4 getting clearance from the roadway worker in charge -- employee in  
5 charge and we had just gone through a few minutes of trying to  
6 relay and if we're okay through this work authority. Right about  
7 the end of that process is when we started the approach for the  
8 road crossing and the engineer started blowing the horn. I  
9 couldn't tell you how many seconds or anything like that, but it  
10 was within, you know, maybe its 20-second approach.

11 Q. Okay, great. That's great, thank you.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay, did you have any trouble contacting the train  
14 dispatcher in emergency -- in an emergency time?

15 A. No, he picked up right away.

16 MR. BUCHER: Okay, I do not have anymore questions.  
17 Dave Bucher. To my right is?

18 BY MR. HERBERT:

19 Q. Philip Herbert, Federal Transit Administration. Mr. Sessa,  
20 thanks for coming in. How long have you worked at CSX?

21 A. 13, going on 14 years.

22 Q. And before that, did you have any other experience?

23 A. Not really with the railroad. I was an apprentice  
24 electrician.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. I did some volunteer work on a scenic railroad, but other  
2 than that, no.

3 Q. The only other question I had was you said that -- you said  
4 you suited up after the collision. What did you mean by you  
5 suited up?

6 A. After the --

7 Q. Yeah, you said that you suited up right after the collision  
8 when you left the cab. Is that putting on PPE?

9 A. Oh, suited -- yeah, getting my gloves, and radio, and vest  
10 on, and all that stuff.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Yeah, suited up to go walking back.

13 Q. Okay, and then you said when you got back there, there was a  
14 first responder, was it police, fire, or ambulance?

15 A. It was police, fire, they had already gone to scene.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Yeah. The first person I spoke to was a police officer.

18 MR. HERBERT: Okay, that's all I have. Thank you.

19 BY MR. WHITMAN:

20 Q. This is Steve Whitman, CSX. Quick question, you're also an  
21 engineer as well?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Are you qualified on this line?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay, to operate as an engineer?

1 A. Yes, in fact, the trip previous, I had been stepped up to run  
2 that train.

3 Q. How long have you been operating this territory?

4 A. I moved to Richmond in January of '16 and I EQ'd in the  
5 summer. So, July to August I EQ'd on the Philly Sub and then I've  
6 been making periodic trips up here as an engineer. When I get cut  
7 back, I like the whole -- the IO1 pool, and so I'm either working  
8 as an engineer off the extra list going everywhere else or I'm  
9 working as a conductor in the IO1 pool.

10 Q. You did -- you qualified in '16 and working it every since  
11 then?

12 A. Yeah, pretty much. Yeah.

13 Q. Coming up to the first crossing, did the engineer initiate  
14 the horn or did PTC blow?

15 A. I don't remember. Yeah, I couldn't tell you.

16 MR. WHITMAN: Okay, that's all the questions I had.

17 BY MR. GRAHAM:

18 Q. Good morning, Charles Graham, Septa. I just have a question,  
19 it's probably just terminology. So, you said you gave the  
20 train -- start giving the train air, is that putting the vehicle  
21 in emergency, is that braking? I just wanted to understand that  
22 terminology.

23 A. By that, I simply -- when I said it, I meant simply a service  
24 application of the brakes, and that was what the engineer was  
25 doing. So, taking some air -- just grabbing a little bit of air

1 to start slowing the train, start stopping the train.

2 Q. Did the car ever go -- did you ever put the vehicle in  
3 emergency?

4 A. No.

5 Q. Okay, I was just curious.

6 A. Yeah.

7 MR. GRAHAM: That will be all.

8 MR. EDWARDS: Robert Edwards. Thank you for coming. I don't  
9 have any questions right now.

10 BY MR. QUILLEN:

11 Q. Joshua Quillen with the FRA. For the purpose of my  
12 investigation, I know Mr. Whitman mentioned PTCS, so you were  
13 running PTCS and were you at a trip optimizer, or do you have that  
14 capability?

15 A. PTCS, I'm not -- I believe TO was out of the picture because  
16 we were approaching a work authority. So, TO will kick it back to  
17 the engineer approaching a work authority among other things and I  
18 believe we were close enough to the -- Mr. Riley's working limits  
19 that TO was not operating the train at that particular moment.

20 Q. All right. Okay, and then about the crossing is when you  
21 said you saw the trolley? I know when I was out there, I kind of  
22 measured between crossings it's 500 feet, so that didn't give you  
23 a whole lot of time. So, about the crossing when you're going  
24 west, is usually when you --

25 A. We had just started in the curve -- so, the first

1 crossing -- slightly east of that crossing is when you can kind of  
2 see the second crossing. And so, I would say by the first  
3 crossing, we were already taking action. We had noticed the  
4 trolley slightly before that, between the interlocking at Darby  
5 and the first crossing in that curve is when you first kind of lay  
6 eyes on the Main Street crossing.

7 Q. Yeah, kind of get an idea.

8 A. Yeah.

9 MR. QUILLEN: Thank you.

10 MR. SESSA: Yeah, no problem.

11 MR. HAND: No questions. This is Tony Hand.

12 MR. WILLIAMS: No questions. This is Seth Williams, safety  
13 officer of Septa.

14 BY MS. BONINI:

15 Q. Beth Bonini from PennDOT State Safety Oversight. You  
16 mentioned -- and thank you for being here.

17 A. No problem.

18 Q. You mentioned that -- I think at, like, 10:19 you were  
19 cleared to -- for the train to go. Who cleared the train to  
20 continue on?

21 A. We were given instructions through our MTO's, formerly the  
22 position was known as a train master RMT0. Through whatever  
23 channels he had, he said okay, you guys are going to move the  
24 train. They actually wanted us to take the train to Richmond like  
25 nothing happened, which I said absolutely not. Then he said well,

1 how about Baltimore, I said absolutely not. They said are you  
2 sure, I said yes, I'm sure. He goes are you sure you can't take  
3 it to Baltimore, I said I am sure I can't take it to Baltimore and  
4 then began the bargaining process to see how far we would take it.  
5 I said well, we'll get it out of the way and then we need to be  
6 relieved. So, whatever channels are -- you know, he's a  
7 supervisor, so he's the one who instructed us hey, you know, when  
8 we give you the signa, we're going to take it away from here  
9 westbound at a walking speed and we'll get the train out of the  
10 way. So, that was at 10:19 was when we started pulling.

11 Q. And just one other question. Thank you for describing  
12 your -- how familiar you are with that route, is there any  
13 training that you get -- or special training that you get on  
14 crossings that include transit?

15 A. Not specifically, no. None that I've received.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. It's just kind of a oh, hey, here's the place where the  
18 trolley crosses and it's not interlocked, blow the horn, you know?  
19 I've never had a bad experience with the crossing before. Nothing  
20 out of the ordinary or unusual has happened to me there before, so  
21 no special, unique training.

22 MS. BONINI: Thank you so much.

23 BY MR. HILL:

24 Q. Hi, Don Hill, safety test with the BLET. I have a few  
25 questions primarily for clarity. For the record, you used the

1 terminology TO?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Does that --

4 A. Trip optimizer.

5 Q. Right. I was going to say that refers to the optimizer,  
6 correct?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. And the direction of the track -- what is the direction of  
9 the track?

10 A. The track is east/west, we were westbound.

11 Q. Okay, and could you give us the rules in effect for that  
12 track area?

13 A. It's signal by direction. I think they call it -- what I  
14 know is 261 territory, they have some new terminology.

15 Q. Is it cab signal?

16 A. It is not cab signal territory.

17 Q. All right, and the maximum speed at the time that the train  
18 was traveling?

19 A. We had just cleared the 25 behind us and were in a 30-mile-  
20 an-hour track.

21 Q. Any particular reason why you believe the engineer would not  
22 put the train in emergency?

23 A. I can't speak for Mr. Johnson, I can only speak for myself  
24 and I would say partial uncertainty as to whether or not the  
25 vehicle would clear, back up, go forward, we didn't see any reason

1 why the trolley couldn't proceed forward through the gates to get  
2 in the clear. I would say, you know, there's kind of a  
3 contentious issue with whether or not you dump the train before  
4 you hit something. Everyone knows that well, if you hit them,  
5 great, you know, it's fine, but if you don't hit the person and  
6 something happens, like, you derail or you forget to bail off and  
7 the train -- you know, put flat spots, (indiscernible), then  
8 they're going to hold your feet to the fire for that stuff.

9       They've changed the rules on how to proceed after place a  
10 train in emergency a couple of times in the past few years. It's  
11 gone from you do a train length at 10 miles an hour to nothing  
12 and back to -- I think it's 20 miles an hour. I don't even know  
13 off the top of my head; I'd have to review the rule. I, myself,  
14 had a bad experience putting a train in emergency after hitting a  
15 person. I hit a person -- I had a trespasser, ran a train length  
16 at 15 miles an hour instead of ten, and then I got a charge  
17 letter.

18       So, I said we're not dumping trains anymore because I'm going  
19 to get fired just for, you know, making a mistake. So, that's why  
20 I didn't dump it I would say because Chuck was taking action and I  
21 said well, you don't know if it's going to clear, you don't  
22 know -- you know, it wasn't all the way across our track, it was  
23 kind of off to the side. Kind of judging, you know, is it going  
24 to -- are we going to rip a fender off, are we going to take the  
25 whole thing? We just -- I didn't feel that it served a purpose.



1 We wouldn't have stopped, you know, at best we would have slowed  
2 down. But that would -- that's my answer to that question.

3 Q. Thank you. I appreciate the great answer. The train sensor  
4 that you were carrying, were you carrying anything that was toxic?

5 A. I think at best there was mixed shipments of miscellaneous in  
6 the trailers. It's a trailer train -- container train, it was not  
7 a key train or a hazmat train, but sometimes there are  
8 miscellaneous shipments of, like, aerosol products in the  
9 trailers.

10 Q. Did you have any issues with glare that you noticed at any  
11 time?

12 A. I can't --

13 Q. If you can recall?

14 A. No, everything was --

15 MR. HILL: Okay, thank you. I appreciate that.

16 BY DR. GARCIA:

17 Q. Thank you, this is Anne Garcia and I have a few questions and  
18 a couple are for clarity, okay?

19 A. Okay.

20 Q. So, you went over your work history with CSX, do you recall  
21 the date that you signed off with -- signed on with CSX?

22 A. 10-12-08. A very happy day.

23 Q. Okay, and what position did you start in at that time?

24 A. I started out as a conductor trainee.

25 Q. And what positions have you held in your time at CSX?

1 A. I've held conductor and engineer and nothing else.

2 Q. Okay, and what was your work schedule for the week?

3 A. Work schedule in that pool is you take a train up overnight  
4 the first day, the second calendar day, you take a train back and  
5 you've got, like, 30 hours off in between. So, if I -- if this  
6 incident occurred on Thursday, 12-09, we had taken the train from  
7 Richmond to Philly the previous day, Wednesday, 12-08, and we had  
8 been on duty 0345 that day to 12-07, and then --

9 Q. Could you talk a little slow?

10 A. Yeah, so --

11 Q. 12-08, you did --

12 A. 1208, we would've taken the train from Richmond to  
13 Philadelphia and we were on duty at 3:45 in the morning, and off  
14 duty at 12:07. And then previous to that, would've been the trip  
15 back from the previous turn and that would've occurred on Monday,  
16 12-06 back from Philadelphia, back to Richmond. The train going  
17 up is usually on duty anywhere between 2:00 and 5:00 in the  
18 morning, whereas coming out of Philly and going home, it's usually  
19 6:30, 6:45 pretty consistently because we're so close to the  
20 originating terminal where the train gets built at North Bergen.

21 Q. Okay, so 12-06, what were your hours?

22 A. On 12-06, my hours were -- we were on 6:30 in the morning and  
23 we were off at 1503, so 8:33 total and that was the trip I had  
24 worked as the engineer.

25 Q. Okay, and do you recall about what time you had got to sleep

1 on those nights?

2 A. For Thursday the 9th, I was probably up until midnight, but  
3 usually when I get in the previous day, I take a nap because we're  
4 on duty so early. So, I would probably have napped from  
5 maybe -- let's see, if we were off duty at 12:07, I was probably  
6 asleep from 3:00 to 6:00 and up until maybe 11:00 something.

7 Q. Okay, and starting on the 6th, what time on the 5th, I guess,  
8 would you have gone to bed?

9 A. So, on the 5th, that would've been going up at 3:50, I  
10 probably laid down about 10:00 at night and they would've called  
11 at 12:50 for 3:50.

12 Q. Called at 12:50 a.m.?

13 A. Yeah, that's when the phone would've rang to be on duty at  
14 3:50. Three-hour call going up. Yeah, nights that I go out on  
15 this trip, I try to be laying down at 10:00, that's the best I can  
16 do. I can't lay down any earlier than that.

17 Q. So, you got about three hours of sleep?

18 A. Yeah, about three hours, hence why I need a nap afterwards.

19 Q. Right, so that was on the 5th?

20 A. That would've been on the 5th.

21 Q. And so, it was 12:50 a.m. on the 6th that you got the call?  
22 So, about what time did you get to bed on the 6th?

23 A. On the 6th -- Monday the 6th was coming home, what did I do  
24 that night? I was probably in bed by 10:00 from having been up  
25 all day and then probably slept all the way until -- usually the

1 dogs get up for breakfast around 7:00 and then I'm up. That's the  
2 best -- that's kind of blurry.

3 Q. So, would you have had a nap before going to bed at 10:00  
4 also?

5 A. In that instance, I don't believe so, no.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. No, I can't just because of everything going on and -- yeah,  
8 I didn't lay down again.

9 Q. Okay, thank you, and then the 7th, you were off?

10 A. Going back to the 7th, yeah, I don't have anything for the  
11 7th. The last trip before the 7th was on the 3rd.

12 Q. Okay, so what time would you have gone to bed on the 7th,  
13 your day off?

14 A. Oh, let's see, if it was a night before going to work, it  
15 would've been probably about 10:00 at night going to bed. Yeah,  
16 come home on the 6th, off the 7th, go to bed that night and then  
17 back out on the 8th.

18 Q. Okay, and on the 8th, you were up at 3:45 a.m.?

19 A. On duty at 3:45.

20 Q. Okay, so about what time would you get up?

21 A. Phone rings at 12:45, I set the alarm for 2:45, and that  
22 gives me an hour to get ready. So, I would've been up, out of bed  
23 at 2:45.

24 Q. So, you go back to sleep after you get the call?

25 A. I have the luxury of going back to sleep. I live pretty

1 close to Acca.

2 Q. Okay, what's your commute time?

3 A. Nine minutes.

4 Q. Yeah, okay.

5 A. Yeah, I'll never give that up.

6 Q. And that's pretty consistent going both ways to and from?

7 A. Yeah, that's more or less consistent.

8 Q. Okay, thank you. I appreciate you giving the details. These  
9 are questions that we ask everyone.

10 A. Oh, yeah.

11 Q. Okay, so it's just trying to get our timeline down for what  
12 we do.

13 A. Understandable.

14 Q. So, I appreciate that very much.

15 A. No problem.

16 Q. Now, a different type of question, when you realized that the  
17 train was going to strike the trolley, what did you do at that  
18 point?

19 A. I think at that point it was more or less just -- you know,  
20 the engineer's putting air down on the train, the train's slowing  
21 down, slowing down, blowing the horn. Physically, I really didn't  
22 do anything other than talk to my engineer about oh, this is going  
23 to suck, and then we had the impact. I just kind of held the desk  
24 and kind of all right, here we go.

25 Q. Okay, so would you call that bracing yourself?

1 A. I would call that bracing myself.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. I know Chuck was busy over there blowing the horn, bailing  
4 off while he took the train brakes, and, you know, he had things  
5 that he needs to do.

6 Q. Okay, and then what happened to you on impact, was your  
7 bracing successful?

8 A. Yeah, it was successful. I didn't -- physically, nothing  
9 happened to me other than the engine kind of listed to the side  
10 and there was a crash. I -- you know, the conductor side of the  
11 locomotive cab, you've got a desk, you've got the two arm rests  
12 and I was pretty -- I didn't move around too much. I didn't have  
13 anything that was -- you know, I know Chuck is over there, he's  
14 got the controls to his left, he's got things sticking out at him  
15 and he -- the impact was on his side of the cab. So, he probably  
16 got a little bit rougher of a ride than I did. I -- yeah, I  
17 basically just held on, we hit the trolley, and that was it as far  
18 as my side was concerned. I was kind of braced if you will.

19 Q. Thank you.

20 A. No problem.

21 Q. And were you injured?

22 A. I was not injured.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I did request three days off -- the critical incident off for  
25 it and got down to Acca, our home terminal, and went up and saw

1 the MTO that was there in the office. I saw hey, we're the crew  
2 that hit the trolley, we need to see about being taken for CI,  
3 critical incident. He said oh, no, you've got to kill someone to  
4 get off that, you can't -- I hit three people, I didn't ask for  
5 off. I'm like well, hitting a trespasser -- a drunk trespasser at  
6 3:00 in the morning on the north end sub's a whole lot different  
7 than hitting a trolley full of people in the Philly sub at 8:00 in  
8 the morning. So, we were pretty angry at that and we left, and  
9 then we found the number for the employee assistance program,  
10 called them, they told us that we had to do it -- that they would  
11 write an email requesting that we be taken off CI. They took  
12 Chuck off CI, but left me available. So, as soon as I was rested  
13 at 4:00 something in the morning, my phone started blowing up  
14 because we're so short of people that they're running rosters  
15 constantly and calling me to be engineer this and conductor that  
16 for all this work that's not mine. So, I let a few hours go by  
17 because I went back to sleep as best as I could. I called EAP  
18 again and they said oh, we sent an email to crew management, I  
19 don't know what's going on. So, I called crew management, explain  
20 that there should be an email saying that we should be allowed off  
21 for critical incident. They couldn't find the email, we round,  
22 and around, and around, and finally the caller said I'm making an  
23 executive decision and taking you off, this is ridiculous. So,  
24 then I was off CI until I was told I was going to be here, at  
25 which point they had to mark me up for a moment to put me back off

1 for company business. So, that's what I'm off right now is  
2 company business.

3 Q. Okay, well, we really appreciate you coming in.

4 A. No problem.

5 Q. And we apologize for any inconvenience.

6 A. Oh, no, it's part of your duty, you know what I mean? So,  
7 that's totally fine.

8 Q. Okay, thank you, and just one more question. You mentioned  
9 that you had a previous incident or --

10 A. Yeah, in 2017 I hit a trespasser with a freight train. That  
11 was fun. I mean, it was -- you know, not related to this, but it  
12 was, like, the most stressful situation because you would not  
13 believe the amount of stuff that was going on at the time. We  
14 didn't just hit a person, there was all kinds of calamities  
15 surrounding the miles up to that and then leaving. It's -- I  
16 mean, I'll bore you with it if you want to know about it.

17 But it's -- I mean, it's -- I was on a train from Brunswick  
18 to Acca, 50 -- it was an empty ballast track, I forget how many  
19 cars. So, we're going down the track, Friday afternoon, great  
20 weather, can't wait to go home. We're roaring, 50 miles an hour,  
21 a good train, and right there at Randolph Road in Rockville,  
22 Maryland, there's, like, a construction worker on the track in,  
23 like, a high vis (sic) suit and there was a train stopped on the  
24 other main due to stalling next to us. And I guess this worker  
25 who's yelling through the stopped train at another worker can't



1 tell that we're coming and I saw him, like, a mile away, he's  
2 wearing a high vest -- high visibility vest. I'm blowing the  
3 horn, blowing the horn, never even looked up, and we smack him,  
4 and I dump it.

5 Previous to that, a couple -- like ten miles before  
6 that -- I'm getting ahead of myself -- they had code failure with  
7 the signal system, so we had to stop at the absolute, get talked  
8 by the absolute signal, do restricted speed for three miles. We  
9 come up on the next intermediate, which is an approach to another  
10 interlock where we have to stop and get permission by, but also,  
11 we're going to have to stop in a work authority. So, I have to  
12 get permission from him, I've got two crossings I can't block, I  
13 don't know where this westbound I'm meeting is. So, I stop in the  
14 work authority, let the guy know I'm stopped, meet the westbound,  
15 get permission to start again, go restricted speed, get stopped  
16 again, get permission by that signal, which is an interlock and an  
17 absolute signal, get permission again from the guy that I just  
18 stopped a second time in his working limits again, proceed at  
19 restricted speed for another three miles.

20 Finally, I get a clear signal at East Rockville, let it rip,  
21 strip it out, go, and, like, two miles later is where we hit the  
22 guy. There's a train stalled on the adjacent track to us, which  
23 is -- I guess this man that we hit, I think he thought for some  
24 reason that the sound he was hearing was the train that was  
25 stopped, fouling the crossing at Randolph Road. So, he never

1 looked up, we hit him, we're stopped there, the conductor goes  
2 back, I think we were there, like, an hour. This was at 12:15 on  
3 a Friday afternoon, dispatcher's like hey, I need you guys to  
4 move, I've got Amtrak behind you, I got this, I got that. Okay,  
5 fine, but I want to be relieved at Benning, which is the next  
6 terminal, it's an intermediate place. I figure Benning's out of  
7 the way, we can get relieved there, it'll be no problem.

8         So, we get going and I hit my counter to do my train length,  
9 and as I'm starting to pull, firefighters are running across the  
10 track with fire hoses. There's a random brush fire adjacent to our  
11 track and I'm like, you know, this is way too much. So, slow down  
12 for them, they get across the tracks, and I let the train get up  
13 to 15 miles an hour, which is five miles an hour over where I was  
14 supposed to get it, you know, I got to keep it at ten. So,  
15 overlooked that, got to Benning, I told the conductor, I got to  
16 get off of this thing.

17         So, I get off the engine, meet the train master in there, and  
18 he goes oh, no, you're taking it to Richmond, you didn't kill the  
19 guy. So, I have to get back on the train, take the train to  
20 Richmond, and, like, a week later, I get a charge letter in the  
21 mail and it's like -- you know, it's maddening. A situation like  
22 that, all the things going on, doing everything by the book, I  
23 miss one thing and, you know, sucks to be you. So, that's my  
24 feeling on dumping the train anymore.

25 Q. Okay, thank you for sharing that and that does help clarify,

1 you know, your decision-making process.

2 A. It's one of the many things you just -- and we all talk about  
3 it, you know, do you dump it, do you not dump it?

4 Q. Right.

5 A. You know, I dumped it once and well, it's really soured me on  
6 the experience. As for being marked off CI, it was just so -- you  
7 know, my engineer and I have both made the comment that, you know,  
8 the actual incident's okay, it's all the stuff that happened  
9 afterwards with all the phone calls, and being asked to take the  
10 train, and all the stuff that's like hold on. Then not being  
11 marked off and, you know, them blowing up my phone as soon as I  
12 was rested.

13 Even on nights that I am available in my pool, the phone is  
14 ringing constantly to step up for work that is not mine because we  
15 are extremely shorthanded. And so, you know, you lay down and  
16 your phone's just blowing up and you can't turn your phone off  
17 because this pool is unassigned freight pool. So, the call time  
18 for the train varies and it gets adjusted. So, if you mute your  
19 phone, well, you could miss the call for the train that's yours  
20 and then you miss call.

21 So, you can't -- you don't have the option of silencing the  
22 phone, you just have to let it ring and I've had it where they've  
23 called me six times in 45 minutes while I was trying to get my  
24 sleep. I've had it call I think ten times in one day repeatedly  
25 for the same trains that have been sitting in the terminal

1 crewless for 24 hours. So, you know, there's only so much rest  
2 you can get while you're trying to get rest for your train and  
3 they're calling you for everything else that they can't run.

4 Q. Thank you, I really appreciate you going into that detail.  
5 It gives us a good incite into what you experience as well as your  
6 decision making.

7 A. Well, I'm happy to share. I'm sorry it's not exactly  
8 pleasant stuff, you know, it's a little bit of a rant. But it's  
9 all stuff we talk about.

10 Q. That's why we're here.

11 A. You know, leaving RG that morning, what do you think Chuck  
12 and I were talking about as we were pulling out of the yard?  
13 About how much this place is just destroying our souls, you know,  
14 with -- it's the same problem all over for us. This is all we're  
15 talking about.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. So, that's that part of it.

18 DR. GARCIA: Okay, thank you. That's all I have right now.

19 BY MR. HAMER:

20 Q. Steve Hamer, H A M E R, Smart Transportation Division.

21 Again, thanks for coming in today.

22 A. My pleasure.

23 Q. We appreciate this. You stole my thunder before. You  
24 mentioned EAP, I was going to ask you about EAP. I'm glad that  
25 you're seeking that out as long as you needed it. Question for

1 that is once you're done with company business, do you return to  
2 the pool or are you back on an EAP or modified --

3 A. I was told as soon as I'm done, I got to call cars to get my  
4 ten hours started to go back to work. That's what I was told.

5 Q. Okay, do you feel that you need, at this time, anymore mental  
6 health time?

7 A. To be perfectly honest, just a day would be nice. I haven't  
8 really said anything about it yet, but I -- just a day because if  
9 I -- let's see, what time is it now? I don't know how long this  
10 will take, but if I were to get home this afternoon and get ten  
11 hours off, I'd be going out overnight in the pool, like 1:00 or  
12 2:00 on my rest and, you know, traveling all the way up to  
13 Philadelphia and all the way back is over 500 miles for me.

14 Q. Right.

15 A. And that's just -- I just would like a day where I'm not  
16 having to go out overnight. But I haven't asked for it yet.

17 Q. Okay, if I heard correctly, you've been on this pool since  
18 about 2016, both as a conductor and engineer?

19 A. Off and on, yes.

20 Q. Now, when you're talking this pool, mainly are we talking  
21 this line that -- where the incident happened?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Yes, out of Richmond, the IO1 pool is the only work we have  
25 that goes to Philadelphia.

1 Q. So, based on your experience on this pool and this  
2 subdivision, how many near misses do you think at this one  
3 particular crossing?

4 A. Near misses are fairly common, just not with trollies. We  
5 had a near miss going up on the trip the day before with a car  
6 that went around the gates.

7 Q. The same crossing?

8 A. The same crossing. You know, there's a -- I know during,  
9 like, the mornings, there's usually a flagman there and I presume  
10 that's for the -- I guess there's, like, school children that come  
11 sauntering on through there on their way to school. And so,  
12 there's a little bit more enforcement I guess you could say during  
13 that side of things. Close calls at this particular crossing,  
14 usually people running across the track or a vehicle, but not a  
15 trolley. I don't think I've ever seen a trolley fouling the  
16 track.

17 Q. I'm talking about anything vehicular or anything that  
18 actually fouls the track as you're approaching it.

19 A. Then I -- if that's the case, then yeah, there are close  
20 calls there, but there are also close calls at every crossing.

21 Q. Correct. So, at this crossing in particular, though, is it  
22 to a point where you actually -- I don't know how to say  
23 it -- perk up a little while you're getting near it because you're  
24 just wondering?

25 A. Because you say it now, I probably am a little bit more

1 vigilant just because there are two crossings in close vicinity.  
2 One crossing is two roads and there's a lot of people and cars  
3 just anyway just because of where it is. I would say yeah, I  
4 could see myself being a little more alert coming through there  
5 just subliminally -- subconsciously than other places.

6 Q. Okay, and my last question, if I understood you correctly,  
7 you had trouble reaching the maintenance foreman for the track  
8 outage?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Was this -- did this interfere or was it before?

11 A. It was before. It was nothing unusual. I mean, there are  
12 some overpasses on the approach to where this work authority was  
13 and we could hear everything. Everything was clear up until the  
14 point of him telling us that's a good copy on the read back. We  
15 had every piece of information except for when we -- he said okay,  
16 you guys are good. At that point, it took several tries and  
17 several minutes to see if we could hear that he said -- did he say  
18 we were okay, was that a good -- and we went immediately from that  
19 process to, you know, calling the signal at Darby to seeing the  
20 trolley on the track.

21 Q. So, based on the situation with the track foreman, could you  
22 say that your heads were clear approaching the crossing where the  
23 incident happened?

24 A. I would say they were clear.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. We had taken that information and kind of all right, we're  
2 through this process. We're already looking forward to the next  
3 thing, which is blowing the horn for the two crossings and  
4 anything after that.

5 MR. HAMER: Right. Great, that's all I have. Thank you.

6 MR. BUCHER: Dave Bucher, I have no more.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I have no more.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I have no more.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Nothing further.

10 MS. BONINI: No, thank you.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm good, thanks for your help.

12 MR. SESSA: No problem.

13 DR. GARCIA: Anne Garcia, I have no further questions.

14 MR. BUCHER: Okay, no more?

15 Okay, I think we're done. Again, thanks for coming out.

16 MR. SESSA: Oh, I appreciate it. My pleasure.

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: CSX FREIGHT TRAIN AND SEPTA TROLLEY  
COLLISION IN DARBY, PENNSYLVANIA  
ON DECEMBER 9, 2021  
Interview of Jeffrey Sessa

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD22LR004

PLACE: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

DATE: December 12, 2021

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.



Carolyn Hanna  
Transcriber