



I, Scott Larson, have read the foregoing pages of a copy of my interview that was held on September 27, 2021. These pages constitute a true and accurate transcription of same with the exception of the following amendments, additions, deletions or corrections:

PAGE NO:    LINE NO:    CHANGE AND REASON FOR CHANGE

No changes required

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: 11-11-21

Witness: 

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of: \*

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FATAL AMTRAK DERAILMENT \*

NEAR JOPLIN, MONTANA \* Accident No.: RRD21MR017

ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2021 \*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: SCOTT LARSON, Engineer  
Amtrak

Shelby, Montana

Monday,  
September 27, 2021

APPEARANCES:

ZACH ZAGATA, Investigator, Operations Group Chairman  
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN JENNER, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

STACEY THOMPSON, Operating Practices Specialist  
Federal Railroad Administration

STACY CHAVEZ, Operating Practices Inspector  
Federal Railroad Administration

AARON RATLEDGE, Assistant Vice President, Operating  
Practices and Rules  
BNSF Railway

PAUL O'MARA, Assistant Vice President Transportation  
Amtrak

PATRICK SULLIVAN, Superintendent of Transportation  
Amtrak

BRIAN FRANSEN, Member, Safety Task Force  
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen (BLET)

JIM CHASE, Member, National Safety Team  
SMART Transportation Division

JAMES J. BACH, Vice Local Chairman  
BLET Division 60

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Scott Larson:	
By Mr. Zagata	5
By Mr. Chase	6
By Mr. Zagata	7
By Dr. Jenner	10

I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 MR. ZAGATA: Good afternoon. My name is Zach Zagata, and I  
3 am the NTSB operations group chairman for this accident. We are  
4 conducting an interview on September 27, 2021, with Scott Larson,  
5 who works for Amtrak. This interview is in connection with NTSB's  
6 investigation of the accident near Joplin, Montana. The NTSB  
7 accident reference number is RRD21MR017. The purpose of this  
8 investigation is to increase safety and not to assign, fault,  
9 blame or liability.

10 Before we begin our interview and questions, let's go around  
11 and introduce ourselves. Please spell your last name, and your  
12 title. I'll start off and then pass to my right. Again, my name  
13 is Zach Zagata, Z-a-g-a-t-a, and I am the NTSB operations group  
14 chairman.

15 MR. LARSON: My name is Scott Larson, L-a-r-s-o-n. I am a  
16 locomotive engineer with Amtrak.

17 MR. BACH: James Bach, B-a-c-h, vice local chairman for BLET  
18 Division 60.

19 MR. FRANSEN: Brian Fransen, B-r-i-a-n, F-r-a-n-s-e-n, BLET  
20 Safety Task Force.

21 MR. CHASE: I'm Jim Chase, C-h-a-s-e, SMART National Safety  
22 Team.

23 MS. THOMPSON: Stacey Thompson, T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n, FRA  
24 operating specialist.

25 MR. RATLEDGE: Aaron Ratledge, R-a-t-l-e-d-g-e, BNSF Railway,

1 operating practices and rules.

2 MR. O'MARA: Paul O'Mara, assistant vice president  
3 transportation, Amtrak. O-M-a-r-a.

4 MR. CHAVEZ: Stacy Chavez, C-h-a-v-e-z, FRA operating  
5 practices inspector.

6 DR. JENNER: I'm Stephen Jenner, S-t-e-p-h-e-n, J-e-n-n-e-r.  
7 I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

8 MR. SULLIVAN: I'm Patrick Sullivan, S-u-l-l-i-v-a-n. I'm  
9 Amtrak superintendent of transportation.

10 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. Thank you.

11 Do we have your permission to record our discussion with you  
12 today?

13 MR. LARSON: You do.

14 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you.

15 Do you understand the transcript will be part of the public  
16 docket and, as such, we cannot guarantee any confidentiality?

17 MR. LARSON: I do.

18 INTERVIEW OF SCOTT LARSON

19 BY MR. ZAGATA:

20 Q. To begin, if you could, just kind of start out, can you give  
21 us an overview of your railroad career?

22 A. Okay. I hired out with Amtrak in June of 2007 as an  
23 assistant conductor/conductor. I was hired as an engineer in  
24 2015, receiving my license, I believe, in early 2016, till the  
25 current date.

1 Q. How long you been working in this territory for?

2 A. Since 2007. Since I hired out --

3 Q. Since 2007?

4 A. -- in Shelby.

5 MR. ZAGATA: All right. At this point I'm going to start  
6 around the room, pass it off to Brian.

7 MR. FRANSEN: I think I'll let it go around, Scott, one time,  
8 and then -- I have no questions at this time, but I might later.

9 MR. CHASE: Jim Chase here.

10 BY MR. CHASE:

11 Q. Working in the territory as long as you have, you're probably  
12 fairly familiar with the track characteristics and the slow  
13 orders, the quirks of the track. In this particular area had you  
14 noticed anything previous in this specific area?

15 A. No. I do know that very recently they just re-tied this  
16 area, within the last 3 weeks, maybe month, the track work was  
17 completed. But as far as any --

18 Q. History of it or anything like that?

19 A. Not -- nothing. No, nothing I can give you.

20 Q. You guys receive training in emergency situations.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Can you go over that a little bit with me and tell me what  
23 that's about?

24 A. Amtrak does a nice job, I feel, with a program called  
25 PREPARE, in preparing us for these situations. Although, I don't

1 know if you're ever completely, as anybody that's been through  
2 this, is completely -- it's not an easy thing to go through, for  
3 sure. But I do feel that Amtrak does a good job getting -- the  
4 best they can, getting us prepared the best we can be.

5 Q. Is there anything you would like to see changed in that type  
6 of training? I know it's almost impossible to prepare for  
7 something this catastrophic, but is there anything that you have  
8 in the back of your mind or anything that you could -- you'd like  
9 to see changed or included in training or anything?

10 A. I guess in talking with -- I know Amtrak does bring cars out  
11 occasionally for training. I know a few years ago they brought  
12 one out to Essex, Montana, and did some first responder stuff with  
13 that. And I think that's very effective, because a lot of the  
14 first responders and things, maybe you've never even been on a  
15 train or never been trained to take out a window or anything like  
16 that. And I think if they continue to do that, I think that would  
17 be certainly helpful.

18 MR. CHASE: Okay. Thank you.

19 BY MR. ZAGATA:

20 Q. Real quick -- I apologize. We skipped through it. This is  
21 Zach Zagata. If you could just kind of give us an overview of  
22 your day on the day of the accident?

23 A. Certainly. Went on duty regular time, at 8:21 a.m. Nothing  
24 out of the ordinary. Had our job briefing. I went up and  
25 relieved the inbound engineers, as I was going to be the first



1 engineer to run the first leg that day. Mechanical department  
2 said everything's good with the train, and we left on time at  
3 9:06. I took the train, the first leg of the train from Minot to  
4 Williston, North Dakota. One stop in between there is Stanley,  
5 North Dakota. Engineer Clary took the train after that, from  
6 Williston to Glasgow, with a stop at Wolf Point between there.  
7 And we were on time. It was a pretty smooth day.

8 I took the train from Glasgow to Havre, Montana. We --  
9 again, a smooth leg. And we left Havre on time, which was a nice  
10 part of the day. And Mr. Clary was operating the train. We had  
11 gone from double track at Joplin to single main at that point, and  
12 shortly thereafter I got up and went to use the restroom, and had  
13 just gotten in there and the train suddenly just back and forth  
14 pretty violently, and it bounced me -- the bathroom is about as  
15 wide I am, and knocked me back and forth. And I hadn't even hit  
16 my zipper yet, and I started to go back to the cab. And I opened  
17 up the door, and at this point we were in emergency, and I've  
18 got -- and I'm down at the bottom step trying to get up the steps.  
19 And at this time the train is lurching back and forth and the door  
20 is -- I mean I'm trying to hold on to the door and keep my -- stay  
21 on my feet at the same time.

22 And I said "What did we hit?" to Bob, and he said we didn't  
23 hit anything, we're on the ground, we derailed. And we came to a  
24 violent, abrupt stop. And I was able to get up onto the -- into  
25 the cab, and looked in the mirror and saw a train -- or cars on

1 the ground. I -- and Bob was on the radio, made the emergency  
2 call and was talking with the dispatcher. And a few minutes later  
3 I got onto the ground and went to the second unit. HEP was off  
4 because of the separation.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What is HEP?

6 MR. LARSON: HEP is head-end power. It provides electricity  
7 to the train.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Generator, that --

9 MR. LARSON: Yeah.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you.

11 MR. LARSON: I went to the second unit and, like I said, the  
12 HEP was down, and I went ahead and turned it to the off position.  
13 And I looked -- I was looking at the locomotives, and I looked  
14 back at the train to see how many cars had derailed, and both  
15 engines were still on the track as well as the baggage car, which  
16 is the first car of the train, and what we call the dorm car,  
17 which is the first crew car/sleeping car, and the eight cars  
18 behind that were on the ground. The next two cars were still  
19 upright, and the four cars were not, that I could see.

20 I did an inspection of both sides of the engine to make sure  
21 we weren't leaking fuel and that we were railed, and then went  
22 back up to the engine to check on Mr. Clary and to take a breath.  
23 It was -- like I told Bob, it's time. I said, I can't -- this is  
24 almost dreamlike and I can't believe this just happened. Even  
25 looking back now, it's -- I just don't -- it's hard to take. And

1 like I said earlier, Mr. Clary and I were in another critical  
2 incident just 16 months ago where another fatality occurred, so it  
3 brings up some emotion.

4 Q. Do you need to take a break?

5 A. No. After that, we were -- emergency vehicles showed up and  
6 ambulances. And the conductors, who should be commended for the  
7 job that they did, really stepped up and -- and I think the crew  
8 back there. We were, around 7, 8 o'clock, maybe 7:30, transported  
9 back to Shelby. Road foreman Blevins took us to the hospital  
10 where we submitted our urine test and blood test and breath test.  
11 And I headed home about 10 p.m.

12 Q. I appreciate it.

13 A. Any -- would anybody like me to elaborate more on it?

14 MR. ZAGATA: We'll continue on to Stacey Thompson to finish  
15 up.

16 MS. THOMPSON: You sure you don't need a break?

17 MR. LARSON: I also -- I might. I recently lost a good  
18 friend also on Thursday night.

19 MR. ZAGATA: Let's take a 5-minute break.

20 (Off the record.)

21 (On the record.)

22 BY DR. JENNER:

23 Q. I'm going to change pace a little, and part of my protocol  
24 is -- that I ask other people as well, is about your rest, your  
25 on-duty/off-duty time, and also about your overall health and

1 medical fitness and things like that. Those are routine  
2 questions.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. So if I can just start with your -- well, let's just go back  
5 Friday, like when you were on duty, when you went off duty, when  
6 you slept and woke up and started your day Saturday. So if you  
7 can just start on Friday morning?

8 A. Okay. Yeah. I just got news on Thursday night of my friend  
9 passing away and --

10 Q. Oh, sorry to hear.

11 A. -- and reported to work on time, 10:48. I actually slept --  
12 I didn't sleep great that night, with the news. An uneventful  
13 trip to Minot on Train 8, and I actually slept pretty well Friday  
14 night. And maybe because of the stress or emotions that I had,  
15 you know, I feel like I slept pretty well Friday night and felt  
16 rested.

17 Q. So, I'm sorry, was Friday your off day?

18 A. Friday was our day to Minot. I was off on Tuesday,  
19 Wednesday, Thursday, and then we took Train 8 to Minot on Friday  
20 and were returning on Train 7 on Saturday.

21 Q. Oh, you weren't operating the train, you were just at -- just  
22 deadheading on Friday? I'm sorry?

23 A. Friday we operated the train to Minot, North Dakota from  
24 Shelby.

25 Q. Okay.

- 1 A. And Saturday was our return trip.
- 2 Q. Okay. So Friday night is -- I think I heard you said you got  
3 pretty good sleep Friday night?
- 4 A. I feel like I slept pretty well Friday night and I felt  
5 rested Saturday.
- 6 Q. Okay. What time did you wake up Saturday?
- 7 A. I got out of -- I woke up about 6:45 a.m. Central Time.
- 8 Q. Okay.
- 9 A. And we left the hotel at about 7:40. Went to the grocery  
10 store, and the conductors got food at Burger King, I believe, and  
11 we reported to work 8:15, I suppose, is when we got there, and on  
12 duty at 8:21.
- 13 Q. Okay. How -- on your alertness level, low alert, high alert?  
14 Where did you fall Saturday morning before you went on duty?
- 15 A. I felt rested and highly motivated. I was going to work, but  
16 I felt prepared to fulfill my duties.
- 17 Q. Great. So how long have you and Mr. Clary worked together on  
18 this trip?
- 19 A. In this particular stint, only a few weeks, as a guy went off  
20 on medical and I was -- I took this position. And we were also on  
21 a -- I mean we worked together three different times, and I can't  
22 give you the exact dates on those. But when we were triweekly, we  
23 were on the same crew as well.
- 24 Q. Right.
- 25 A. Yeah, just -- we worked together a few times.

1 Q. Right. Do you enjoy working together? Do you --

2 A. I love working with -- I like this crew. The conductor is  
3 actually my brother-in-law, Dennis. And like I said, Bob and I  
4 are similar in quite a few ways. We're both proud family men, I  
5 guess, and proud dads, and we have kids that are in high school  
6 and in activities and we follow each other in that each of his  
7 kids a little bit and, yeah, we're -- I like working with Bob.  
8 He's I think a reliable and capable and safe engineer. And, yeah,  
9 we -- I really like working with him.

10 Q. Great. And I was going to ask you, just your overall health,  
11 you know, before the day of the incident?

12 A. I think my overall health is pretty good. I'm about 25  
13 pounds lighter than I was a year and a half ago. Just -- and  
14 my -- yeah, I think my overall health is pretty well. Since I  
15 lost a little weight, I've probably been sleeping better, feeling  
16 a little better, and -- yeah.

17 Q. Do you recall when your last physical was?

18 A. March.

19 Q. Any issues there?

20 A. There actually was. And because I've been checking my blood  
21 pressure often because I've had some elevated blood pressure  
22 issues, and also since I've lost some weight, my blood pressure  
23 was real good and real normal, and when I took my physical, my  
24 blood pressure was high. And I actually brought my blood pressure  
25 monitor in the next time, and I'll just tell you that the doctor

1 diagnosed me with white coat hypertension syndrome.

2 Q. Sure.

3 A. And I really didn't know that that was a real thing. And she  
4 said, oh, yes, it is, and you have it. And -- yeah, that was the  
5 only time that I've -- I've had some blood pressure issues over  
6 the years, but it's been much better.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Like I said, with my weight loss and --

9 Q. Right. Any serious medication conditions that you currently  
10 have?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay. Any more acute, like colds or allergies or --

13 A. I do have some seasonal allergies. But even -- as I've  
14 gotten older, that has gotten -- I don't know if I'm growing out  
15 of it or what, but it's not nearly as bad as it was when I was a  
16 kid. It used to be -- my allergies used to be pretty bad, but any  
17 more --

18 Q. Are you on any type of medication for allergies or anything  
19 else?

20 A. No. I take some Flonase, that's it, for -- and I do have  
21 some blood pressure medication.

22 Q. Any side effects for blood pressure medication?

23 A. Uh-uh.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Lower blood pressure.

1 Q. And have you ever been diagnosed for any type of sleep  
2 disorder?

3 A. No. I did take a sleep apnea test a few years back and,  
4 yeah, it was kind of a borderline thing, and that's kind of what  
5 initiated me to drop a few pounds. And like I said, I feel like  
6 I'm sleeping better, I feel better.

7 Q. Good. Good for you doing that.

8 DR. JENNER: That's all I have. I appreciate your  
9 information.

10 MR. LARSON: Yeah. Yep.

11 MR. ZAGATA: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

12 MR. LARSON: To add?

13 MR. ZAGATA: Yeah. To add to the -- we're all done  
14 questioning. Yeah, so --

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You can ask if you got a question you  
16 want to ask.

17 MR. ZAGATA: Yeah, you can ask, yeah, as well, too. Yeah.

18 MR. LARSON: Who's buying lunch?

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Where's a good place to eat?

20 MR. LARSON: Well, we might have to leave Shelby.

21 MR. ZAGATA: So, no, we appreciate -- and with that, we'll  
22 conclude the interview here. So thank you --

23 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

24

25



CERTIFICATE

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

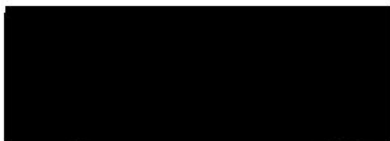
IN THE MATTER OF:            FATAL AMTRAK DERAILMENT  
                                      NEAR JOPLIN, MONTANA  
                                      ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2021  
                                      Interview of Scott Larson

ACCIDENT NO.:                RRD21MR017

PLACE:                         Shelby, Montana

DATE:                         September 27, 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.



Kay Maurer  
Transcriber