

Approved: August 23, 2023

Preliminary Report RRD23FR015

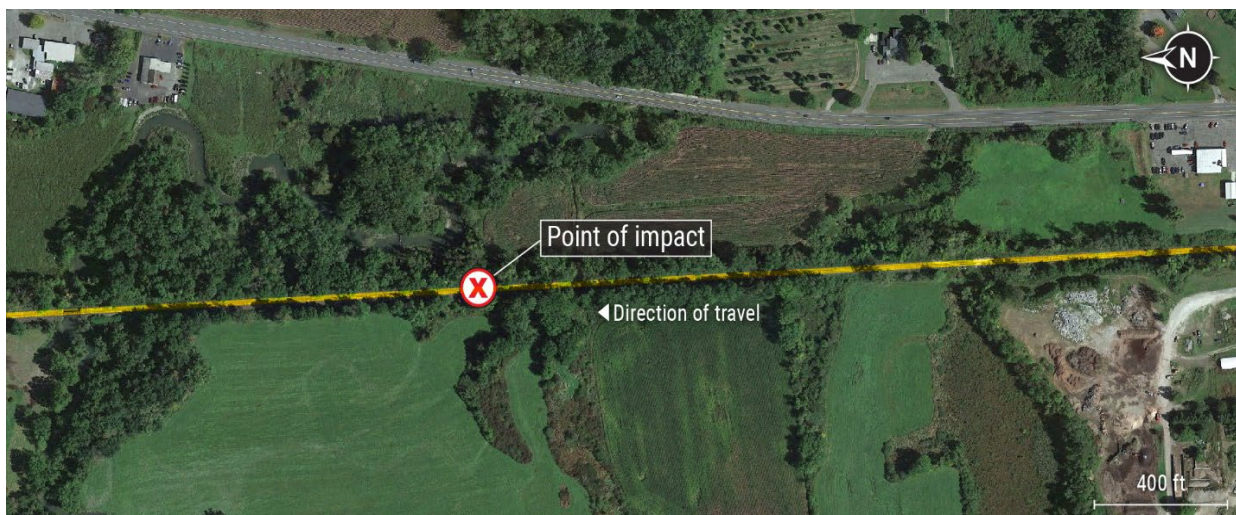
*This information is preliminary and subject to change.*

# Railroad Employee Fatality

Great Barrington, Massachusetts

August 4, 2023

On August 4, 2023, about 10:05 a.m. local time, an employee of the Middlesex Corporation assigned to perform maintenance-of-way work for the Housatonic Railroad Company (HRRC) on the Berkshire Line was fatally injured when struck by a roadway maintenance machine (a driller) in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> (See figure.) The driller’s operator was moving the machine north on the track in reverse. The accident employee was operating a leaf blower on the same track when he was struck near milepost (MP) 58.7. Visibility conditions at the time of the accident were daylight and clear; the weather was 66°F with no precipitation.



**Figure.** Overhead view of the accident site. (Source: Google Earth.)

The track in the vicinity of the accident is owned by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and operated by the HRRC. MassDOT hired the Middlesex Corporation to support a rehabilitation project on the Berkshire

<sup>1</sup> (a) All times in this report are local times. (b) A *driller* is a machine that drills holes in rail ties. *Rail ties* are the primary lateral support for rails.

Line.<sup>2</sup> The HRRRC, under agreement with MassDOT, provided on-track working limits and a roadway worker-in-charge (RWIC) to the Middlesex Corporation work group.<sup>3</sup> Preliminary information indicates that about 4:30 a.m., the RWIC held a job briefing near MP 57.3 and informed the work group about the working limits for the day, which were between MP 50 and MP 59. The employees then split into two work groups. The group that included the RWIC went south to work on a bridge project. The group that would be involved in the accident went north to work on the track project.

The work group for the track project included four workers who were installing lag screws. The driller experienced a mechanical failure, and two workers moved the driller to a rail yard for repair; one of them was the operator. The other two workers continued to work on the track. The accident occurred when the operator was moving the driller from the rail yard to the work location to resume work.

While on scene, National Transportation Safety Board investigators completed interviews, conducted sight-distance observations, and examined the roadway maintenance machine involved in the accident.

The National Transportation Safety Board's investigation is ongoing. Future investigative activity will focus on the roadway worker protection procedures regulated by the Federal Railroad Administration and practiced by the HRRRC and the Middlesex Corporation; and on the roadway worker oversight practices followed by MassDOT, the HRRRC, and the Middlesex Corporation.

As a result of this accident, the Federal Railroad Administration's Fatality Analysis of Maintenance-of-way Employees and Signalmen Committee issued an alert on August 7, 2023, advising all roadway workers to participate in on-track safety briefings, ensure on-track protection is adequate, and maintain a safe distance from roadway maintenance machines.<sup>4</sup>

Parties to the investigation include the Federal Railroad Administration, MassDOT, the HRRRC, the Middlesex Corporation, the Great Barrington Police Department, and the Great Barrington Fire Department.

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<sup>2</sup> The rehabilitation project began in 2015 when MassDOT acquired the Berkshire Line from HRRRC. The rehabilitation included tracks, bridges, culverts, turnouts, and crossings.

<sup>3</sup> (a) *Working limits* are boundaries that set apart a segment of the track where train and roadway maintenance machine movements are authorized by a roadway worker-in-charge. (b) A *roadway worker-in-charge* is an employee qualified to establish on-track protection for workers.

<sup>4</sup> The full text of the alert is available at <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/fames-alert-4>.