

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

CSX EMPLOYEE FATALITY IN *

WALBRIDGE, OHIO * Accident No.: RRD23FR017

ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2023 *

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Interview of: ANDREW SCHMIDT, Yardmaster
CSX Transportation - Walbridge

CSX Walbridge Yard
Walbridge, Ohio

Tuesday,
September 19, 2023

APPEARANCES:

RICHARD SKOLNEKOVICH, Operations Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JASON COX, National Representative
Brotherhood of Railway Carmen

BRIAN BENDEL, Track Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

STEVE AMMONS, Senior Director of Train Handling Rules
and Practices
CSX Transportation

ROBERT CRAWFORD, Operating Practices
Federal Railroad Administration

JASON GURZYNSKI, Motor Power and Equipment Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(8:53 a.m.)

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3 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: All right. Good morning. My name is
4 Richard Skolnekovich, and I am the NTSB operations group chairman
5 for this accident. We're conducting an interview today on 19
6 September 2023 with Andrew Schmidt who works for CSX. This
7 interview is in conjunction with the NTSB's investigation of the
8 accident that occurred at Walbridge, Ohio, on 17 September 2023.
9 The NTSB Accident Reference Number is RRD23FR017.

10 The purpose of this investigation is to increase safety, not
11 to assign fault, blame or liability.

12 Before beginning our interview and questions, we'll go around
13 and introduce ourselves. Please spell out your last name and your
14 title. I'll start off and then pass it to my left.

15 Again, my name is Richard Skolnekovich, S-k-o-l-n-e-k-o-v-i-
16 c-h, NTSB operations investigator.

17 MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons, A-m-m-o-n-s, CSX Transportation,
18 senior director of train handling rules and practices.

19 MR. COX: Jason Cox, C-o-x, Brotherhood of Railway Carmen,
20 national representative.

21 MR. GURZYNSKI: Jason Gurzynski, G-u-r-z-y-n-s-k-i, FRA,
22 motor power and equipment inspector.

23 MR. CRAWFORD: Robert Crawford, C-r-a-w-f-o-r-d, FRA, OP.

24 MR. BENDEL: Brian Bendel, B-e-n-d-e-l, FRA, track inspector.

25 MR. SCHMIDT: Andrew Schmidt, S-c-h-m-i-d-t, CSX, Walbridge

1 yardmaster.

2 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. Thank you, Andrew. Before we get
3 started, you understand that today it's being recorded?

4 MR. SCHMIDT: Yes.

5 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. And we have your permission to
6 record it?

7 MR. SCHMIDT: Yes, you do.

8 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. And you understand the recording
9 will be used for transcription, that will eventually go in a
10 public document, and so because of that, we can't offer you any
11 confidentiality.

12 MR. SCHMIDT: Yes.

13 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. Great. Do you have any questions
14 before we get begin?

15 MR. SCHMIDT: I do not.

16 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. We'll go ahead and get started.

17 INTERVIEW OF ANDREW SCHMIDT

18 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

19 Q. So, Andrew, if you could, could you kind of give me just the
20 background of your railroad career, when you came in and what
21 you've done?

22 A. I hired on in 2006 as a conductor, worked as a conductor for
23 8 years, and then I moved up to a yardmaster position which I've
24 been in since then. In 2014, I became a yardmaster.

25 Q. Okay. 2014. Now, were you working -- did you first get

1 hired out in this yard or did you work somewhere else?

2 A. I hired out here at Walbridge.

3 Q. Walbridge. So have you always worked here?

4 A. No. For a while, when I got furloughed, I worked out of
5 Willard and I worked out of Columbus. Those were the only other
6 places I've been.

7 Q. Okay. Willard and Columbus. All right. As a conductor,
8 were you RCO qualified?

9 A. Yes, I was.

10 Q. Okay. All right. What is, what is your duty schedule like
11 now? Like days and hours.

12 A. I work Tuesday through Saturday, third shift, 10 to 6 in the
13 morning.

14 Q. Okay. Do you ever work more hours than that or on these
15 days, off days?

16 A. When other people mark off, and there's no relief, sometimes
17 you'll have to work 16 hour shifts.

18 Q. Okay. Is that about the longest you've worked is a 16 hour
19 shift?

20 A. Yes, that is the longest. They won't let us work any longer.

21 Q. Okay. All right. And as the yardmaster, are you under hours
22 of service laws?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Okay. On a day-to-day basis, can you kind of give me a run
25 through of just what you do daily during those shifts?

1 A. When I get to work, I sit down. I start going through my
2 crews, and then I start making all my switch lists for all my yard
3 jobs. Shortly after that, I'll go through, and depending on what
4 day it is, like on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, my industry work will
5 be made for me but the rest of the week, after I get my switch
6 list and that, I build up all my industry work, get my emails
7 printed and make my work orders for my crews. After that, then
8 pretty much just talk to everybody and get everybody moving and --

9 Q. Okay. All right. So, just on average daily, how many, how
10 many crews are you directing each day? Just generally.

11 A. Generally, lately probably close to 15, maybe 20 a night.

12 Q. Fifteen crews or people?

13 A. Crews.

14 Q. Crews. Okay. So is that a mixture of both full crew and
15 RCO?

16 A. Yes, that's for like road crews, the yard jobs and I think
17 that's about it, but --

18 Q. Okay. Do you supervise any of the yards besides Walbridge or
19 it's just Walbridge?

20 A. No, I supervise Walbridge, Stanley and the Toledo docks.

21 Q. Okay. And so these 15 crews, they're scattered between those
22 three yards?

23 A. Yeah, but the majority of it is Walbridge.

24 Q. Walbridge.

25 A. I get two to three crews at the docks and usually maybe one

1 to two at Stanley, and everything else is here at Walbridge.

2 Q. Okay. How many industry crews do you have?

3 A. On my shift, I have 321, 392 and a 325, 5, 3.

4 Q. Okay. Just out of curiosity, what's their makeup? Two man
5 crews, three man crews.

6 A. Two.

7 Q. Two man.

8 A. For the industry work, it's two man crews.

9 Q. Yep. And then for regular yard crews, what is their makeup?

10 A. The majority of the remotes are two man crews except for like
11 the 97 -- well, I guess half of them, 97 and 94 are one man except
12 for on third shift, you get two guys on the 94, but every other
13 job's got usually at least two guys.

14 Q. Okay. Are they both considered conductors or do they break
15 them down like conductor, brakeman, switchman?

16 A. On the remote jobs, a foreman and a switchman. And on
17 conventional jobs, you have engineers, conductors and, of course,
18 trainees as well.

19 Q. Do you know offhand how many trainees that are working right
20 now? It's okay if you don't.

21 A. Usually -- lately there's been one on every job on third
22 shift. So approximately seven or eight.

23 Q. Okay. So with Walbridge itself, when the crews come in, are
24 they trickling in or is there a set time when all these crews come
25 in?

1 A. No, it's completely random.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. You might get one, and then you'll get five or six in a row.

4 Q. Do start times change? I know they might change daily, but
5 like -- is there like relief jobs or is it just all set regular
6 jobs?

7 A. No, we do have -- we have the regular 5 day a week
8 assignments, and then we have usually relief jobs to fill in the
9 days that they're off.

10 Q. Okay. Is that kind of throughout the week?

11 A. Yes, that's every day.

12 Q. Okay. So you might have a relief job every day?

13 A. (No audible response.)

14 Q. Okay. Now, with the relief jobs --

15 A. On one --

16 Q. Oh, go ahead.

17 A. On one shift or another, yes.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Sorry.

20 Q. With the relief jobs, they normally -- are they called for
21 just one -- like for a RCO, it's just one RCO -- one foreman or
22 are they normally called for two?

23 A. Normally it's two.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Unless there's a manpower shortage, and then we'll go to one

1 man.

2 Q. Okay. All right. So now with most of your jobs being two,
3 when you, when you are short manpower, as a yardmaster, what do
4 you have to do? Do you have to, you know, re-allocate the work or
5 what -- tell me -- walk me through what you need to do?

6 A. It all depends on the job. Like the 394, you can get away
7 with one man because there's no signals and you have a long zone.
8 So the 94 is fine. But say like the 393, I would -- if it came
9 down to a one man on the 393, I would switch him with the 394 and
10 move -- switch ends of the yard. So that way, the one man has the
11 zone. On the other end of the yard, there's a signal. So you
12 definitely want somebody on that end to protect it or somebody in
13 visual range to see it.

14 Q. Okay. Now how many, how many remote crews do you have
15 operating Walbridge at any given time during your shift?

16 A. Four.

17 Q. Four. So it's 394, 395 -- or 393. And the other one was
18 397.

19 A. Yep, and then 395.

20 Q. Okay. Now, for -- do they all sign up relatively around the
21 same time or do they all come in at different times, the remotes?

22 A. They're staggered about a half hour apart. The 395 comes on
23 duty at 2230. The 393 comes on duty at 2300. 397 comes on duty
24 at 2330, and then the 394 comes on duty at 2359.

25 Q. Okay. All right. Now, when they come on duty, do they come

1 to you and get all their paperwork and switch lists or how does
2 that work?

3 A. Normally I have everything made before the crews come on
4 duty. So then when they get to work, they grab their paperwork,
5 and then they'll call me on the phone and get the briefing and the
6 order of how I want the work done.

7 Q. Okay. Did they come to the yardmaster office or is there --
8 or are they just picking up paperwork somewhere?

9 A. No, usually only the road crews and like the 110 -- not 110,
10 but the 111, like the conventional crew that started Walbridge,
11 those are usually the only ones that come up and see me or the
12 yard crews. The yard jobs, you usually don't see unless they need
13 to top up and get like batteries or some kind of supplies.

14 Q. Okay. So how do they get their paperwork?

15 A. Everything -- every time I make a switch list, I designate
16 the printer to go to and it's sent to each shanty that they need.

17 Q. Okay. And then they call you to verify they got it.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. And they go through the work with you over the phone?

20 A. Yes, that's correct.

21 Q. Okay. All right. Now, when they are out working, how are
22 you contacted? Are you doing it over cell phone, over radio,
23 both?

24 A. No, there's no cell phone use. Everything is done over the
25 radio.

1 Q. Okay. Is there -- how many channels do you have to talk to
2 the crews?

3 A. The road channel, channel 20, channel 70, channel 48, 80, 70.
4 About seven for my yard jobs.

5 Q. Okay. Now, in the yardmaster office, do you have a system
6 where you can pick up all those different channels or do you have
7 to constantly rotate back and forth?

8 A. No, on the Avtec, it'll pick up many different channels at
9 once, and then I have to swipe which one I want, and then I can
10 broadcast on that channel.

11 Q. Okay. So like a computer screen --

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. -- type radio?

14 A. Yeah, it's a touch screen Avtec, with multiple channels. You
15 just touch on which one you want.

16 Q. I've gotcha. But you can listen in to all the channels at
17 the same time or --

18 A. Yes, everything is monitored that I have selected to be
19 monitored.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. We have a few channels that aren't used any more that are not
22 selected but everything is monitored.

23 Q. Okay. Now, what happens if, if you have multiple channels
24 talking at the same time. Is there a way to mute one and leave
25 one on?

1 A. No. Well, you can -- yeah, on our screen, whatever channel
2 we select controls one speaker, and then all the other channels
3 are coming out of another speaker.

4 Q. Okay. You just kind of point your ear to the one that you
5 want to listen to and --

6 A. Just try to focus. It's really hard.

7 Q. Yeah, that can be a little bit rough.

8 A. It gets confusing.

9 Q. I gotcha. Let's talk about the tracks themselves. So I know
10 -- well, first off, do you -- as the yardmaster, do you control
11 any of the switches?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. I do not control switches.

15 Q. All right. What about any signals or anything like that?

16 A. No, I have to talk to the dispatcher for all the signals I
17 need.

18 Q. Okay. And when you talk to the dispatcher, it's just to get
19 in and out of the yard or are there controlled switches inside the
20 yard somewhere?

21 A. No, there's no controlled switches in the yard. Just
22 mainline movement for the dispatcher.

23 Q. Okay. Just mainline coming in the yard or --

24 A. Coming in and out of the yard. They'll tell me when trains
25 are getting close so I can try to start figuring game plans on how

1 to yard them.

2 Q. Okay. Now, with -- is there any -- do you do any
3 (indiscernible) or anything like in the yard?

4 A. No.

5 Q. Okay. All right. Now, when the crews sign up, they contact
6 you and then they've got to go -- we'll start with the RCOs. So
7 they have to establish the zone. Do they coordinate establishing
8 the zones with you?

9 A. Yes. When they initially go out, they'll give me a call on
10 the radio and they'll let me know that they're getting ready to do
11 their tilt timeout tests so I can be prepared and not expect the
12 worst, but they'll call me. They'll to do their tilt test and
13 then they'll usually ask permission to run the zone.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Then they'll run their zone and put all that in the logbooks
16 and --

17 Q. Can you walk me through the timeout tilt until test? Like
18 they call you and then what are you listening for?

19 A. Yeah. Basically they'll say like Y397 Walbridge, and I'll
20 answer Walbridge answering over. Then they'll say getting ready
21 to do our tilt timeout or ready to copy tilt timeout and I'll say,
22 yes. And then the next thing, you just wait for the beep, beep,
23 beep, the tone of the robot going into the tilt timeout and after
24 it broadcasts, I tell them, you know, copied tilt timeout and what
25 time I copied it.

1 Q. Okay. And you keep a logbook of that?

2 A. Yes, I do.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. All of us yardmasters are supposed to. Well, we all share
5 one.

6 Q. Yep. Is it written or is it on the computer?

7 A. No, it's written.

8 Q. Okay. All right. And then they go out and establish the
9 zone. Can you walk me how they establish their zone?

10 A. They just run their light power up through all their limits,
11 if there's switches and they have locks, lock them, and then one
12 the zone is ran, they call me and tell me that the zone is active.

13 Q. Okay. And do you assign their limits? The limits to their
14 remote zones, do you assign that?

15 A. No, no, that's -- it's all in the timetables of where the
16 designated remote zones are at.

17 Q. Okay. All right. Now, do you have the -- do you have any
18 screens in the yardmaster's office that shows you where they're at
19 on the tracks?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Can you kind of walk me through what that looks like?

22 A. We have cameras situated all throughout the yard where you
23 can pretty much see anywhere, like all the switches you can see.
24 You can see a lot of the leads. You can't really see the body of
25 tracks because there's nothing in the middle of the yards, but you

1 can, you can see everything you need.

2 Q. Okay. So it's just all cameras?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. If I had to guess, there's probably 25 of them around the
6 yard.

7 Q. Okay. And I know you can see them in daylight, but how are
8 those -- how effective are those cameras at night?

9 A. At nighttime, they're a little bit fuzzy but you can see
10 still very well.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I mean as long as it's in a well lit area. Like I say, if
13 it's in the body of the track or down deeper in, you can't see
14 anything at all. It's pitch black.

15 Q. Okay. All right. So with your RCOs, can you kind of walk me
16 through the switchless process. I know they line out their
17 switches in a kiosk. Can you walk me through that process between
18 them and you?

19 A. Basically after I make their switch list, it goes into their
20 kiosk, and once they run their zone, they'll go into the kiosk.
21 Once they -- I don't know how they work because I've never ran
22 one. They came after I came up here, but they select whatever
23 list that they're supposed to do first, and then I guess it auto
24 programs the switches for them, and then they just have to use the
25 clicker to advance it, to go to each different track they need as

1 they're kicking the cars.

2 Q. Okay. Now, is that something that you can control or you
3 can't control that at all?

4 A. I have no control.

5 Q. Okay. You just give them the work.

6 A. Yes. I give them the work, and then if anybody needs to come
7 in or out of their territory, I inform them. They call the RCO
8 foreman in charge, and then they get all of the permissions into
9 the zones.

10 Q. Okay. Now, let me kind of switch over to like mechanical and
11 track workers. The mechanical and track workers, if they want to
12 go out into the yard, do they have to get permission from you?

13 A. No. If they -- well, to drive around the yard, no. If they
14 need to go out on the tracks and work, then they'll call me and
15 tell me, hey, I need to work on such and such, like eastbound 2.
16 And then I'll tell them either, yes, you can or no, you can't. Or
17 if I have no issues with it, I'll have them check with the RCO
18 foreman. Well, let me rephrase all that because the RCO -- if
19 it's in the zone, they're always talking to the remote crew. If
20 it's not, then I'll give them permissions to do what they need.

21 Q. Okay. And then -- so when it was -- stay outside the RCO
22 zones for a second. So when they're going to go out and do work,
23 how do they -- how do you provide -- do you provide any protection
24 for them or are they just on their own?

25 A. I do not provide protection. I tell them which tracks they

1 can have, and then they'll go out and put their blue blocks and
2 blue flags or orange locks, whatever color it may be, but they
3 flag up and protect themselves.

4 Q. Okay. That's the mechanical flags themselves and set his
5 track.

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. Do you know if the track does use watchmen or flagmen
8 or anything?

9 A. A lot of times, yes, they will inform me. If it's the track
10 department, they'll say, hey, I need to do some welding on this
11 switch, and we'll be working under watchman rules.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. And at that point, I just tell them, okay, well, brief with
14 the remote crew in charge, and then you're okay to do it.

15 Q. Now, outside of remote, with the regular crews, how are you
16 coordinating with the mechanical or track? Do you just -- are
17 they all on the same channel or do you reach out to the various
18 crews?

19 A. Depending on which side of the yard, we have different
20 channels for different parts of the yard. So those -- I really
21 don't know how to answer that.

22 Q. Take your time. There's no rush. I guess really the
23 question --

24 A. I'm trying to think, because I --

25 Q. -- I'm kind of looking for the coordination. So when they're

1 not working in a zone, and mechanical or track are going out to
2 work on it, they're providing their protection. But, is there any
3 coordination with crews or do you just -- do the crews -- or are
4 crews expected to know where they're at?

5 A. With the conventional crews, I just -- I usually don't have
6 very many conventional crews to deal with.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. But, like to get air tests and that, I'll tell the crew, once
9 they tie on, get their air to pull out and then they'll call the
10 carman to get an air test.

11 Q. Okay. All right. Now, I'll switch over to the RCO zone. So
12 when mechanical or track want to work inside an active zone, what
13 is the process for them to do that?

14 A. Usually they talk to me first, tell me what they need, and
15 ask if it's okay to do it with me first. Once I give them
16 permission. Then they check with the RCO foreman in charge and
17 get permission to lock the switch up or leave, whatever.

18 Q. Okay. All right. Now, with -- so they contract you over the
19 radio first, and then they contract the RCO foreman to get
20 permission. Is that correct?

21 A. They'll either contact me on the radio or phone.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And then after they talk to me, then they'll reach out to the
24 RCO foreman in charge on the radio.

25 Q. Okay. Have you had any instance where they had difficulty

1 reaching the foreman?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. Did they, you know, how did they -- did you relay for
4 them?

5 A. Yes, I did.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. In fact, I relay for many crews.

8 Q. I was about to ask. Is that something that commonly happens?

9 A. Yes. At Walbridge lately, we've been having a lot of radio
10 issues. I don't know why but I do do a lot of relaying for crews.

11 Q. Okay. Is there any particular areas in the yard where it
12 seems like they're having a problem or is just scattered
13 throughout the yard?

14 A. It's scattered.

15 Q. Do you think it -- just based on your opinion, do you think
16 that's an equipment issue or do you think it's a radio issue, like
17 dead spots?

18 A. I don't know. I'm -- we've, we've been bringing this up a
19 lot lately trying to get communications to look into but they
20 can't seem to find any issues.

21 Q. Okay. All right. So when, when you do have to relay, do you
22 keep track of what you're relaying?

23 A. I don't write it down, no.

24 Q. Okay. All right. So you're just kind of relaying the
25 information to like let's say the RCO foreman and then is it his

1 responsibility to keep that information?

2 A. Yeah. So if the car department calls and calls and can't get
3 ahold of the RCO foreman, then they'll call me. Once they call
4 me, I'll reach out to the RCO foreman and tell them, hey, track
5 department or car department, whoever, is looking for eastbound 7
6 and then if he says, yeah, it's okay to have 7. Then I'll relay
7 back, okay, car department, you've got permission to lock up 7.
8 If I don't get permission, I'll say standby, I don't have
9 permission yet.

10 Q. Okay. Now, you said you were a conductor before and did RCO
11 operations before.

12 A. That is correct.

13 Q. Okay. So with a RCO zone, can you kind of give me just your
14 characterize? What is the purpose of a RCO zone?

15 A. That's for headend protection so nobody has to be on the
16 headend while you're moving as long as you stay within your zone.

17 Q. Okay. Now, let me ask you this. Do you -- when mechanical
18 or track go inside a RCO zone, just your opinion, do you still
19 consider that like an active RCO zone or --

20 A. Anything -- any time a zone is active, everybody has to be on
21 the lookout because even if I give you permission to lock this up,
22 in order to get to this switch, you might have to cross over and
23 there's no protection for that because with a RCO zone, you don't
24 have to watch the headend. So.

25 Q. So when a foreman gives permission to go into a zone, what --

1 just based on your perception, what do you -- what does that, what
2 does that mean to you as far as when they allow somebody to go
3 into the zone, what does that do for them?

4 A. The only -- well, for switches, basically permission to enter
5 the zone for the switches is just to throw the switch only,
6 nothing more.

7 Q. Okay. So it's permission to just reactivate a switch or lock
8 a switch out?

9 A. Yes, to lock switches out.

10 Q. So just permission for the switches.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. It doesn't give them permission anywhere else basically
14 except for the switch.

15 Q. I've gotcha. Now, with the RCO foreman that's giving them
16 permission, does he have any additional responsibilities or he
17 just continues to work the zone?

18 A. He has a logbook. I know he has -- whenever anybody wants to
19 come into his zone, he has to write down the name of them and what
20 time they came in. As for the switches, I don't know. I have --
21 when I was a conductor, we didn't have RCO books for zones and
22 whatnot. So I don't know the practice of what conductors do with
23 switches any more.

24 Q. Okay. So when you did have experience with the RCO logbook,
25 what kind of information was put in it?

1 A. Basically just the time and who came into your zone.

2 Q. Okay. So now, when you have mechanical or track going into
3 the zone, basically the way your section is, is that -- they're
4 responsible for their own protection --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- to go in and do the work on whatever tracks they're going
7 to do.

8 A. Yes. I expect that out of everybody though.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. When you're working at a railroad, you cannot expect -- you
11 always expect something to be moving. You have to be on the
12 lookout.

13 Q. Okay. Now, based on your experience, has that changed what
14 the RCO foreman has to do and how he operates in the zone or he
15 just continues to --

16 A. In my opinion, I would just keep running --

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. -- because they're not physically breaking my zone. They're
19 just getting permission to lock switches.

20 Q. Gotcha.

21 A. So I would just proceed on as normal.

22 Q. Gotcha. Okay. So now, if you don't mind, I'd -- actually,
23 you know what? I'm going to hold off. That's all the questions I
24 have for now.

25 MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons, CSX.

1 BY MR. AMMONS:

2 Q. Andrew, thank you for helping out with this today.

3 A. You're welcome.

4 Q. You mentioned earlier there that there was approximately
5 seven different channels for the yard jobs?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Now, is that seven for Walbridge or is that including Stanley
8 and Toledo docks?

9 A. That's including Stanley and the docks as well.

10 Q. How many are active in Walbridge for the yard jobs?

11 A. You've got the road channel -- well, the road channel is not
12 for that, but I do have. You have 25 and 70 or 20 and 70 are the
13 two remote.

14 Q. So basically the yard jobs in Walbridge are operating two
15 different channels?

16 A. Yes, the yard jobs are.

17 Q. All right.

18 A. On the eastbound yard is channel 20, and then on receiving or
19 arrival yard, you're on channel 70.

20 Q. Okay. You mentioned earlier that the limits -- that you
21 don't designate the limits of the remote control zone, that that's
22 done so in the timetable?

23 A. Yes, that is correct.

24 Q. Is there also signage that designates those limits --

25 A. Yes, there is.

1 Q. -- physical signage?

2 A. Yes, there's signs.

3 Q. Okay. And you mentioned keeping a log for the man down test.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. I believe you said it was a paper log, a written log --

6 A. That's right.

7 Q. -- not electronic. Do you also keep a log for when they
8 activate the zones?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Is that also paper?

11 A. Yes. It's all included on the same thing as the tilt timeout
12 sheet.

13 Q. You mentioned about you having to due to the radio
14 communication issues here --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. -- especially recently, that you do a lot of relaying of
17 information?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Do you, do you relay permission for on track equipment to
20 enter a zone? So, for example, someone's trying to communicate to
21 the 397 for permission -- another train is trying to communicate
22 to 397 for permission to enter the zone.

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. And they can't hear the permission from the 397. Would you
25 communicate that permission?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay. On the night of the incident, did you hear permission
3 being given for the two car inspectors, two carmen? Did you hear
4 permission being given to them from the -- I believe we refer to
5 it for most of this investigation as the Y397 but, in fact, the
6 employee was the Y394 working --

7 A. Yes, that is correct.

8 Q. So you heard that permission being given?

9 A. I heard the RCO foreman was trying to call on the radio and
10 give the carmen permission in, but the carmen could not hear them.
11 So I relayed for them.

12 Q. Okay. And do you recall what that permission was?

13 A. Permission to lock up eastbound 3 and eastbound 5.

14 Q. Is that a typical move for the carman and the 397 on that --
15 on that night, was that a typical move?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. And you relayed that. Did you relay that information?

18 A. Yes, I did.

19 Q. And, when that happened, in your opinion, was the zone still
20 active? Meaning that the Y397 foreman did not have to provide
21 headend protection.

22 A. Yes, he still had an active zone. No switches were thrown to
23 break the zone. So it was still an active zone.

24 Q. Okay. And then the last thing I've got, what can you tell us
25 about your involvement that night as far as from the moment that

1 you knew there was -- an incident had occurred? What role did you
2 play at that point?

3 A. I immediately yelled out for the trainmaster or the MTO in
4 charge and he called 911 as he was on his way down the scene. I
5 stopped all traffic in the yard and on the mains around the yard,
6 and then I just waited.

7 Q. Okay. And when you said you yelled out to the MTO in charge,
8 was that Mac Smith?

9 A. Yes, it was.

10 Q. Okay. When you yelled out, like down the hall verbally or
11 over the phone or --

12 A. No, he's in the room right next to me.

13 Q. Okay. All right. And so then Mac immediately called 911.

14 A. Called 911 and ran out the door, yes.

15 Q. Okay. All right. That's all I've got. Thank you.

16 A. You're welcome.

17 BY MR. COX:

18 Q. You stated that there are normally four remote control crews
19 that work on third shift. Is that correct?

20 A. Yes, just in Walbridge. There is one more at the docks on
21 third shift as well.

22 Q. I see. And how many were working on the night of the
23 incident?

24 A. Three.

25 Q. And in the remote control zone area, where the incident

1 happened, how many people are usually stationed on the crew down
2 there?

3 A. One unless they have a trainee.

4 Q. Unless they have a trainee.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. So, on the night of the incident, the carmen contacted the
7 remote control foreman to lock 3 and 5?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Now, 5 switch is off of the ladder. Is that correct? The 5
10 switch is not part of the ladder.

11 A. You have a 4-5 switch on the ladder, and then you also have
12 an inside 4-5 switch.

13 Q. Okay. Thank you for that clarification. And the 3 switch,
14 is that a part of the ladder, a part of the remote control zone?

15 A. The 3 switch comes off the ladder on the other side -- or
16 actually, no. I'm sorry. That's eastbound 2. Eastbound 3 is
17 when you come in -- is the first one off the ladder.

18 Q. So is that a part of the ladder? The switch is a part of
19 the --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- remote control zone? Okay. So one question I have about
22 the understanding of a remote control zone, so the carman, he gets
23 permission to lock up 3. Is the remote control operator required
24 to reach check his route at that point?

25 A. No. Because no switches have been thrown, and nobody has

1 come into the zone on the, on the rail.

2 Q. With -- okay. Would you happen to know -- let me rephrase
3 the question. So if a carman requests permission to lock that
4 switch and it's a part of the remote control zone, then the remote
5 control foreman knows that somebody has had interaction with that
6 switch. Is that correct?

7 A. The switch on his kiosk, when the car department locks it up,
8 it'll turn blue on his screen. Then he knows that it's locked up
9 at that point.

10 Q. Which screen is that?

11 A. On his kiosk.

12 Q. On his kiosk where it has the switches in the shanty?

13 A. Yeah, the little metal building on the lead.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Okay. But if he's already down inside a rail, does he have
17 any way to know somebody improperly tampered with that switch or
18 maybe while locking it, that it was improperly thrown in error?

19 A. The switches on the lead are always lined for straight unless
20 you're switching into the track. So when the carmen go out and
21 lock it up, they don't physically throw the switch. They just
22 put the lock in it.

23 Q. What would happen if they did physically throw the switch?

24 A. Well, then they would be violating the zone, the RCO zone.

25 Q. Right. But the RCO operator would have no idea that the

1 switch had been operated. Am I understanding that correctly?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And then do the carmen communicate with transportation when
4 they leave the zone or unlock the rail?

5 A. No.

6 Q. And, are any movements as the night progresses and say the
7 carmen get permission for 3 and 5, are there any associated
8 movements related to the carmen that might be going on with
9 transportation and like as an example, I asked for 3 and 5. Does
10 anyone tell the carmen, oh, hey, by the way, this or this might be
11 coming into the vicinity?

12 A. I think if they monitor the same channels as us when they're
13 working in the yard, then they would because the RCO foreman's --
14 like when another yard job comes in to get a track, they'll get
15 permission to tie it up from his end of the yard. So when they
16 come in, they'll do that. They'll let them know what's going on,
17 and -- I forgot the question.

18 Q. The question was, if I lock up 3 and 5 and there's associated
19 movements for that area, does anyone in transportation relay to
20 the carmen, hey, you might want to watch out for this or that
21 because it might be coming into that area?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Do you think that if the carman leadman was put up in your
24 general work area, that that might help with that type of
25 information or communication?

1 A. Probably not.

2 Q. Could you please explain why?

3 A. Well, for a while when the carmen did have somebody up in the
4 office on third shift or on the -- for a while, they were in a
5 different office, and basically all we relayed to them was tracks
6 to turn over and then they would relay stuff back to us. But in
7 the switching of the body of the tracks, there -- I don't know. I
8 don't even -- I know the crews try to tell them, but it -- like I
9 said, if everybody was on the same channel, I think there would be
10 a lot more communication. The carmen work on their own separate
11 channel than all of our transportation guys. So once they're in a
12 track, they change the channel. My guys can no longer get ahold
13 of them.

14 Q. Okay. Thank you for that clarification.

15 A. You're welcome.

16 BY MR. GURZYNSKI:

17 Q. Andrew, Jason Gurzynski, FRA. Thank you for being here.

18 A. You're welcome.

19 Q. Just a real quick question. You mentioned there's two radio
20 channels that RCOs utilize in the eastbound yard, right? West
21 end, east end.

22 A. No, the two channels is -- the one channel, channel 20 is for
23 the eastbound yard, the east and west end. Channel 70 is more for
24 the receiving and arrival yards.

25 Q. Does mechanical operate on their own channel?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Do you know what?

3 A. I know if I need to get ahold of the leadman, I call on 0786,
4 but a lot of times if I call for a carman on that channel, I don't
5 get any answers.

6 Q. So if they're relaying or if they need information say from
7 you, the yardmaster, do they call you on one of the transportation
8 channels?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. So do you monitor or is the yardmaster's office set up to
11 monitor the carmen channel?

12 A. Yes, I have -- when I work, I have the carman's channel
13 selected.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Because for my crews, like I said, when I need to get trains
16 out, I'll have my crews call for air tests, and I want to make
17 sure they call.

18 Q. I understand. I have nothing further. Thank you.

19 A. You're welcome.

20 MR. CRAWFORD: I have nothing.

21 MR. BENDEL: Brian Bendel.

22 BY MR. BENDEL:

23 Q. When the carmen want to go into the RCO zone, do they always
24 call for permission?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. And the other question is, do they notify you when they leave
2 or do they just go when they're finished?

3 A. They just drop the flags and go. They usually don't even
4 call the RCO foreman to tell him that they're unlocking it.

5 Q. That's all I have.

6 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. Richard Skolnekovich, NTSB.

7 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

8 Q. Just a couple of follow-up questions. I'd kind of like to go
9 back to the yard, just kind of the yard make again. Are you
10 familiar with the switch indicator lights that are out there?

11 A. Switch what?

12 Q. Indicator lights or the scoreboard. Have you heard that
13 term?

14 A. I know, I know briefly about them, but I've never actually
15 operated them.

16 Q. Okay. Next question I've got, the night of the accident,
17 we're still kind of confused between whether or not it was the
18 Y397 or Y394. What -- how were you referring to him?

19 A. Because he was working down there, and I was told that he was
20 going to move from the 394 to be the 397, I called him by the 397.

21 Q. Called him by 397. Okay. Next question I've got, with RCOs
22 in general, do you have the ability or have you ever in the past
23 like stopped a RCO crew in the middle of work while other work was
24 going on?

25 A. I have stopped crews, yes.

1 Q. Okay. And you've got the authority to do so?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. All right. So then the night of the accident, just to
4 the best of your recollection, can you tell me what kind of work
5 Y397 was doing?

6 A. 397 does the same thing every night, drives tracks, pulls
7 them up and starts kicking, switching. That's all the 97 does.

8 Q. Okay. Can you kind of elaborate a little bit more on that?

9 A. After he did his tilt timeout, he ran his zone, and then he
10 started switching. I believe he started with eastbound 18 or
11 maybe eastbound 1. I can't remember, but he just -- he started
12 switching. When he finished that list, he went onto the next one,
13 and that's how 97 works.

14 Q. What kind of switching activity is done? Is it bad orders or
15 is it full cuts? What --

16 A. Full cuts. I mean they come out with what they'll fit in
17 their zone. Usually around 15, 1600 feet, they'll come out with
18 that, put that cut away and then they'll go get another cut.

19 Q. And the switch, how many, how many cuts do they typically
20 make per night just on average?

21 A. Per track, I would say 20 to 30 depending on the length.

22 Q. Okay. Are they cutting or building or --

23 A. No, they're just cutting.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Kicking cars down the lead into the tracks.

1 Q. All right. And then you have some inbound tracks that are
2 close by, that ladder track.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay. How often do you have inbounds coming in there during
5 their shift?

6 A. Quite often.

7 Q. Quite often. Could you give me like an average of each
8 night?

9 A. That's hard to say because the traffic changes so often here,
10 but I would say I probably get three trains in the eastbound a
11 night.

12 Q. Okay. Now, these three trains, are they receiving? What
13 kind of --

14 A. No.

15 Q. What do you do with these trains?

16 A. Inbounds --

17 Q. Inbounds.

18 A. -- come in, tie them down, cut away and then get them bled to
19 be switched.

20 Q. Okay. Now, the night of the accident, prior to the accident,
21 with 397, did you have much interaction on the radio talking to
22 him?

23 A. No, I did not.

24 Q. Okay. You did talk to him on the radio though, right?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay. Did you have any problems hearing his radio?

2 A. I did not.

3 Q. Okay. Did you have any problems hearing the carman's radio?

4 A. No.

5 Q. Okay. Did you have any problem with any radio communications
6 with any of the crews who were operating?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay. All right. And then after the accident, did you have
9 any problem reaching crews or having any problems with any of the
10 radios?

11 A. No. After the accident, I stopped everything and nothing
12 moved until about 5:30 in the morning.

13 Q. Okay. Now, when you stop them, do they all call back and
14 confirm that they've stopped movement?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Okay. So did you just --

17 A. Scan the cameras.

18 Q. Okay. I gotcha. Okay. So you just did a big broadcast.

19 A. Yeah, I selected all the channels I had my crews working on,
20 and then I told everybody to stop.

21 Q. Okay. And you just confirmed it with cameras?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay. When emergency services arrived, did you help
24 coordinate any of that or was it done by the MTOs?

25 A. That was done with the MTOs or the MTO, Mac Smith.

1 Q. Okay. Just based on your recollection, from the time the
2 incident happened until the first responders arrived, how long do
3 you think that was?

4 A. Ten to fifteen minutes.

5 Q. Okay. Did -- after the accident, did you talk to the foreman
6 of the 397 over the radio?

7 A. I did not.

8 Q. Okay. All right. Did you -- when the carman first
9 identified it as an emergency, was it -- could you understand his
10 radio?

11 A. Yeah, I could definitely understand it.

12 Q. Okay. All right. That's all the questions I have. Thank
13 you, Andrew.

14 A. You're welcome.

15 MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons with CSX. Andrew, I appreciate you
16 again. I appreciate you being here today. I don't think at this
17 time I've got any more questions for you.

18 MR. SCHMIDT: Okay.

19 BY MR. COX:

20 Q. I've got one question. From the time that you relayed to the
21 carmen that they had permission to lock 3 and 5 until you heard
22 the emergency broadcast from the carman, how much time do you
23 think passed?

24 A. I'd say 3 to 5 minutes.

25 Q. Thank you.

1 MR. GURZYNSKI: I've got nothing further. I'm sorry.

2 MR. AMMONS: Yeah. Steve Ammons again.

3 BY MR. AMMONS:

4 Q. I'm sorry. I did have one more questions for you. If we
5 were to ask you, is it possible to go back just a few days later
6 and get the switch list and the actual moves that were made by the
7 397, just prior to this incident --

8 A. Um-hum.

9 Q. -- that entire list and what his moves were, where he was
10 switching those into, could you tell us how to retrieve that
11 information?

12 A. Yes, I can pull up a switch list.

13 Q. And it shows exactly which cars he placed in which tracks?

14 A. Yeah, but it doesn't specify the times.

15 Q. Okay. Is there any way to specify the times on that or --

16 A. You would have --

17 Q. -- the order in which he switched them?

18 A. Yeah, you could figure it out. If you pulled up the switch
19 list, and you had all the cars that were on it, you would have to
20 go into each car and look up -- when you click on the car, it'll
21 have a time that it completed, the switch list part of that was
22 completed.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. It'll input when they do each cut.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. So you have to look through each car and then you can
2 determine where his cuts were and what time it was.

3 Q. Okay. That's helpful. That's all I've got. Thank you.

4 A. You're welcome.

5 MR. CRAWFORD: No questions.

6 MR. BENDEL: No questions.

7 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

8 Q. All right, Andrew. First of all, I really appreciate you
9 taking the time and helping us out with this. Before we kind of
10 close out, I kind of ask you, based on what you know and I know
11 hindsight being what it is, is there anything that you think, you
12 know, could help preclude this from ever happening again?

13 A. Honestly, I don't know.

14 Q. Okay. That's fine.

15 A. Because I mean one -- if they go to lock out track, they
16 should have somebody there with them in case they're not paying
17 complete attention. They're putting a blue flag up, they should
18 have had somebody there with them just to be on the lookout.

19 Q. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

20 A. I can't think of anything.

21 Q. Okay. All right. Well, if we have any questions in the
22 future, do you mind if we contact you?

23 A. No, not at all.

24 Q. Okay. All right. Well, on behalf of the NTSB, I really do
25 appreciate you coming in here and taking the time to talk to us.

1 And unless you've got anything else to add, we'll go ahead and end
2 this interview now.

3 A. I have nothing.

4 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. That concludes this interview.

5 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

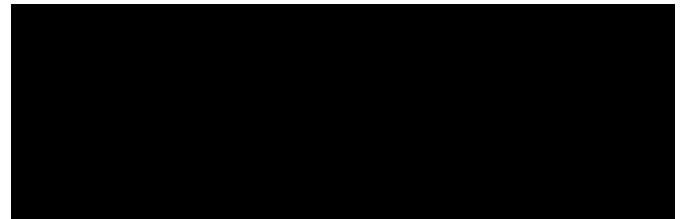
IN THE MATTER OF: CSX EMPLOYEE FATALITY IN
WALBRIDGE, OHIO
ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2023
Interview of Andrew Schmidt

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23FR017

PLACE: Walbridge, Ohio

DATE: September 19, 2023

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.



Transcriber