

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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NORFOLK SOUTHERN EMPLOYEE *

INJURED AT RAILYARD IN NORFOLK, *

Accident No.: RRD24FR015

VIRGINIA ON AUGUST 27, 2024 *

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Interview of: TREZ JOHNSON, Conductor
Norfolk Southern Railway

Norfolk, Virginia

Thursday,
August 29, 2024

APPEARANCES:

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. STROT: All right, good afternoon, my name is Ben Strot, I'm an investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board. Today is August 29th, 2024, we're here meeting at the pier master tower in Lambert yard. This interview is being conducted in reference to NTSB Accident Number RRD24FR015, a serious employee injury in Norfolk, Virginia on the Norfolk Southern railroad that occurred on August 27th, 2024.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged with determining a probable cause of transportation accidents and promoting transportation safety. We're not a part of the DOT, FRA, or any other regulatory agency. The NTSB has no regulatory or enforcement powers, we are -- we will publish recommendations to any party that we believe we can act on those recommendations to prevent accidents from happening in the future. There are several phases in this process, we're currently in the fact-finding phase that will be followed on by an analysis/probable cause finding, and finally, any recommendations that we see necessary. Today we are here to speak with Trez Johnson.

Before we begin, we'll go around the room and introduce ourselves for the transcriptionist. Please be sure to speak up, speak clearly and spell your last name as we go around. My name is Ben Strot, S-t-r-o-t, and I'm a rail accident investigator for the NTSB.

MR. JOHNSON: Trez Johnson, J-o-h-n-s-o-n, I started off at

1 CSX and now I work for Norfolk Southern.

2 MR. TRAYWICK: Jay Traywick, T-r-a-y-w-i-c-k, Transportation
3 Superintendent, Blue Ridge Division.

4 MR. HUNT: Randy Hunt, H-u-n-t, Senior Director of Operations
5 Safety at Norfolk Southern.

6 MR. MITCHELL: Jeff Mitchell, SMART Transportation, National
7 Safety Team.

8 MR. LANDY: Marcus Landy, FRA, L-a-n-d-y.

9 MR. GIBSON: Jordan Gibson, G-i-b-s-o-n, FRA, observer.

10 MR. MOULDON: David M-o-u-l-d-o-n, FRA, observer.

11 MR. SWIGERT: Lonnie Swigert, S-w-i-g-e-r-t, BLET Safety Task
12 Force.

13 MR. KALMAN: David Kalman, K-a-l-m-a-n, Operating Practices
14 Inspector with the FRA.

15 MS. GARCIA: Anne Garcia, G-a-r-c-i-a, human performance for
16 NTSB.

17 MR. STROT: All right. Thank you, everybody. Just a
18 reminder, everyone, as we go around asking questions, to just
19 restate your last name as you ask a question.

20 INTERVIEW OF TREZ JOHNSON

21 BY MR. STROT:

22 Q. All right, Trez, if you'll just start off, give us an
23 overview of your railroad experience, what you've done, where
24 you've been, and who you've worked for.

25 A. Again, I worked for CSX originally, starting in 2021. As a

1 conductor, I did -- I was RCO qualified, as well, working an
2 eight-line yard there and I did some road trains from time to
3 time. Then I started with -- then I started working for Norfolk
4 Southern last year and started off in Winston-Salem and took a
5 permanent transfer here to Norfolk. And this is our yard, so
6 that's really it.

7 Q. So you did your new hire training in Winston-Salem with NS?

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. And was that yard work, as well, or road or --

10 A. It's like a yard local, so it's yard work but some jobs, they
11 do industries but they weren't considered locals.

12 Q. Okay. And you said you've been here since last year, about
13 when last year did you start?

14 A. In July.

15 Q. July. And that was in Winston, July 2023?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. When did you get here to Lambert yard?

18 A. March 3rd.

19 Q. March 3rd of this year. Okay. When you got here to Norfolk
20 from Winston-Salem, what kind of training did you get on the local
21 operations here?

22 A. I've had about six weeks of training, each job about four to
23 five days, weeks in Lambert's Point and I've got some training in
24 Portlock, as well, for the majority of the jobs, four to five
25 days.

1 Q. Okay. Do you feel like that was sufficient?

2 A. Yes, because I've already had railroad experience, so it was
3 more important to learn the territory, I mean, and understand what
4 we're doing, of course, but it was -- I was just trying to figure
5 out where I was.

6 Q. Yeah, okay. Great, thank you. So now we'll pivot over to,
7 if you could, just take me through the day of the accident, from
8 the time you came on duty through the accident period and then
9 when you went home that day, just kind of everything that went on
10 from the job briefing, what you all talked about in the job
11 briefing, what you were doing out there, what you heard and saw.

12 A. Okay. The job came on duty at 3 o'clock, I was utility
13 today, we would work -- well, that day, we were working the empty
14 yard, the yardmaster came in and gave us our paperwork, which is
15 an inventory of the tracks we would be looking at and in terms of
16 what he needed. At that point, we was just switching tracks so we
17 was grabbing bad orders from tracks and putting it in our inbound
18 four, which is like shop track for, you know, the carmen and
19 everything.

20 So we did that the first half of our work and then went to
21 lunch and when we came out of lunch, we were told to grab the bad
22 order out of the makeup track, which is the car they already
23 pulled, it was supposed to be a good car that's sitting on the
24 road train, but it was a bad order so we had to take it out, put
25 it back and go put that one up at Inbound 4 and then -- excuse me,

1 retract it. We didn't put it at Inbound 4 because Inbound 4 was
2 full, we put it in the Makeup 1 so when it was un-pulled, the next
3 shift could grab it, but -- and then we go work on the tracks,
4 open, control the knuckles, make sure everything's coupled and
5 then that was going to be it for the day.

6 So I was talking to Charles and I told him to get flags,
7 which is to let the empty yard tower know that we were going to be
8 working these tracks so they wouldn't put -- send any cars until
9 it was on 19 and 20 and 11 and 12 because they were pull tracks
10 and we was trying to get a good start for the next shift to hook
11 and pull so the road trains could be prepared, so we'd have it
12 ready for the road trains.

13 So I went 19 and 20 and he worked 11 and 12 after lunch and
14 then that's when I heard the radio, he was screaming "ahead" on
15 the radio, but I wasn't sure what was going on and he sounded
16 frantic, so I got on the radio and I'm like where are you at, is
17 everything okay and then he said "ahead" again, like I said, if
18 you listen to the recording, of course, I thought it was an animal
19 because, you know, there's wild animals here, because I seen a fox
20 before and I'm like is it a fox, like, because he might be scared
21 of the fox and I understand, it's a wild animal, and he was like
22 no, nothing here, but then it sounded like he was okay, like he
23 calmed, completely calm. So I just thought that felt weird, so I
24 went across and asked him on the radio "where you at, where you
25 at," and when I found him, I went to check to see if he was okay

1 and he was on the ground, but I seen a cut on his arm. So at
2 first I'm thinking it's just -- it's a cut, I mean, yeah, it's a
3 cut, it's bleeding but it's like I don't know what's going on, is
4 everything okay, he said he needed a ride, so I called for PTI
5 over the radio because I'm not aware that it was a serious
6 situation because I don't see any signs of anything serious.

7 And then a little bit later he said he can't walk and I'm
8 like no, we need the med kit and he's saying he got a cut on an
9 arm and now he's saying he can't walk. And we got the ambulance
10 and everything and I was talking to him, trying to figure out what
11 was going on and I'm like I'm not sure what's happening, so now
12 I'm trying to look at his body, so I'm like lift up your shirt,
13 you know, like let me see something, but after a while he was
14 saying his hip hurt or whatever.

15 So when I looked and I seen the blood, I took off my shirt
16 and my belt and I wrapped it around his body and our engineer came
17 down to see what was going, then he found out, so he went back up
18 to let people know where we was and the lead came from the empty
19 tower, which I don't know if it was really empty tower, but he's
20 coming from this way and he came with the -- a med kit and patched
21 up, basically, his arm and then the medics came and took him off.

22 Q. Okay. While you were there talking to him, did you ask him
23 what happened or did he ever say what happened?

24 A. I didn't know what happened, I was confused by the whole
25 situation because, I mean, he was just on the ground and I was

1 like why are you on the ground.

2 Q. Yeah, okay. Did you notice, did he have a light with him?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. What kind of light did he have?

5 A. The lantern.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. One second, I want to make sure because I -- yeah, I want to
8 say he had a lantern.

9 Q. Okay, okay.

10 A. I think.

11 Q. When you're down in the yard working like that, what is the
12 lighting like?

13 A. The lighting could always be better. In retrospect, it's
14 nighttime --

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. -- and you can't see. Even if you do try to put lights
17 everywhere in here and light the whole thing up, the cars are
18 tall, regardless, so there's going to be shadows to the point you
19 can't see, so I have my flashlight, obviously, it's important.
20 But I mean, it could always be better.

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. But it's the lighting of the track, which is manually
23 controlled.

24 Q. Do most guys use a hand lantern or headlamps, what's --

25 A. Yeah, everyone uses a light at night, I mean, it's in the

1 rules.

2 Q. Yeah, but do they -- most of the guys prefer a lantern or a
3 headlamp or --

4 A. I prefer -- personally, I prefer a headlamp because I need
5 access to my hands --

6 Q. Right.

7 A. -- to work. But you see a mix, some people carry both, you
8 carry the lantern and a handheld -- I mean a headlamp.

9 Q. Got you, okay. All right. And you had a student that day,
10 or a conductor trainee.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. How often do you get a trainee?

13 A. Every now and again, but I have a year --

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. -- so I can take trainees.

16 Q. Okay. All right. When you're out there working, how often
17 do you see somebody coming out, like operations testing, you know,
18 a manager actually in the yard doing operations testing or checks
19 or whatever it's called?

20 A. Like I said, I just recently got here, I've seen it a few
21 times, but someone's always around.

22 Q. Yeah. Um-hum.

23 A. But I'm not sure what they're supposed to be doing, I just do
24 my job.

25 Q. Yeah. Whenever someone is out there, do they ever approach

1 you and just talk to you about what's going on and, you know,
2 maybe give you some feedback on what you're doing in your short
3 amount of time here?

4 A. I haven't necessarily had that, but I've had them -- like,
5 when I didn't know what I was doing, I've had some of the
6 yardmasters come out and walk with me and show me the territory
7 and everything again, you know, when I marked up here.

8 Q. Okay. So when you have a question about what's going on, you
9 don't have a problem asking and they will send somebody out to
10 help you out?

11 A. Yeah, I don't have a problem asking anymore.

12 Q. And they'll send somebody out to help you?

13 A. I mean, if they can, yeah, most of the time. Like I said,
14 when I first got here and I really didn't have an idea of where I
15 was going, the yardmaster came down from the tower and walked with
16 me to show me where I was supposed to be going.

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. Like I've had that happen before, yes.

19 MR. STROT: Okay, all right. I'm going to go ahead and pass
20 it around and let some other folks in here ask some questions.

21 Jay.

22 MR. TRAYWICK: I'm good. Trez, thank you. I'm good for now.

23 BY MR. HUNT:

24 Q. What job were you working? I know utility brakeman --

25 A. I was on 39 UUL, I was the utility for the empty yard.

1 Q. Thirty-nine UL?

2 A. UUL.

3 MR. MITCHELL: I don't have any questions for you, but it was
4 a good job taking your shirt off and put pressure on, I mean, that
5 was good thinking.

6 MR. JOHNSON: Thank you.

7 BY MR. SWIGERT:

8 Q. Lonnie Swigert, S-w-i-g-e-r-t, BLET Safety Task Force. When
9 you're out there in the yard, do you notice any safety issues or
10 anything in the area, in your working area out there?

11 A. It's been reported, again, in the empty yard, the grass is
12 just like really, really tall, like really tall, it's over the
13 rails, but the engineer reported like stuff like that. You can't
14 control wild animals, of course, but it doesn't mean you don't see
15 them from time to time. I have noticed -- that's all I've
16 noticed, like usually if there is some, a conductor typically
17 speaks out on it, they will say something.

18 Q. And when you say something is it typically taken care of, you
19 know?

20 A. Oh, outside of this grass, basically, I haven't had any
21 issues.

22 Q. On the day of the incident, and he probably already asked
23 this and it was just something in a note I wrote down, did you
24 feel rushed in any sort of way or anything or was it just --

25 A. No, because there was a lot of confusion, right, because

1 typically, I mean, frantic is frantic.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. You don't go from being frantic to talking how me and you are
4 talking right now and there's nothing that happened. Like I said,
5 it just felt weird, so I went to go check.

6 MR. SWIGERT: That's all I have at this time.

7 BY MR. KALMAN:

8 Q. Dave Kalman, FRA. Have you ever worked with this conductor
9 before --

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. -- this accident? Yes? Okay, about how many times?

12 A. Just a couple. Yeah, he's -- I'm not sure how long he's been
13 marked up, but he was in training when I first got here, I trained
14 him -- well, I can't say I personally trained, you know, but yeah,
15 he worked two jobs that I've seen him doing marked up, we worked a
16 couple of jobs together.

17 Q. Okay. And you saw him when you reported for duty and your
18 job briefing?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. Could you describe his state of mind?

21 A. I mean, he was fine.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. He was on the extra board, so you know, he was on call, but
24 he came in, we talked about what we were going to do for the day,
25 like I said, the first half we were switching bad orders out and

1 the second half we were working the tracks. It wasn't a lot to
2 me, personally, but like, you know, we discussed how we were going
3 to do it and that's why I went to the other tracks and he went to
4 the other tracks just to help the next shift out. Since we
5 couldn't pull anything because the makeup track was full and when
6 it's time for them to go get the cars, it would already been
7 ready.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. I mean, yeah, he seemed fine.

10 Q. Okay. And you worked that specific job, the UL-30, not the
11 utility but the job with the engineer?

12 A. I've worked the foreman position one time since I've marked
13 up.

14 Q. One time?

15 A. Yeah, I usually sit on the utility side.

16 Q. Okay. Okay. Are you aware of the previous incident here at
17 Lambert's Point?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Okay. How did you hear about that?

20 A. I was there.

21 Q. You were there?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay. Are there any job aids for these jobs in Lambert's
24 Point?

25 A. What do you mean?

1 Q. Like do you get maps or like descriptions printed out of like
2 how to actually work the job?

3 A. I don't have work plans, and I apologize. Yeah, like the
4 trainees and stuff, at least here in Lambert's Point, I got three
5 small maps that shows me -- it don't show me the entire, the
6 entire yard, don't --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. -- get me wrong, but it shows me where the leads are and like
9 I said, if I had it in my pocket, I would've showed you them.
10 Yeah, I have three little, small ones that show -- but it only
11 shows the western side, it doesn't show the eastern side, so I
12 mean, I don't really know how to explain that.

13 Q. Yeah.

14 A. It confused me a little.

15 Q. And do these job aids, do they have like written procedures
16 or directions on how to complete certain tasks?

17 A. In the maps I have, no.

18 Q. No, okay. When you did that work, that job, as a foreman,
19 what did you personally do when you had to go in between
20 equipment, you know, to adjust a knuckle or a drawbar?

21 A. Well, typically, once you go onto the track, since you know
22 you're going to be getting between cars, you get three-step.

23 Q. Um-hum.

24 A. You get a stick and spike, usually, so I can only speak from
25 my experience, you don't even have to completely get in between

1 the cars unless, you know, the knuckles are bypassed or something
2 like that. Usually you just -- they're already like this and you
3 just get the spike, put it in and move the stick and then open the
4 knuckle and just go together. I ain't had situations where it's
5 been different than that.

6 Q. Okay. And were you trained on the use of this -- what did
7 you call it, a sticking spike?

8 A. Yeah, a stick and spike.

9 Q. Oh, stick and --

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. -- spike, okay.

12 A. It's a wooden stick and then a spike with a washer over top,
13 but --

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Yeah. Technically, yeah, I was shown how to do it by the
16 person training me, yeah. It ain't like I took a class or
17 something like that, but yeah, I've used it.

18 Q. Okay. And back to the procedure when you get in between
19 equipment, you know, you said you get three-step and you use the
20 spike tool.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Is there anything else you do procedure-wise?

23 A. Not that I can think of at the moment. Like I said, I
24 usually work the track. The east track only holds about 40 cars,
25 so I just walk and check separations, check for bad orders and

1 make sure the cars ain't derailed because you can see over there,
2 you know, it's on -- it's coming from the dumper going to the
3 tracks, so like it's potentially a derail and little stuff like
4 that or a bypass and usually -- but not -- I open it with the
5 stick and spike and it's usually like this, so I don't have to
6 move too much, just go and open it.

7 Q. Okay. And back to the previous incident that you were at,
8 was there any safety training after that incident, any additional
9 job briefings?

10 A. There was a bunch of job briefings and stuff after that
11 incident. Now, training, I haven't really worked that job since,
12 you know, I've been holding the job I'm on now for like a month
13 and a half or so.

14 MR. KALMAN: Okay. Okay, thank you.

15 BY MS. GARCIA:

16 Q. Anne Garcia. You mentioned you work utility --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- for the empty yard, so can you tell me something about
19 what those job duties are?

20 A. Utility. I assist the foreman with any requests he has, like
21 lining switches or getting brakes. If he needs me to work a
22 track, I'll work a track, as well. Once we get the cars together,
23 I'll put it in the makeup tracks up in the empty yard, watch the
24 shove as it goes in, like little things like that. And usually if
25 he needs help with anything, obviously, we'll -- sorry, I'll be

1 there to, like, assist him because, you know, two heads is better
2 than one, if you're trying to figure out how you want to get a job
3 done, I'll come with suggestions, like if I know an easier way.

4 Q. Okay. And the conductor trainee was working with you or
5 shadowing you?

6 A. He was alongside me, yes.

7 Q. Okay, were you providing some training for him, on-the-job
8 training?

9 A. Um-hum. I taught him everything he knows and (indiscernible)
10 I know, because I don't know what the other people he's been next
11 to said to him, so I taught him everything that I know.

12 Q. Okay. Going back to the time of the incident, you said that
13 he suddenly sounded very calm and you thought that was weird.

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And then you went to him. How did you get to him, what path
16 did you take?

17 A. I went around. So if you can see, these are the tracks that
18 were basically in -- I came from this way, from the rear, because
19 one, they're dumping cars and they already told us where they were
20 dumping, sending the cars to and which tracks, so I wasn't going
21 to cross in between any cars, not knowing, you know, so I went
22 this way and then came up top and that's when I found him.

23 Q. Okay. Were you walking or running?

24 A. Yeah, I was walking, really.

25 Q. Were you walking fast, I mean, were you --

1 A. Yeah, to a certain extent, yeah, just because I was trying to
2 see -- he sounded calm, so I wasn't too worried, so it ain't like
3 I was being frantic or running, but I was just keeping
4 communication on the radio to see where he was and ask him what he
5 did see. I mean, as I was going up. Then when I saw him, you
6 know --

7 Q. So you were asking what did he see to help you --

8 A. Like animal-wise.

9 Q. -- to find out -- okay.

10 A. What side of the tracks is on, because again, I --
11 originally, I thought he was just scared of a -- they scared of
12 spiders, you know, people are scared of spiders and little bugs
13 and birds, so it could be anything and it's nighttime so, you
14 know --

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. -- people, people be nervous, so I'm talking to see if it's
17 something like that, I'm like are you scared of the fox, is it --
18 like I even said it on the radio, like I said, it's recorded, I'm
19 like is it the fox, he's like no. I'm like is anything in this
20 track, like do you see -- so like no, I'm like where are you at
21 and he says he's on the 10 and 11 side, so --

22 Q. Okay. Have you heard people over the radio, like start
23 screaming because of a spider in the past?

24 A. I saw people drop their flashlights over a spider, you know,
25 and pick it back up and like I'm sorry, you know, it was a spider.

1 Like little things, I mean, you don't know how someone's going to
2 react over -- over animals, I mean, that's the truth, you don't
3 know you're scared of something until it's in front of you.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. Well, that's my personal opinion, though.

6 Q. Yeah. And did he say anything to you when you got there?

7 A. No. I asked him was he okay and what was going on because I
8 seen the cut on his arm and then he said he needed a ride, so I
9 tried to get him a ride with PTI because I didn't think it was
10 anything other than -- and I was like I'm not going to call for an
11 ambulance over -- you know, I was going to report it, of course,
12 but I just didn't know how to go about it at that time.

13 Q. Okay. Did he say anything to anybody else that you
14 overheard?

15 A. Not that I know of, no.

16 Q. Okay. What is the training that you've received at Norfolk
17 Southern?

18 A. I've been on every job that we have here about four to five
19 times, like I said, you get to see the job. Like how I've been
20 trained and how I've seen the training, typically, when you're a
21 CT -- so I won't even use Norfolk Southern, I mean Lambert's
22 Point, exactly, but usually when you're a CT --

23 Q. CT is conductor trainee?

24 A. Conductor trainee, yeah.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. You'll have a conductor or a foreman, even an engineer
2 sometimes, you will watch what they do like the first day, maybe
3 the second day and then like the third day they let you get a
4 little bit more hands on because you're going to be doing it by
5 yourself after a while. So once it's your turn to do it, you got
6 a little bit more confidence, you know, you're not as worried. It
7 ain't like they're throwing you to the wolves, at least from my --
8 from my own experience, as I shadow, I see how the person did it
9 maybe a day or two, then you work with the same person again,
10 probably the next day and then all right, you're ready, and he
11 lets you, you know, talk on the radio a little bit more and like
12 do the job.

13 Q. Right. So when you're doing training, did you ever get
14 tested?

15 A. What do you mean, on -- I mean, right before you mark up, you
16 take a test, you have the training coordinator watches you as you
17 control the job.

18 Q. Okay. And did you get the results of the test?

19 A. Yeah, technically, if you don't do well on the tests, you
20 can't mark up, which just means you can't get promoted to an
21 actual conductor.

22 Q. Okay. But do they go over with you any answers that you got
23 wrong?

24 A. I'm assuming -- I'm sorry, I thought you meant like hands-on
25 tests, you're talking about the actual --

1 Q. Yeah, the actual tests.

2 A. When you take the actual tests of like the rulebooks or track
3 authority and stuff, yeah, you take that and then like, yeah --

4 Q. Is that before you get here?

5 A. It's before you get here and before you mark up.

6 Q. Both times?

7 A. Yeah. It shows you the answers missed and then, you know,
8 you get (indiscernible) to retest.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. But I think if you miss it -- I didn't, so I'm not sure, but
11 I think if you fail it twice or something, you can't work for
12 Norfolk Southern.

13 Q. Okay. And the testing that you get on the job, do you get
14 the results right away, do they tell you if you did something
15 wrong?

16 A. On an actual test, yeah, it tells you when you -- what you
17 got wrong and what your percentage is and if you're talking about
18 the hands-on tests, that's someone watching you to see if you're
19 doing stuff safely and stuff. I mean, if you're doing something
20 wrong, the person who's going to pass or fail you will usually
21 tell you well, you didn't do this and this is why this happened,
22 or if you did good, a good job, you know, I think you'll be okay,
23 dah-dah-dah-dah, if you need anything, call, stuff like that.

24 Q. Okay. What are your thoughts on the training you've
25 received?

1 A. My own personal training, it's been from, like I said, a few
2 years ago and I was trained from a different group of people, but
3 I liked my training overall. By the time it was time for me to
4 actually do stuff on my own, I felt like I could. I wasn't as
5 overwhelmed. Now, when I came here, it was a little bit more
6 overwhelming, but that's because it's a lot, I mean, you've seen
7 the yard, it's a lot.

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. It's different names for everything and everything has got a
10 nickname, you know, but it's just a lot. But I was pretty
11 comfortable coming here, as well.

12 Q. Okay. Do you think your training was sufficient?

13 A. Um-hum.

14 Q. Okay. Jumping back to the time of the incident and your
15 response to go to him, have you -- how did you know what to do and
16 it turned out to be an emergency situation? Have you received
17 training?

18 A. No, not from Norfolk Southern or any railroad. Well, pardon
19 me. When you go to McDonough and Norfolk Southern in -- wherever,
20 usually, you know, they practice job briefings and they show
21 evacuation routes and stuff and they assign -- so like in that
22 aspect, like kind of, but like in the hands-on situation like what
23 just happened, I've never been trained. I mean, I know to call
24 over the radio, you know, because who else is going to help, but
25 no. Yeah, no.

1 Q. Okay. You've never received any training on like symptoms of
2 when someone's going into shock or has a concussion or --

3 A. No.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Not that I can recall.

6 MS. GARCIA: Right. Okay, that's all I have right now.

7 BY MR. STROT:

8 Q. Okay, all right. Trez, I appreciate it, I just got a few
9 more questions for you. Earlier you talked about setting some bad
10 orders out --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- before lunch, did you do that with the job on the empty
13 yard side or was that with a different job?

14 A. No, with him on the empty yard side.

15 Q. Okay. Any issues when you all were making those bad order
16 set-outs, any hiccups or anything you had to help out with there
17 or just normal?

18 A. No, everything was normal. I actually -- I was the one doing
19 the switching, I had him at the switch, throwing it for me and
20 bringing it back to me.

21 Q. Okay. Any reason for that or just --

22 A. No, just because he's relatively new, yeah, I just helped him
23 out a little bit, it wasn't no -- and I also wanted the trainee to
24 see how to do it, like -- but yeah, there wasn't any like specific
25 reason or anything like -- yeah.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I just did it.

3 Q. All right. So I want to go back to the empty tracks and say
4 you're in -- working in empty track hypothetical --

5 A. Uh-huh.

6 Q. -- and you need to make a separation to work on something,
7 say it's a knuckle that you got to get in there to work on, so you
8 tell your engineer to --

9 A. Take it ahead.

10 Q. -- to take it ahead and get some room, would you secure those
11 cars before he takes them ahead, the cars that are on this side of
12 the cut?

13 A. So technically, right, when you take them ahead you get your
14 three-step and again, I don't know which side I'm working on, but
15 if I take it ahead and I'm getting three-step and working on that
16 one right there, then the engineer has, you know, control over
17 that stuff.

18 Q. Um-hum. But what about the other cars, say there was another
19 cut of cars on the track on -- we're calling this the west end
20 here, there's a cut of cars there on the west end of the track, a
21 cut of cars on the east end of the track they have your locomotive
22 on, so I see what you're saying, you get your three-step on the
23 east-end cars. But let's say there's a cut of cars on the west
24 end and you're going to pull back that 50 feet, do you secure
25 those cars on the west end?

- 1 A. So to start, I've never had a situation like that, so --
- 2 Q. Okay.
- 3 A. -- I'm not really sure what I would do in the time. I know
- 4 to get three-step on what I'm working on.
- 5 Q. Yeah.
- 6 A. So wherever I'm working at, I would make sure it's secured,
- 7 if that makes sense.
- 8 Q. Yeah.
- 9 A. Yeah.
- 10 Q. Okay. If you made that cut, and I know you say you've never
- 11 done it before, but do you know how quickly those cars would roll
- 12 back in?
- 13 A. No, I don't know because, like I said, usually when I work
- 14 the track, the most you got to do is pull the cut lever and push
- 15 the stick.
- 16 Q. Got you.
- 17 A. So I'm not even like literally in it, I'm not near the
- 18 knuckle, anyway.
- 19 Q. Okay, all right. Last question I have is, is the empty yard
- 20 normally this full, I mean, is this pretty normal to have every
- 21 track full of cars?
- 22 A. Yes and no, I mean, because you have -- you have slow days
- 23 or, you know, slow in production or business --
- 24 Q. Um-hum.
- 25 A. -- so it may not be as full, but at the same time you have

1 rapid days where, I mean, the tracks is full, the tracks being
2 full, yeah, I mean, it's not really a difference in work.

3 MR. STROT: Okay, all right, appreciate it. That's all the
4 questions I have.

5 Jay.

6 MR. TRAYWICK: No, sir, thank you.

7 MR. STROT: Okay.

8 BY MR. HUNT:

9 Q. And I apologize if you already said this, when you walked
10 around the end to go up and check on the conductor, was your CT
11 with you?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay, so he was there the whole time?

14 A. I mean, he was with me, yes.

15 MR. HUNT: Okay. And I think that's it, thank you.

16 MR. MITCHELL: No further questions.

17 BY MR. SWIGERT:

18 Q. This is Lonnie Swigert, BLET Safety Task Force. Previously
19 you said the -- you talked about the foreman on the job, that day
20 of the incident was Mr. Swann (ph.) the foreman?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay. And you said, I think you -- I believe you said you've
23 worked the foreman job at least once, previously?

24 A. I've worked it once, yes.

25 Q. Once, okay. So when you were making -- when you guys tie on,

1 you go into an empty track, you tie on originally, right, there's
2 a couple brakes, is that correct?

3 A. Yeah, two.

4 Q. Yeah, you knock them off and you're going to start making any
5 couplings that aren't made.

6 A. Um-hum.

7 Q. When you find one that's not made and you bump into it, if
8 the tie doesn't make -- do the cars roll away typically or do they
9 stay where they're at?

10 A. That really just all depends. Yes, I've seen it roll before,
11 but usually it's not like it goes way out there. If it's going to
12 roll, it will separate and then come right back, so it's not like
13 -- like almost any time, if that makes sense.

14 Q. Okay, yeah. So then in the instance that happens and it ties
15 back on and it's still butted and you can't get it with your stick
16 and your -- and if you come right to that, you stretch a little
17 bit and just open the knuckle and try again or whatever, how quick
18 do you think that rolls in? I mean, I'm sure it depends on how
19 far you stretch or --

20 A. I'm going to say that part, I can't -- I can't answer.

21 Q. It probably depends on how many cars there are or how much
22 weight --

23 A. Yeah.

24 MR. SWIGERT: All right. I think that's all I have right
25 now. Thank you.

1 BY MR. KALMAN:

2 Q. Dave Kalman, FRA. Have you received any training on
3 emergency procedures, if you come across a coworker that's clearly
4 in distress, open wounds?

5 A. No, I haven't received training, we don't do like CPR and
6 stuff here or doing hasty tourniquets or nothing, no.

7 Q. Okay. And when you came across the foreman, did he give you
8 any indication of what had happened to him?

9 A. No. Originally, like I said, he was the calmest person.

10 Q. Um-hum.

11 A. So I'm not -- I mean, I do see, I visually see the cut on his
12 arm, but I'm not aware of what's going on.

13 Q. Okay. And you mentioned that he said he needed a ride.

14 A. Yeah, like a vehicle because, I mean, he was on the ground --

15 Q. Um-hum.

16 A. -- and I thought he was like -- you know, like out of breath
17 or, you know, just --

18 Q. Okay. Is there any reason why you originally called for a
19 PTI van?

20 A. That's the taxi here.

21 Q. Um-hum.

22 A. I was going to have him get in the taxi and I was going to do
23 the rest of the work.

24 Q. Okay, so you were just going to send him away, just --

25 A. Well, because he said he needed a ride, so I thought --

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. -- he needed to get up there, so I was calling for a ride for
3 him, that's all.

4 Q. Okay, he said he needed a ride and yeah, you were just going
5 to put him in the van, okay. Did he, by chance, mention, you
6 know, hey, don't call an ambulance, don't call for help?

7 A. Not that I can recall.

8 Q. No, okay. And have you ever heard of any other individuals
9 or crews in the empty yard having any close calls of equipment
10 rolling back?

11 A. Not that I can recall. Like I said, usually I'm the utility,
12 I don't -- I mean, I do -- I can work tracks --

13 Q. Yeah.

14 A. -- but I don't even usually be the person working the tracks,
15 so --

16 Q. Okay. And this foreman, did he -- was there that object, the
17 stick and the spike, was that --

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. -- anywhere near him?

20 A. Not when I saw him, no.

21 Q. No. Okay, so you don't know if he was using one or not?

22 A. I mean, I can say with certainty -- well, I can't say with
23 certainty, no. Commonly, that's the only way you can open the
24 knuckle is with the stick and the spike, you can't -- unless you
25 stretch and just keep hitting knuckles, that's the only way you

1 can open it because you got to use the spike and put it through
2 the hole that's on the knuckle and then you use the stick to like
3 put some pressure to open the knuckle as you hold it. But like I
4 said, the knuckle -- I'm sorry, I mean, I don't know how to
5 explain it, but like the knuckle is usually right here, the stick
6 is about this long and you usually put the spike there and you can
7 hold the cut lever and once you line the stick and the spike up,
8 all you need to do is hold the stick and get the cut lever and do
9 that. Like I said, unless it was another reason, I just don't
10 know what happened there.

11 Q. Right. Okay. And when you come across, you know, knuckles
12 butted, whatnot, you separate the equipment 50 feet, get your
13 three-step, right, do you secure equipment on the opposite end?

14 A. Like I said, I've never -- I haven't had that, I haven't run
15 across something like that. Usually --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- if the knuckle's just close like this, like I said, you
18 can open the one knuckle with the stick and spike, no problem.
19 Now, to bypass, yeah, like you got to take it ahead, but my --
20 it's not usually bypass for me.

21 MR. KALMAN: Okay. All right, thank you.

22 BY MS. GARCIA:

23 Q. Anne Garcia. I have just a few more questions. Okay, first
24 just for my clarification, who was your supervisor that day?

25 A. Like the pier master, I think it was Chris Davis, he was the

1 pier master. The yardmaster was Kyndall, I don't know her last
2 name.

3 Q. Okay. How often do you see your supervisor in the field?

4 A. I see my yardmaster like at the beginning of each shift.
5 Again, I have access to them pretty much the whole time. The pier
6 master, I don't really know, to be honest.

7 Q. Okay. Thank you. What are the procedures that Norfolk
8 Southern has in place for reporting safety concerns?

9 A. If you see it, report it. I mean --

10 Q. Who would you report it to, how would you report it?

11 A. Either the -- I mean, superintendent, our pier master or the
12 yardmaster, depending on what it is. Like if it's like the grass
13 or something, you report it over the radio, yeah, this grass is
14 high, you know, just letting you all know you can't see, it's over
15 the rails or, you know, stuff like that.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. So I would say the yardmaster, just because that's who I
18 would talk to if I seen something.

19 Q. Okay. And you just do it over the radio?

20 A. Um-hum.

21 Q. Okay. Have you ever reported safety concerns, you,
22 personally?

23 A. I haven't. I've been on the job like that, but usually it's
24 just the high grass. So I got -- I'm sorry, I haven't really had
25 any other situations outside of high grass.

1 Q. Okay. Are the people in your department encouraged to report
2 safety concerns?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. How was that conveyed to you?

5 A. Well --

6 Q. The encouragement.

7 Q. -- the conductors will say, the yardmasters will say, you
8 know, like don't be quiet about something, if you see something
9 and it's going to affect your work, then report it, just keep
10 reporting it every time you see it.

11 Q. Okay. And do you know of other people who have reported
12 safety concerns?

13 A. I'm not sure.

14 Q. Okay. Are people that you work with, are they ever
15 encouraged to report deviations from procedures when they see
16 them?

17 A. I mean, yeah, I've been taught it in school and stuff like
18 that, you know, if you see something unsafe, say something.

19 Q. Okay, in school. How about here at the yard?

20 A. Not really, I can't say that, but typically, right -- and I'm
21 -- I'm sorry, because I can't really answer that question.
22 Typically, if you see something unsafe, normally someone's going
23 to say something, you know, correct you, because nobody's -- as
24 far as I know, you're not just doing --

25 (Noise interference.)

1 MR. JOHNSON: -- that might put anything -- you know, so if
2 they see it, then you just misunderstood it, you don't know what's
3 going on yet. So typically someone will stop you, you're not
4 supposed to do that, don't -- yeah.

5 MS. GARCIA: Um-hum.

6 MR. JOHNSON: That's dangerous.

7 BY MS. GARCIA:

8 Q. Yeah. Do you ever feel pressured, like a time pressure to
9 get something done or --

10 A. No, not really. I do everything how I can do it, you know,
11 I'm not going to rush or try to move faster than what I'm able to.

12 Q. Okay. And my last question is have you been given all the
13 resources you need to carry out your work in a safe way?

14 A. Yeah, I mean, I've still been asking for a stick and spike
15 and I need a new brake stick but, you know, they're back orders,
16 stuff that's out of your control. But for the most part, yeah,
17 I'm given everything I got and asked -- I'm told how to do the job
18 and since we have -- we usually have two people on a crew, it's
19 not usually just the conductor, so I mean, I always got another
20 head to give me advice.

21 Q. Okay. Your radios, do they work well?

22 A. Sometimes. I mean, yeah, the -- because the radio is just
23 another thing where, you know, sometimes you have the best of
24 days, it's the best of days, you can hear everything, hear
25 everyone no matter how far you are, you know, sometimes you got

1 the extra long antenna, you know, and then sometimes you don't
2 know what happened for a little bit, it's just not coming in clear
3 or something, but usually if it doesn't come in clear, at least
4 for me, "can you say it again, I couldn't hear you." If I can't
5 understand you, I make it clear. Most of the engineers, if they
6 can't hear on the radio, stop all movement, "say it again, what's
7 going on," yeah. So I mean even when it sucks, everyone's doing
8 what they can, but my radio, I got an Icom, so it's like --

9 Q. I don't know what that is.

10 A. Yeah, I'm sorry, it's like it's a radio, like it's -- it's
11 good and then it's not, you know, and it's just like a pencil,
12 yeah, once it wears down, it wears down.

13 MS. GARCIA: Okay, thank you.

14 MR. STROT: All right. I don't have any other questions.
15 Does anybody else? I'll give everybody in the room one chance.

16 BY MR. HUNT:

17 Q. I just -- and I think you answered this a couple different
18 ways, but I just want to be perfectly clear, you never explicitly
19 asked Mr. Swann what happened?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Okay, so -- and he never said, "this happened to me"?

22 (No audible response.)

23 MR. HUNT: Okay, thank you, sorry.

24 MR. JOHNSON: Yeah.

25 MR. HUNT: That was Randy Hunt, NS.

1 MR. JOHNSON: Say again?

2 MR. HUNT: I was just saying my name for the recording.

3 MR. JOHNSON: Okay.

4 MR. STROT: Anyone else? Go ahead.

5 BY MR. MITCHELL:

6 Q. Jeff Mitchell, SMART. You made a comment there a second ago
7 about you said there's usually another man on the job with the
8 conductor?

9 A. I'm saying here, that's what made -- makes things easier
10 because you got another man on the job.

11 Q. Is that a brakeman or --

12 A. Yeah, a brakeman like me, utility.

13 Q. Okay, you're a utility man or a brakeman?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. But there's not a brakeman on the job?

16 A. Oh, no. It probably would be way easier if we did have a
17 brakeman on every job, you know, but --

18 Q. Okay. But the utility man is the extra floating man that
19 helps out?

20 A. Yeah.

21 MR. MITCHELL: Okay, thank you.

22 BY MR. KALMAN:

23 Q. Dave Kalman, FRA. You mentioned your training here at
24 Norfolk Southern was six weeks?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. And about four to five days per job, correct?

2 A. Just about, yeah.

3 Q. Okay. If you could, for me, on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being
4 terrible, 10 being the best thing ever, could you rate your
5 training experience?

6 A. Like a 7.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. But it feels a little different for me, again, because I was
9 already --

10 Q. Right.

11 A. -- conductor qualified, it's not like -- yeah -- I mean, it's
12 a lot to teach me, but it's mainly territory.

13 MR. KALMAN: Um-hum. Okay, thank you.

14 MS. GARCIA: Okay.

15 BY MR. STROT:

16 Q. All right. Well, Trez, that's all the formal questions we
17 have for you. Are there any questions we should've asked you or
18 anything you would like to add?

19 A. No. I mean, unless you're talking about the brakeman on
20 every job, I'm a big advocate for that, yeah. You can put that on
21 a radio --

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. -- and tell everybody.

24 Q. All right. So we talked to the engineer that was on the job,
25 we're going to talk to your CT and we're going to talk to the

1 yardmaster from that evening and we're also going to talk to the
2 training folks. Is there anybody else you can think of that we
3 should interview as part of this?

4 A. No, nothing, no one comes to mind.

5 Q. Okay. If we have any follow-ups, follow-up questions, do you
6 mind me contacting you at the number you gave me?

7 A. That's fine.

8 MR. STROT: Okay. On behalf of the NTSB, I'd like to thank
9 you for your time and cooperation and I appreciate all you did
10 that night and just your, you know, strong work ethic and what
11 you're doing out there, so appreciate it.

12 MR. JOHNSON: Thank you.

13 MR. STROT: All right.

14 (Whereupon, the interview concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: NORFOLK SOUTHERN EMPLOYEE
INJURED AT RAILYARD IN NORFOLK,
VIRGINIA ON AUGUST 27, 2024
Interview of Trez Johnson

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD24FR015

PLACE: Norfolk, Virginia

DATE: August 29, 2024

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



David A. Martini
Transcriber