

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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CTA TRAIN COLLIDES WITH *

RAIL EQUIPMENT IN CHICAGO, * Accident No.: RRD24MR002

ILLINOIS ON NOVEMBER 16, 2023 *

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Interview of: JOHNNY SMITH, Operator
Chicago Transit Authority

Chicago, Illinois

Saturday,
November 18, 2023

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL BACHMEIER, Railroad Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

SHANE RICHARDSON, Railroad Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVE BUCHER, Railroad Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ROVAUGHN GRAHAM, General Manager, Transit System Safety
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JHAUN JASPER, Senior Manager, Transit System Safety
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Chicago Transit Authority

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Illinois Department of Transportation

CYRELL McLEMORE, Senior Inspection Specialist
Federal Transit Administration

MARK WEEMS, 1st Vice President
Amalgamated Transit Union Local 308

PENNIE McCOACH, 2nd Vice President
Amalgamated Transit Union Local 308
Representing Mr. Smith

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I N T E R V I E W

(12:22 p.m.)

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2
3 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay, my name is Michael Bachmeier and I am
4 the NTSB operations group chairman for this accident. We are here
5 today on November 18th at 12:22 in the Residence Inn, Chicago, to
6 conduct an interview with Johnny Smith, who works for CTA. This
7 interview is in conjunction with NTSB's investigation of the
8 accident near Howard tunnel, the accident reference number is
9 RRD24MR002. The purpose of the investigation is to increase
10 safety, not to assign fault, blame, or liability.

11 Before we begin our interview and questions, let's go around
12 the table and introduce ourselves. Please spell your last name,
13 who you're representing, and your title. I'd like to remind
14 everyone to speak clearly so we can get an accurate recording.
15 I'll start off and then pass it off to my left. Again, my name is
16 Michael Bachmeier, spelling of my last name is B-a-c-h-m-e-i-e-r,
17 and I am the NTSB operations group chairman for this accident.

18 MR. BUCHER: Dave Bucher, B-u-c-h-e-r. NTSB chief of the
19 rail division.

20 MR. ALLEN: My name is Andre Allen, A-l-l-e-n, and I'm the
21 representative of the Illinois Department of Transportation, State
22 Safety Oversight Agency.

23 MR. GRAHAM: Rovaughn Graham, G-r-a-h-a-m, Chicago Transit
24 Authority, transit safety.

25 MR. WEEMS: Hello, Johnny. My name is Mark Weems, I'm the

1 1st Vice President of ATU Local 308. Weems is spelled W-e-e-m-s.

2 MR. RICHARDSON: Shane Richardson, R-i-c-h-a-r-d-s-o-n, I'm
3 with the NTSB operations.

4 MS. McCOACH: Pennie McCoach, M-c-C-o-a-c-h, and I'm the 2nd
5 Vice President for Local 308.

6 MR. SMITH: Johnny Smith, S-m-i-t-h. I'm a train operator.

7 MR. BACHMEIER: Thank you, Johnny.

8 MR. BUCHER: And then we'll go around the room for the
9 observers.

10 MR. JASPER: Jhaun Jasper, J-a-s-p-e-r, Chicago Transit
11 Authority, safety.

12 MR. CARNEY: Kevin Carney, C-a-r-n-e-y, CTA safety officer.

13 MS. ALEXANDER: Jeannie Alexander, A-l-e-x-a-n-d-e-r, Chicago
14 Transit Authority, rail operations.

15 MS. ESTER: Geisha Ester, E-s-t-e-r, Chicago Transit
16 Authority, Training and Workforce Development.

17 MR. McLEMORE: Cyrell McLemore, M-c-L-e-m-o-r-e, Federal
18 Transit Administration, Office of Transit Safety and Oversight.

19 MR. BACHMEIER: Perfect. Thanks, everyone.

20 Johnny, do we have your permission to record our discussion
21 with you today?

22 MR. SMITH: Yes.

23 MR. BACHMEIER: Do you understand the transcription will be
24 part of the public docket and as such, we cannot guarantee any
25 confidentiality?

1 MR. SMITH: Yes.

2 MR. BACHMEIER: As discussed, you have a representative with
3 you today, Pennie, is that correct?

4 MR. SMITH: Yes.

5 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay. I'd like to ask everyone to clearly
6 announce your name and title before questioning. With that, we're
7 going to proceed. Are you ready?

8 MR. SMITH: Yes.

9 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay.

10 INTERVIEW OF JOHNNY SMITH

11 BY MR. BACHMEIER:

12 Q. Johnny, could you please give us a synopsis of your work
13 experience, taking us up to your present job, and how long you've
14 been in your current position as a train operator?

15 A. Well, I started cleaning the buses February 4th, 2021. I did
16 that roughly seven, eight months and I put in for flagging and I
17 flagged from then 17 months, then they pulled me over for
18 operations, qualified August 3rd, 2023, and I've been operating
19 since.

20 Q. August 23rd?

21 A. August 3rd.

22 Q. August 3rd.

23 A. August 3rd.

24 Q. That was your first day as a --

25 A. No, it was training. I was -- I qualified.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. When did you get qualified, when were you fully on your own?

4 A. The 4th. They put you out the next day.

5 Q. Okay. So you --

6 A. I couldn't tell you what the 4th was, but if it was my off
7 day, I didn't go in, but my next day to work.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. They put you out there.

10 Q. So how much training did you get as an operator?

11 A. Roughly, somewhere in between 90 days.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Give or take.

14 Q. Okay. So on the day of the accident, what time did you
15 report for duty?

16 A. Report for duty in between -- I had to be there, my check-in,
17 tap-in time was 7:16 a.m. I got to Howard, I tapped in and it was
18 6:20-ish, almost 6:30-ish.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I was there way before the time.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Sitting in the break room, filled out my paperwork, chilled
23 out, went down, I went down to the north side but my train was on
24 the south side, so I had to go back over.

25 Q. Yeah.

1 A. Got on my train, keyed my train up, go to Dempster and pick
2 up my people, go to Skokie, pick up my people. Come back, sit at
3 the signal, get right back here, drop my people off, that's one
4 trip. Go to the turn-back, come back around, Howard south, went
5 on my signal, go to Dempster, pick up my people, drop them off,
6 pick them up. Go to Skokie, drop them off, pick them up. Go
7 through that turn-back, come back around, same thing like -- my
8 fourth trip.

9 Fourth trip, come in out of Howard, going south, some
10 maintainers or something on the right-of-way, they called on from
11 Howard to Skokie and they called it on, control called me, I was
12 593 -- 593 -- 593, 10-4 control, workers on the right-of-way.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. I go past them, six miles per hours, I get past them. As I'm
15 going past them and I'm coming to Skokie yard, I see Instructor
16 Chris and he was standing next to the snow plow, but they was in
17 Skokie yard in the gate. As I'm passing him, I blow the horn,
18 "eh-eh," and went past.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. So I hear whoever was operating the train, I called to
21 control saying what's the next southbound train, control say
22 there's no southbound train, there's one northbound train that's
23 passed you all, 593, so you all can proceed to Howard. I'm
24 hearing all this. I get to Skokie, I acknowledged control that
25 the snow plow is going southbound. I get to the turn-back, pick

1 up my people at Skokie near the southbound, see the maintainers
2 again, slow down, passed them, they gave me a proceed, passed them
3 on the right-of-way, the WA light on, so it was on for a stretch.

4 Q. What's a WA light?

5 A. Workers ahead.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. It's a warning light, so it won't let you go past 35 miles,
8 so --

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. I don't recall if it was the actual street, but it's that
11 bridge, like as soon as you come in -- like as soon as you coming
12 past Dempster, that WA light, and that was on for a stretch, all
13 the way to, like, that river where you're passing the water, the
14 WA light ended right there. So I get the WA light, get past
15 there, now I'm into the part where it's like a little dip, I'm
16 going to call it a hill, but it's right on the bridge, it's a
17 little dip, it's where the train started braking down and to brake
18 it out to 35, I was already at 35, so -- and it started braking at
19 25, but the first 35 brake-down, it should've been braking down
20 now, you know, the train should've been slowing past that --

21 Q. Does the train slow you down or do you have to physically --

22 A. The aspect will slow you down, so you got to drop down, you
23 got to drop your brake down, you got to go to -- you got to go to
24 maximum brake to get to the aspect, wherever you're going, but I
25 was already -- it wasn't giving -- I was at the WA so I was only

1 at 35. So I'm going down, I got the brake down, but I'm still
2 feeling a little push on the train, so I'm like I'm pulling it
3 down. So I'm getting to the part where it dipped to 25, it drop
4 you down, your aspect, 25, dropped me down, but the train still
5 got a little push. So at this point, I know I can see the snow
6 plow because before we get up the hill, it take you to 55, it will
7 stop you.

8 A red aspect jumped on the train for a second or two, jumped
9 right off, right then and there I go to emergency brake because I
10 know it should've stopped the train. That was letting me know
11 there was another train on the track. I go on emergency brake,
12 the train still pushing and pulling. Emergency brake, hitting the
13 track brake, but emergency brake is four dynamic, that mean all
14 the brakes apply. It was still pulling and sliding.

15 I jump on the radio, train not stopping, I'm hitting the
16 horn. At this point, it's you that train or my train. I was
17 thinking down on the floor and I'm like oh, man, I'm like crossing
18 my skull (ph.). Right then I knew I was -- I'm like well, my
19 body's going to get crushed. I slowed the train down the best
20 that I could because I had a dynamic brake four, throw it on the
21 hole, it slid, I'm sliding, impact.

22 Q. Okay, thank you. So I appreciate that. Are you doing all
23 right?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Okay. Maintenance of way, was that between Skokie and

1 Dempsey or Skokie and Howard?

2 A. That's between Dempster and Howard.

3 Q. Dempster and Howard.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. The maintenance-of-way workers.

6 A. Oh, the maintenance of way, yeah, that's between Dempster,
7 yeah, and Howard.

8 Q. Dempster and Howard.

9 A. Dempster and Howard.

10 Q. And --

11 A. That's what they called it on for, Dempster and Howard.

12 Q. -- when you talked about the snow fighter --

13 A. Okay.

14 Q. -- you saw that in Skokie yard?

15 A. Yeah, it's a gate, separating the gate from the actual tracks
16 we're on --

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. -- I sent it on.

19 Q. Okay. I want to get back to 7:16 on-duty time, what station
20 do you go on duty?

21 A. Howard.

22 Q. Howard. Okay, I'm going to -- so your -- you did runs, your
23 first run, would that -- can you just say the terminal -- do you
24 start at Howard, then?

25 A. Start at Howard.

- 1 Q. And then the next station?
- 2 A. Dempster.
- 3 Q. Dempster. Next one?
- 4 A. Skokie.
- 5 Q. Skogie?
- 6 A. Skokie.
- 7 Q. Sko-kee (ph.).
- 8 A. Yeah.
- 9 Q. And then what?
- 10 A. And then you go to a -- you go, what they call a turn-back,
- 11 you go to the end, you got the 6.40 (ph.) at south end and you
- 12 stop, you have to let the gates lower, you hit the horn, make sure
- 13 nobody walking the tracks. You key your train down, you walk to
- 14 the other end.
- 15 Q. Yeah.
- 16 A. And then you go into Skokie --
- 17 Q. Okay.
- 18 A. -- to pick up the passengers and you're heading back south.
- 19 Q. So Skokie, Dempster, Howard.
- 20 A. Yeah.
- 21 Q. Three stations.
- 22 A. Three stations.
- 23 Q. Okay. Okay. And then how many runs do you do per day? Your
- 24 normal on-duty is 7:16, what time do you normally --
- 25 A. That ain't my normal -- I'm on the board, so --

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. -- I have to call to get my assignment --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. -- after 4:30.

5 Q. Okay, okay. So a normal -- that day, what was your normal --

6 A. They had me on, what they call -- because I was from 7:00 to
7 7:00.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. So it was eight runs in between, a 3-hour break, it was eight
10 runs, 3-hour break, and then like another seven runs.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. If I recall.

13 Q. Okay. And now I'm going to go back. So you, when you're
14 approaching the -- when you're coming in to there, you know, into
15 the accident --

16 A. Right.

17 Q. -- now, you were talking about 35 and 25.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Is that what you were seeing or were you seeing a different
20 speed, were you seeing --

21 A. No, that's --

22 Q. -- something different?

23 A. That's what I was seeing. I was seeing -- I was seeing the
24 yellow aspect dropping --

25 Q. You were seeing a yellow aspect?

- 1 A. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- 2 Q. So a yellow aspect, that means 35?
- 3 A. Yellow 35, yellow 25, yellow 15. Anything above would be
4 green.
- 5 Q. Okay. So you had yellow in your --
- 6 A. Yeah.
- 7 Q. Okay. And you were saying you were going 35.
- 8 A. Yes.
- 9 Q. And then you showed going down to 25?
- 10 A. Yeah, it showed we're going down to 25.
- 11 Q. And then when you hit that -- and then that 15?
- 12 A. Yeah, before I even hit the 15, when it went -- giving -- it
13 gave me the 25, but the train wasn't doing 25, it was still like
14 it was pushing forward. Me operating, I know the different -- 25,
15 the train should be --
- 16 Q. Yeah.
- 17 A. -- slowing, like --
- 18 Q. Yeah.
- 19 A. And stay if the train was slowing.
- 20 Q. Okay.
- 21 A. So we was trying, might be emergency, you only use in
22 emergency, I'm throwing it on.
- 23 Q. Okay.
- 24 A. Before you hit someone or something.
- 25 Q. Okay. Now, I know we have different signals, coming from a

1 freight, so do you see signals on the side or is it all cab
2 signals in the cab board that you guys --

3 A. No, you have signals on the side, it would be on the right
4 hand.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. The snow plow was in front of the signal.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. That's the signal you have to stop to wait to get into Howard
9 Yard to get to Howard.

10 Q. Okay. And you saw red?

11 A. I didn't see the signal because of the snow plow in front of
12 the signal.

13 Q. Okay, okay.

14 A. But I know the snow plow is stuck there, so it's a red, they
15 can't move.

16 Q. What was your signal prior to coming up to the snow plow?

17 A. Like I said, right before that, right -- right after the 35,
18 a red, a steady red's on now, that should've stopped the train.
19 It jumped right off, so I was going to a 25. I still got the max
20 controller and max brake. It's coming out in the cab, but the
21 train ain't coming down, so before we could even get to the 15, I
22 threw on the emergency brake, trying to stop the train, period,
23 because if you get to the 15, then right -- right after that is
24 the snow plow.

25 Q. Yeah, okay.

1 A. So I tried to stop the train before we even got to where it
2 dropped me to 15.

3 Q. So when you were coming up there on that bend --

4 A. Right.

5 Q. -- you seen that snow plow?

6 A. I seen the snow plow.

7 Q. And you were doing everything in your --

8 A. I'm in --

9 Q. Full dynamic?

10 A. Full dynamic.

11 Q. Pull the emergency --

12 A. In the track, I'm on the radio, train not stopping, hitting
13 the horn, hoping they'll just, I don't know, run the signal or
14 something. I mean, at that time it was -- it was panic, like I
15 just knew, you know what I'm saying, I wouldn't be talking to you
16 all, so --

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. -- it's a blessing.

19 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay. I'm going to defer.

20 BY MR. BUCHER:

21 Q. Okay, Dave Bucher, B-u-c-h-e-r. And I just have a few
22 questions to follow up on what Mr. Bachmeier --

23 A. Right.

24 Q. -- was talking, so you said they were maintainers or track
25 people, were they actually maintainers that you mentioned earlier?

1 A. Yeah, they could've been maintaining the track, it was two
2 guys, I know they was walking.

3 Q. Okay, okay. So do you have a location for them? I mean,
4 where -- like a milepost approximate?

5 A. They don't give exact location, you got to call in from
6 station to station.

7 Q. Okay, but where were they located?

8 A. They was right in the middle between Howard and Dempster.

9 Q. Between Howard and Dempster.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. Okay, cool. Thank you. I'd like to follow up briefly on the
12 -- can we call it like a right, a flip, a signal flip, because you
13 said you got a brief red and then it went back to yellow in the
14 cab?

15 A. Yeah, yeah.

16 Q. How long was it, did it -- like a second or half a second
17 or --

18 A. Couldn't be no more than two seconds.

19 Q. Okay, so it went red but then it went back?

20 A. Yeah. It went red, it should've stayed red. It should've
21 stopped the train.

22 Q. Right, right. I understand. But it lasted what, about two
23 seconds, red?

24 A. Yeah, maybe two seconds.

25 Q. Okay, great. Thank you. Okay. And I have one question

1 about the train. In the previous runs, and it looks like you made
2 -- you said four runs before the accident?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. About.

5 A. Yeah, about four.

6 Q. Were there any issues with the brakes in any of the earlier
7 runs?

8 A. It was pretty much regular, you know.

9 Q. The train reacted --

10 A. Regular stops, yeah.

11 Q. -- as it was designed?

12 A. Yeah, yeah.

13 Q. There were no brake issues?

14 A. No, regular stops, regular pick-ups.

15 Q. Okay, thank you.

16 A. I'm going around.

17 Q. And lastly, were there any cab signal issues in your previous
18 runs, like had you noticed flips before?

19 A. No, no, no, no. No. No, no, everything it's supposed to
20 gave me, it gave me.

21 MR. BUCHER: Okay, all right. That's all I have for now, I'm
22 going to pass it on.

23 BY MR. ALLEN:

24 Q. Just a brief follow-up to your question. Andre Allen, IDOT.
25 He asked if there were re-flips, I think, that day. In your

1 experience, since you've qualified on that run, had it ever
2 happened to you before or is this the first time?

3 A. First time. Any time you get like a steady red, it will stop
4 the train, you have to control, control will say where you at,
5 your position, and then, you know, they'll tell you if something's
6 ahead of you or there's just something on the track and then, you
7 know, you use the R-614 (ph.), but you have to call control. But
8 it'll usually stop you.

9 MR. ALLEN: That was all I had.

10 BY MR. GRAHAM:

11 Q. Graham, G-r-a-h-a-m. First, I want to say thank you, sounds
12 like you did a pretty good job under the circumstances. You
13 mentioned going into -- let me begin here. How were you aware or
14 how were you made aware that that piece of equipment was sitting
15 at the signal?

16 A. Over the radio. Over the radio, I knew it was headed that
17 way.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I didn't know it was sitting there, per se, but I was aware
20 they was like on the track.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. But when I see it's a steady red, I instantly know, usually a
23 steady red is something stopping the train. So then, as I'm
24 coming around, then I see it.

25 Q. So you did get indication in the motor cab --

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. -- that something was occupying the signal block?

3 A. Yes. Yeah.

4 Q. And that's when you began to brake?

5 A. I began to brake before it, yeah, in between -- when it stop
6 you from 35, then 25. In between that, a steady red popped on.

7 Q. So that station was Dempster?

8 A. You mean the last station --

9 Q. Before you -- before the accident.

10 A. Oh, before the accident, yes. It was Dempster.

11 Q. Between Dempster and the collision, did you ever get up to 55
12 miles an hour?

13 A. Coming -- briefly, before you flag out to the WA light and I
14 passed the maintainers that one more time. I passed them north
15 once, passed them south once. After I passed them, that's when
16 the accident occurred. So it was 55, like I say, I don't know
17 them streets, where a gate crossing is at by heart, you know what
18 I'm saying, but after like one of them streets it will give you
19 55. After the second, after the second gate crossing, it will
20 give you 55 up to, I got to say, where that WA light was on, then
21 that's when it cut me down.

22 Q. And maybe two more. Are you saying that the train didn't
23 react to what you were doing?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. After the brake application?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. And it slid?

3 A. It slid.

4 MR. GRAHAM: That's all I have for now.

5 MR. SMITH: Ten-four.

6 BY MR. WEEMS:

7 Q. All right, Mark Weems, Vice President of Local 308. To back
8 up to what Graham said, Johnny, thank you for your service to the
9 City of Chicago and those individuals you service and it seemed
10 like you did an exceptional job, considering the situation. I
11 have some follow-up questions that I just want to flesh out some
12 things. You stated you did a couple of trips, did you have the
13 same train on all the trips?

14 A. Yes, I had all the same train.

15 Q. Okay, so you had the same train, that's fine. And you had no
16 -- no issues with that train prior to this incident?

17 A. No issue with stopping, no. No, there were no issues,
18 period. It was like I said, it was a routine stop here --

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. -- routine stop, Skokie, routine stop in the turn-back,
21 coming out the turn-back, routine stop and going past the
22 maintainers, maybe six, I went past them many times, twice.

23 Q. In relation to where the accident happened, where were the
24 maintainers that were calling on the right-of-way?

25 A. I had been past them, they was -- wherever that bridge at

1 back there.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Yeah, wherever that bridge at back there, it's a bridge, it's
4 a stretch, that's where the WA light on. I mean, it stretched a
5 while, probably -- I don't know, I couldn't even imagine it, but
6 if anybody rode the Yellow Line, but I'm pretty sure not any of
7 you all -- you all know it's a stretch, it's a bridge, it's a
8 stretch from one end to another.

9 Q. You made reference to when you were coming up to the bridge,
10 there's a dip.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Has that dip been there for a while?

13 A. Oh, that's the dip. As you coming down, before you get to
14 that -- to that signal --

15 Q. Right.

16 A. -- that'll get you in Skokie yard, I mean, Howard Yard, it's
17 coming around, it's like a -- up top, it's a dip, it'll drop me to
18 35, 25. It'll drop you to 15 to come back up and --

19 Q. So are you saying it's a dip as far as the ATU was concerned
20 or an actual physical dip in --

21 A. Oh, yeah, it's a physical dip, it's like a -- it goes down
22 and it comes up.

23 Q. Does the train feel like it bounces?

24 A. No, because it don't give you that much power.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. It start taking down, so you going down and by the time you
2 get down, then it's going to get you to 15.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. So at 15, it's going to make you go up real slow before you
5 even get to the signal.

6 Q. Okay. But if in a situation where you didn't get 15, you
7 were at a higher rate of speed, do you think the train would mount
8 in that area?

9 A. I don't know, I couldn't -- I couldn't answer that, yeah.

10 Q. That's not a good question, so --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. -- no worries.

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. Mr. Graham asked you a question about the steady red that you
15 received and you said you knew the snow fighter was there because
16 of the steady red.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Could it have been, if that snow plow wasn't there, would you
19 have gotten a steady red in that area if the signal just was red
20 ahead?

21 A. No, it would've gave you 15, it would give you 15.

22 Q. Okay, good.

23 A. It would give you 15.

24 Q. So that's not the area that you would've gotten a steady red?

25 A. No, you don't get no steady red.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. The signal alone would be a double red.

3 Q. Right.

4 A. So the cab signal, it ain't going to be steady red.

5 Q. Okay. And you said you started braking, did you start
6 actually physically braking before your sight of the snow fighter?

7 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

8 Q. Good. And my final question, you said you felt -- you felt
9 power when you were braking, power or sliding.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. Was it both?

12 A. It was power and then when I got to, like I say, where it
13 should be going to 15, then it started sliding. It started
14 sliding and it just slid on to the train.

15 MR. WEEMS: That's all I have.

16 BY MR. RICHARDSON:

17 Q. Richardson, R-i-c-h-a-r-d-s-o-n. Just trying to clear up my
18 note here. So the accident occurred between Dempsey (sic) and
19 Howard, correct?

20 A. Yes, southbound.

21 Q. From the time you left Dempsey until the point of the
22 incident, what was your -- the highest speed you reached on that
23 run?

24 A. The highest I reached was 55 at one point.

25 Q. Fifty-five at one point.

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. But that was --

3 A. That was right after -- yeah, right after Dempster, but that
4 -- before I could get to the maintainers, I was doing 35.

5 Q. The maintainers --

6 A. Was in between --

7 Q. -- occurred after you were at 55 but before the incident?

8 A. Yes.

9 MR. RICHARDSON: Okay, that's all I have. Thank you.

10 BY MR. BACHMEIER:

11 Q. Okay. Mike Bachmeier, B-a-c-h-m-e-i-e-r. When you were
12 talking about a dip, are you talking the grade of the track?

13 A. No, it's the way it's made, it -- it's like a hill, the train
14 go down, then it comes up.

15 Q. Yeah, so a grade.

16 A. Yeah, okay.

17 Q. What I'm trying to get out of here, I don't want us -- I
18 don't want us to think a dip is a track condition.

19 A. No, no, no, no.

20 Q. You know what I'm saying, a dip? This is like the --

21 A. No, this is the route, the route of the train. Yeah.

22 Q. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We're talking grade.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. It goes -- yeah, because I was out there yesterday at the
25 track --

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. -- and that's what I was -- wanted to make sure that we're
3 all --

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. -- thinking the same thing, there's a grade that takes you --

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. -- up into the signal.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. You're coming down, then --

10 A. Down, then you --

11 Q. -- you go up.

12 A. -- come up, yeah.

13 Q. Yeah, yeah, that's the grade. Okay. And then we kind of --
14 okay. How many trips have you operated on the Yellow Line in your
15 training or since you've been promoted? Roughly.

16 A. That's a hard one to ask because --

17 Q. And you don't have to be precise.

18 A. Because the -- because by the Yellow Line we got two stops --

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. -- it's always at least 15 trips and I can't recall how many
21 times I got assigned to the Yellow Line because you never get --
22 like I say, I'm on the board, so I never had a say, I might do
23 red --

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. -- Friday, do purple two days, do a Yellow Line once a week,

1 so I couldn't --

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. -- actually answer that, how many trips I did on the Yellow
4 Line, that's -- that's like almost -- I can't answer that, I
5 couldn't even answer that.

6 MR. BACHMEIER: Yeah, you did get it correct, I can
7 appreciate that. You did good, thank you, that's -- for now,
8 that's all I have. Are you still doing all right there, bud?

9 MR. SMITH: Yeah, you know, other than feeling like I got hit
10 with a sledgehammer a lot of times, but --

11 MR. BACHMEIER: David.

12 MR. BUCHER: Just a couple.

13 MR. SMITH: Yes, sir.

14 BY MR. BUCHER:

15 Q. Dave Bucher, B-u-c-h-e-r, NTSB. What was the last day you
16 worked before the accident day?

17 A. That was coming off my break, I mean, my off day, so I'm off
18 on Tuesday and Wednesday, my last day was Monday.

19 Q. Monday, okay.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. And then you were off two days.

22 A. I was off Tuesday and Wednesday.

23 Q. Okay. Okay. And just want to -- one second, I'd like to go
24 back, after the accident, okay. How long do you think it took for
25 the emergency people to show up?

1 A. After that, first I had to --

2 Q. Right.

3 A. -- untangle myself because I was pinned. You see that
4 thing's bent in?

5 Q. Um-hum.

6 A. Had me pinned to the wall. Somehow, I -- I don't have an
7 idea, but I made it to the floor, so like I say, the first person
8 that I seen was Instructor Chris, he was helping a customer, then
9 he went to pulling me --

10 Q. Um-hum.

11 A. -- back and he told me not to look at my leg.

12 Q. Just a guesstimate.

13 A. Are you talking about police, firemen or just --

14 Q. Well, EMS. Emergency.

15 A. Oh. Well, they came last, it was like -- because the police
16 one helped me with my wound, they didn't want nothing on my leg.

17 Q. Right.

18 A. And then the firemen -- it was pretty fast, like, because I
19 don't know, I was probably on that train after the accident, maybe
20 15, 20 minutes, I can't recall exactly, but they was --

21 MR. BUCHER: Okay. That's good enough. That's good enough.

22 MR. SMITH: Yeah.

23 MR. BUCHER: I appreciate it. That is all I have right now
24 and I'll pass it along.

25 MR. ALLEN: I don't have anything further, just want to say

1 I'm glad that you're here today.

2 MR. SMITH: Appreciate it.

3 BY MR. GRAHAM:

4 Q. My only follow-up question is have you ever experienced this
5 kind of issue on any series of train before, 5,000 (ph.) series or
6 not, where there were some issues, reaction, once you wanted to
7 brake out?

8 A. I never had -- well, I had a train that slide before, you
9 know, sometimes they -- because all the braking is different, you
10 know what I'm saying, all the trains are the same, sometimes they
11 slide but not that much. This was the first time that this issue,
12 this is the first time I had a steady red that pop on and pop off.
13 Anytime else I got a steady red, like I say, it's just right now.

14 Q. And do you think that if it would've remained on, the train
15 would've stopped?

16 A. The train, the train would've stopped right then and there.
17 It's just the train, it would've stopped right there.

18 BY MR. WEEMS:

19 Q. Mark Weems, my only follow-up, just trying to -- in the last
20 moments prior to the impact, did you feel -- did you still feel
21 the train powering or was it just in a slide?

22 A. It wasn't that much power, but it wasn't stopping, it was
23 still moving. I figured, once it started sliding, it would stop
24 before I'd reach the train, but it didn't, so it was getting
25 probably -- it wasn't giving as much power as it was giving like

1 when I was at 25 before I threw the emergency brake, that what
2 really slowed it down some, you know, but it -- it didn't stop it.
3 So yeah, it did a little bit more sliding, but it was like it
4 still had power somehow.

5 MR. WEEMS: Thank you.

6 MR. RICHARDSON: I don't have anything.

7 BY MR. BACHMEIER:

8 Q. Okay. I just have a couple. Is there a process to report
9 safety concerns on CTA that you know of?

10 A. Yeah, this -- if something's going on, on your train, you
11 call control.

12 Q. Okay. Is there any -- have you ever had any concerns about
13 calling CTA or control about any -- or management for anything, if
14 you see something?

15 A. Yeah, I had a train they had to take back in the shop. I was
16 working the Red Line and I don't exactly recall what it was doing,
17 but I left from Howard, got to Jarvis and there was something
18 going on with the lights, so control -- well, the manager called
19 me and told me to hit the P switch for the lights and if they
20 didn't work, they didn't work, so they had me going back to the
21 other end and bring the train back, and I guess that's the only
22 issue I had so far.

23 Q. But they were working with you, they were trying to help you
24 out?

25 A. Oh, yeah, the managers, yeah.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. The managers hear you talking to -- when you're talking to
3 control, so they usually -- if you don't know exactly what's going
4 on and you need help with P switches or what, the managers got
5 you, they'll tell you hey, go do that, try that, that don't work,
6 bring it back.

7 Q. Okay. So that's what I was just -- okay. All positive
8 there.

9 A. Yeah.

10 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay. That brings us to --

11 MR. BUCHER: I have one more.

12 MR. BACHMEIER: He forgot that we only get two times around,
13 but I'm -- but since he's the real safety guy, I'm going to defer
14 to Dave.

15 BY MR. BUCHER:

16 Q. Dave Bucher, B-u-c-h-e-r. I want to ask about there were a
17 lot of leaves on -- in the area. In any of the previous trips the
18 day of the accident, did you notice any leaves on the track --

19 A. Leads?

20 Q. -- and did it affect the operation?

21 A. Oh, from a tree?

22 Q. From trees, yeah. Leaves, all over the -- it's very obvious,
23 because we were on scene and there were a lot of leaves on the
24 ground.

25 A. I don't recall about leaves on the track, like -- I mean, but

1 like you said, there's leaves everywhere. I don't recall them
2 like actually on it, you know, the rails --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. -- and nothing, but --

5 Q. That was --

6 A. -- I mean, there could've been.

7 Q. Okay. I mean, if it didn't affect the operation, I -- I just
8 wanted to make clear that there was no leaves, didn't appear to be
9 on the track or anything.

10 A. Yeah, I can't a hundred percent say I did not see a leaf or
11 -- but there was leaves, so --

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Yeah.

14 MR. BUCHER: All right, thank you.

15 MR. BACHMEIER: Anyone else have any?

16 MR. GRAHAM: No.

17 BY MR. BACHMEIER:

18 Q. Okay. Johnny, do you have anything you'd like to add?

19 A. Basically, I guess it just seemed kind of strange, that train
20 and stuff, yeah. It was one of the scariest moments of my life,
21 so --

22 Q. Is there anything that you think that could've helped prevent
23 this accident?

24 A. The train stopping.

25 (Laughter.)

1 MR. SMITH: Man, like -- like I say, it usually be -- you
2 know, it work as usual, you know, you see your -- you come to your
3 light, your aspects, you stop, so this is something new, so you
4 know what I'm saying? Like --

5 MR. BACHMEIER: Yeah. Thank you. Johnny, if we have any
6 follow-up questions, would you mind if we contacted you?

7 MR. SMITH: Yeah.

8 MR. BACHMEIER: And the phone number that you gave me there,
9 is that your --

10 MR. SMITH: I got my phones back, so you can get my phone
11 number, there was a phone --

12 MR. BACHMEIER: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Well, on behalf of our
13 NTSB, everyone here, we want to thank you for coming in and giving
14 us an opportunity to visit with you today, thank you.

15 (Whereupon, at 12:59 p.m., the interview concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

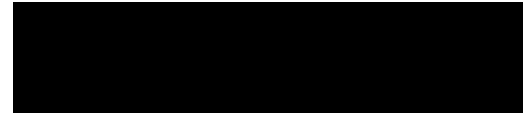
IN THE MATTER OF: CTA TRAIN COLLIDES WITH
RAIL EQUIPMENT IN CHICAGO,
ILLINOIS ON NOVEMBER 16, 2023
Interview of Johnny Smith

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD24MR002

PLACE: Chicago, Illinois

DATE: November 18, 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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber