

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: EUGENE SPELLS, Rail Instructor 3  
Chicago Transit Authority

Chicago, Illinois

Saturday,  
November 18, 2023

APPEARANCES:

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National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:33 p.m.)

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2  
3 MR. BACHMEIER: My name is Michael Bachmeier and I am the  
4 NTSB operations group chairman for this accident. We're here  
5 today on November 18th at 2:33 p.m. at the Residence Inn in  
6 Chicago to conduct an interview with Eugene Spells, who works for  
7 CTA. This interview is in conjunction with NTSB's investigation  
8 of the accident near the Howard terminal -- tunnel. The NTSB  
9 accident reference number is RRD24MR002.

10 Eugene, do we have your permission to record our discussion  
11 with you today?

12 MR. SPELLS: Yes, you do.

13 MR. BACHMEIER: Do you understand the transcriptions will be  
14 part of the public docket and as such, we cannot guarantee any  
15 confidentiality?

16 MR. SPELLS: Yes.

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

19 MR. SPELLS: Yes.

20 MR. BACHMEIER: I would like to ask everyone to clearly  
21 announce your name and title before questioning. I forgot part of  
22 it. Before I begin, let's go around the room and introduce  
23 ourselves. Please spell your last name, who you're representing,  
24 and your title. I'd like to remind everyone to speak clearly so  
25 you can get an accurate recording. I'll start off and then pass

1 it off to my left. Again, my name is Michael Bachmeier, the  
2 spelling of my last name is B-a-c-h-m-e-i-e-r, and I am the NTSB  
3 operations group chairman for this accident.

4 MR. GRAHAM: Rovaughn Graham My last name is spelled  
5 G-r-a-h-a-m, CTA safety.

6 MR. WEEMS: As you know, my name is Mark Weems, W-e-e-m-s,  
7 I'm the 1st Vice President for ATU Local 308.

8 MR. ALLEN: Good afternoon. Andre Allen, A-l-l-e-n, and I'm  
9 the representative of the Illinois Department of Transportation  
10 State Safety Oversight Agency.

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

13 MS. McCOACH: Pennie McCoach, M-c-C-o-a-c-h, 2nd Vice  
14 President for ATU Local 308.

15 MR. SPELLS: And I am Eugene Spells, an instructor, badge  
16 number 35440.

17 MR. BACHMEIER: Last name is spelled?

18 MR. SPELLS: I'm sorry. Yes, Spells. S as in Sam-p as in  
19 Peter-e-l-l-s.

20 MR. BACHMEIER: Perfect. And then we have some observers in  
21 the room.

22 MR. JASPER: Jhaun Jasper, J-a-s-p-e-r, CTA safety  
23 department.

24 MR. CARNEY: Kevin Carney, C-a-r-n-e-y, CTA safety  
25 department.

1 MS. ALEXANDER: Jennie Alexander, Chicago Transit Authority,  
2 A-l-e-x-a-n-d-e-r, rail operations.

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

5 MS. ESTER: Geisha Ester, E-s-t-e-r, Chicago Transit  
6 Authority, Training and Workforce Development. Instructor Spells,  
7 thank you for being here.

8 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay. Well, I'd like to ask everyone to  
9 clearly announce your name and title before questioning. With  
10 that, let's proceed.

11 INTERVIEW OF EUGENE SPELLS

12 BY MR. BACHMEIER:

13 Q. Eugene, could you please give us a synopsis of your work  
14 experience, taking us up to your present job?

15 A. Sure. This is Eugene Spells speaking. I have been with the  
16 CTA for 25 and some years and months. Right now my current  
17 position is Instructor 3. Starting in the beginning, do you want  
18 the history from the beginning to --

19 Q. Just the general -- yeah, whatever you -- yeah.

20 A. Okay. Okay. So I started in 1998, March 23rd, I came in as  
21 a CRO, combined rail operator. Started customer assistance work.  
22 From there, we went to flagging, from flagging to RTO operator,  
23 from RTO to switchman, from switchman to supervisor, from  
24 supervisor to Instructor 1, then Instructor 2, and now presently,  
25 Instructor 3.

1 Q. Okay. Perfect. On the day of the accident, what was -- can  
2 you kind of give a synopsis of what -- what the day was to look  
3 like and what it consisted of and what the plan was for the day?

4 A. Of course. Once again, this is Eugene Spells speaking. On  
5 the day of the incident, I was to report to Skokie Shops at 0700  
6 hours. The plan of what had to happen that day is that they had  
7 the S500 equipment, which is a diesel snow fighter, and I was  
8 basically -- my role was basically to ride the equipment,  
9 basically as a -- I want to like -- I'd like to call it somewhat  
10 of a roadmaster, someone who does all -- facilitates all  
11 communications, actually even if we need to go down and throw  
12 switches, to actually line the actual diesel up, and just  
13 basically be there for communications, safety, and as an aid of  
14 just using my knowledge as an instructor to help in any other way  
15 necessary or needed.

16 Q. Okay. So you were kind of there to pilot the snow fighter  
17 back and forth on the Yellow Line. Were you supposed to leave the  
18 Yellow Line or --

19 A. There was a Yellow coming into Howard, so basically, the end  
20 of the line would be Howard and then from Howard back on the  
21 Yellow Line, so yes.

22 Q. Okay. So can you tell us what transpired? What time did you  
23 guys get out to the snow fighter, what time did you guys start  
24 working? Had you made any runs?

25 A. Okay. So actually, like I said, my job starts before the --

1 before we actually board the snow fighter. So once I arrive, I  
2 have to make contact with the personnel, which is actually Ron,  
3 Ron Okeley, Okeley, I think was his last name, is the person that  
4 I made contact with. I secured the bulletin, checked over the  
5 bulletin to make sure of everything, so I had a good understanding  
6 of what had to go or where we were going and what was needed. So  
7 once I secured the bulletin, I just -- I talked with him.

8 I actually was there also to brief the other instructor, give  
9 him some information, as well. So I talked with him and just  
10 basically went over everything that was going to transpire that  
11 day. I also had to make calls, so I used the inside line, which  
12 is a CTA line, I actually contacted Howard tower to let them know  
13 what was going to happen and what we needed from them and tried to  
14 give them an approximate time of what time we would be there and  
15 to also let them know that I would be in communication with him  
16 via the radio as we approached.

17 I also called the control center to actually let them know  
18 all the information, give them the S500 number and just letting  
19 them know around, you know, what time we would be coming out,  
20 which will be sometime after the rush, that we would be coming  
21 out, and any other information that they needed, badge number or  
22 all of that kind of stuff, and to let them know my partner's badge  
23 number and everything that he would be needing, as well. So after  
24 that, we actually had to secure a signature sheet, which I brought  
25 with me to actually get the trainees that would actually be there,



1 so it was their trainees and not trainees for us because we would  
2 not be actually teaching them, once again, we just was sort of  
3 taking the coordination of the actual diesel and all  
4 communications. But their guys are right here on this sheet so we  
5 would have a record of who would actually be on the train for  
6 their training. And there was a little bit of confusion at first  
7 because they had four guys come down and I let them know there was  
8 only supposed to be two, and that this was going to transpire in a  
9 two-day -- it was going to be Thursday and then there was supposed  
10 to be two Thursday and then two that Friday.

11 So once they figured out what two was going to go, then the  
12 other two, I guess, went back upstairs and they started the diesel  
13 up because they have to let it run for a while and then after  
14 that, we basically boarded, we were on -- I think it was Track L  
15 outside of Skokie and once we did that, we boarded, we got all the  
16 information needed and we proceeded through the yard to actually  
17 set the diesel up for the right configuration to actually come  
18 out.

19 And then going through the yard, I had -- Instructor Edgerton  
20 was the person I was briefing, he was actually on, I'm going to  
21 say, what would be the back when we came out and I was actually on  
22 the front. But before we got over there, we got down and we  
23 walked through switch points and I explained to him basically, you  
24 know, the procedures of what needed to be done. Also about lining  
25 up the switches, which we actually did line up switches for the

1 diesel to proceed over to the point where we would come out of the  
2 yard. And then before we actually got ready to come out, I called  
3 control once again via the radio to actually get permission to  
4 come out, heading southbound toward Howard, and I also asked that  
5 we follow a southbound train, because that's normal procedure for  
6 any non-revenue equipment coming out, to actually follow any train  
7 that has passengers on them.

8       So when I called control center, they said there was no  
9 southbound and they said that the train was at Howard, leaving, it  
10 would be leaving shortly and it was coming northbound and he said  
11 if you wanted to come out now, it would be fine, so I said that's  
12 fine. So we selected, I actually selected to come out going  
13 southbound en route to Howard. So we actually came out and once  
14 we came out, we cleared the switches, I called control to let them  
15 know that we were clear of the switches.

16       As we proceeded southbound en route to Howard, I actually saw  
17 the northbound train at a distance, coming over the hill, headed  
18 to Skokie-Dempster. I actually called him, a short ring to let  
19 him know we just came out of the yard, watch the switch points and  
20 everything, you know, because everything actually has to go back  
21 over as he approaches the yard where we came back out, so I just  
22 gave him a call to let him know. We kept proceeding toward Howard  
23 and as we approached Howard, I actually called the tower via the  
24 radio to let them know we were on the approach and basically, he  
25 knew everything because I had communicated it with him via the

1 phone and just to let him know that we were on the approach, that  
2 we hadn't even got there but I wanted him to be prepared because I  
3 wanted to expedite the move and make sure that we got clear of the  
4 area that we were going to be in and of course, we have to wait  
5 for a signal to come in. So as we approached, which there is an  
6 incline to the signal before you actually go into Howard Yard, as  
7 we went up, I was speaking to the operator at that time, who was  
8 Louie, Louie was the one and I'm not sure of the last name, but  
9 Louie was the one that was operating the actual diesel.

10 So as we went up -- you know, and that diesel is an older  
11 diesel and it's pretty slow. So as we went up the incline there  
12 was a little bit of momentary rollback because of the incline,  
13 okay. So as he did that, then like I said, I -- we don't operate  
14 this particular equipment, so I respect the person that's actually  
15 operating the equipment, so I did not want to -- I just let him  
16 know we don't want to roll backwards.

17 So I said put the brake on, so I had him put the brake on,  
18 the actually diesel stopped, we were still waiting on the lineup  
19 to come in and from there we were waiting, we were waiting, okay,  
20 and I was in communication with the tower. He did actually --  
21 when I was coming into -- we were on the approach, he actually did  
22 answer, so I knew they got my message, but we were waiting and  
23 like I said, from then, it probably was approximately about -- I'm  
24 going to say about a four-minute wait, four, no more than maybe  
25 five minutes, somewhere in there, approximately, and I know I

1 turned -- I have a -- you know, it's a habit when you know you're  
2 out here and you're not revenue equipment and you're on equipment,  
3 that you try to look back, even though I probably couldn't see  
4 that it was a train coming, but just being idle in a position  
5 where I knew we were on a curve, as well, and so I turned, as I  
6 turned to look back and that's when we got struck.

7 Q. Okay. Do you know what time you left Skokie?

8 A. So it had to be approximately, I would say, somewhere between  
9 -- it was after 10 o'clock and it wasn't 10:30 yet, I don't think  
10 it was 10:30 yet, so it had to be between 10:15 and -- I don't  
11 know, I'm not sure. It was after 10:00, definitely.

12 Q. Okay. And then how far a run was it from Skokie to Howard?

13 A. So from Skokie to Howard, you want to know for that diesel  
14 train or --

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. -- do you want to know for --

17 Q. No, for you. Yeah.

18 A. Okay. So with that diesel train maybe traveling no more than  
19 about 30 miles an hour, it probably took us about 10 minutes, I  
20 want to say it took us almost 10 minutes.

21 Q. Okay. Because I think we listened to tapes earlier --

22 A. Um-hum.

23 Q. -- and it was around 10:14 where you guys asked for  
24 permission to --

25 A. Um-hum.

1 Q. That's what I was just kind of -- so once you got to Howard,  
2 what was your plan?

3 A. So the plan was to have the tower route us into the station  
4 and once we get in to the platform, basically, we were to shut  
5 down and change in and basically just head back and it was whether  
6 they wanted to do one or two passes, however they wanted to do it.  
7 I was just there to coordinate the movement.

8 Q. So once you got there and you came in the grade up to the  
9 signal --

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. -- you were just waiting for the control operator to line you  
12 in to --

13 A. The tower. The tower.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. Correct.

16 Q. Okay. And basically, you're just going to go in there and  
17 you knew there was a train coming behind you?

18 A. Well, eventually we knew that there was a train that comes  
19 because that's the route of the Yellow Line.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. Yes.

22 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay. I'm going to defer on to Mr. Ro.

23 BY MR. GRAHAM:

24 Q. Good afternoon. This is Graham, G-r-a-h-a-m, with CTA  
25 safety. Just continuing along that same line of questioning, how

1 much -- because you're on the line of the road with last service,  
2 how do you navigate in and out? So let's say you did wait four  
3 minutes but you received a signal to enter Howard, what do you  
4 guys do then?

5 A. We take a signal.

6 Q. But I mean, so how do you get out of the way of the Yellow  
7 Line?

8 A. So that is a coordination that the tower actually -- you  
9 know, that they do. So there's four tracks within there and  
10 there's two tracks coming in, when you're coming in southbound for  
11 the normal move, so we could be put on whatever track the tower  
12 might select us to be on and then if they see another train  
13 coming, then it's up to their discretion to put that train where  
14 it needs to go. And in that exact situation, they would not come  
15 on top of us because, of course, our move was to actually shut  
16 down and change in and come back out.

17 Q. Were they somewhere -- so that's the normal practice, they --

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. -- kind of put you in a holding pattern, that revenue service  
20 happened and then you guys --

21 A. Right. Well, there's two tracks that you can use.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. So if there's one train behind us, we could actually go to  
24 one track and they can actually go to the other and both trains  
25 are for southbound service.

1 Q. And some of these questions you've answered, let me  
2 apologize.

3 A. No problem.

4 Q. What was your role and responsibility related to this S500?

5 A. Okay, so my role and responsibility was to coordinate the  
6 movement of the S500; to take care of all communications; if need  
7 be, throw switches, which we actually did within the yard, coming  
8 out of the yard, before we came out of the yard and basically,  
9 that's it.

10 Q. You mentioned another instructor.

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. What is that person's --

13 A. Pardon me?

14 Q. What's the name of the other instructor?

15 A. He's Instructor 1, he would be -- his title would be an  
16 Instructor 1.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He wants his name.

18 MR. SPELLS: Oh, I'm sorry, his name is Christopher Edgerton.

19 BY MR. GRAHAM:

20 Q. You also mentioned the name Ron Okeley.

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Who is that?

23 A. So Ronald, he was the person that was actually on the  
24 bulletin, so from my understanding, he was to be riding with the  
25 equipment, somewhat like a supervisor, for Skokie Shops or the

1 maintenance, that's to my understanding.

2 Q. Was he on the equipment?

3 A. Correct, he was on the back of the equipment that left out.  
4 On the rear of the S500.

5 Q. Do you know if he was one of the instructors or one of the  
6 people training the -- one of the trainers?

7 A. No. Like I said, as far as my understanding, he was on the  
8 bulletin and if you -- if we -- I don't know if we had that  
9 bulletin secured --

10 Q. Yes.

11 A. -- it would give all the information on that bulletin as to  
12 what his job description is for the S500.

13 Q. Okay. In totality, how many people were aboard?

14 A. Six.

15 Q. (Indiscernible) two instructors?

16 A. Two instructors, the actual person, I guess, that was doing  
17 the training for the trainees that was aboard, so there was four  
18 of us on the front because the two trainees were there, the actual  
19 guy that was operating the diesel, and myself, that made the four  
20 on the front. Instructor Edgerton and Mr. Okeley were on the  
21 rear.

22 Q. Got it. While you guys were -- you said you told the person  
23 operating the equipment to stop it, right?

24 A. Correct. There was momentary rollback, but then the  
25 momentary rollback, like I said, we don't -- we're not supposed to



1 roll back at all, so I told him to put -- apply the brake.

2 Q. Who was that person?

3 A. Louie.

4 Q. Louie?

5 A. Um-hum.

6 Q. And he was a machinist?

7 A. I'm not sure of his title.

8 Q. Was he a student or one of the trainers?

9 A. He was the one that was actually going to be teaching the  
10 trainees from Skokie, correct.

11 Q. You mentioned roles and responsibilities throwing switches  
12 and communicating.

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. Was there ever a time where there was a lack of communication  
15 or an inability to communicate with the control center or the  
16 tower?

17 A. Not for me, not for when I called or when I got the response.  
18 Of course, I could move until I got the okay to actually come out,  
19 and everything that he communicated with me was understood as far  
20 as coming out of the yard.

21 Q. And I mean, was it -- and also like was there ever a time  
22 when you broadcast to either the control center or tower and did  
23 not receive a response?

24 A. Only when the confusion was going. Only after the incident  
25 it was hard to communicate and I'm sure that's because there was a

1 lot of people communicating on the radio.

2 Q. Understood. I'm not familiar with the equipment and we have  
3 not been allowed to access it yet, but are there seats on the  
4 equipment or was everybody standing at all times?

5 A. Okay, so there are seats, so you have two seats normally for  
6 the machinist or the people that actually operate the train.  
7 There are two side seats that actually fold. So I had a seat but  
8 I was not sitting down because once I'm on the line of road, what  
9 we call operating on sight, which I was not operating the  
10 equipment, but my eyes were operating on sight.

11 Q. So there were enough seats for four, the four of you who were  
12 in the front half of the vehicle?

13 A. Actually, there is.

14 Q. There are four seats?

15 A. Actually, there is, because I believe there's -- I'm almost  
16 sure there's another side seat as the same seat that I was in on  
17 the other side. Now, whether they were sitting or whether they  
18 were standing at the time.

19 Q. Last couple for me. You mentioned a rollback, were there any  
20 challenges with the folks who were operating the equipment? Did  
21 you guys experience any --

22 A. So the S500, like I said, it's a diesel, it's a heavy  
23 machine, machinery, and anytime you have any type of heavy  
24 machinery, if you encounter an incline and just because of the  
25 heaviness and trying to power up an incline, yes, there can be a

1 little bit of a problem because, like I said, the momentary  
2 rollback starts to be a problem and then you have to try to  
3 control it by either giving power or using both power and brakes.

4 MR. GRAHAM: I think that's it for me.

5 BY MR. WEEMS:

6 Q. All right. Mark Weems, W-e-e-m-s. First off, you know,  
7 thank you for coming out and thank you for your service to the  
8 City of Chicago. The first question is, as an Instructor 3, are  
9 you the highest grade of personnel in rail operations?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. I want to ask you a question to follow up on something  
12 Mr. Graham asked you. Could they have held -- when he asked you  
13 questions pertaining to your move in Howard and out of Howard,  
14 could they have held the sleet fighter, when you came in, could  
15 they have held that revenue equipment at the signal that you were  
16 at until you changed in and left Howard?

17 A. Yes. So ask it to me, say it -- repeat that question for me,  
18 please.

19 Q. Yeah, the signal that you were at when the incident  
20 happened --

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. -- okay, if you would've had a pocket open and they would've  
23 let you in, could they have held the revenue equipment at that  
24 signal that you were at --

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. -- and let you change in and come out?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Were you guys prepared do that?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Okay. Another question of clarity. You said you  
6 communicated to the train, the revenue train that was going from  
7 Howard to Skokie when you guys were coming out, you communicated  
8 short range that hey, we just came out, watch your switch points,  
9 is that correct?

10 A. Correct, yes.

11 Q. Did he respond to you?

12 A. So it's hard for me to say yes or no to confirm that.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. I definitely wanted to make sure I got that information to  
15 him, was my role and my intent just for safety purposes. You  
16 know, it's something, you know, I'm not going to say everybody  
17 does, but I felt like it was a need and something to do, that's  
18 all.

19 Q. And along the lines of another question that Mr. Graham asked  
20 you, were there any hurdles when you communicated at all that day  
21 with the control center or tower personnel between Howard and  
22 Skokie?

23 A. Actually, no.

24 Q. Okay. My final question is the rollback, is there -- is  
25 there any way you guys could have stopped prior to being on that

1 incline and still been able to see the signal that you would've  
2 been waiting at?

3 A. Yes. And we actually did because we did not go all the way  
4 to the signal, so it calls for you to stop 50 feet from the signal  
5 in regular rail service --

6 Q. Um-hum.

7 A. -- and we probably were about at least a hundred feet away.

8 Q. And did doing that, that decrease the amount of -- the  
9 steepness that you would've been on --

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. -- on that hill, the stopping and you guys sliding back?

12 A. Yes, yes, it did.

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

14 BY MR. ALLEN:

15 Q. Andre Allen, IDOT SSO. I just had a couple of procedural  
16 questions. You mentioned receiving the bulletin and you checked  
17 the bulletin, it's the first thing you did when you arrived.

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. Do you have any role in preparing that bulletin or is that  
20 just something that you're handed?

21 A. No, it's not prepared by me. It's something that I need to  
22 -- I need to know information before you head out, because you  
23 have all the particulars or the specifics on what the route is and  
24 where you're going and who's involved and the equipment involved  
25 and the times and anybody else that's involved in the procedure.

1 Q. And does it also like reference any particular SOPs to be  
2 aware of?

3 A. I'm trying to think. Not that I can recall, not that I can  
4 recall.

5 Q. And then just another one, you were talking about your  
6 movement in the yard, that you told, I think, Edgerton --

7 A. Correct.

8 Q. -- about some SOPs to follow when you're moving equipment  
9 through the yard. Do you know what SOP that you were referring to  
10 there?

11 A. You said SOPs in the yard? No, not there. I was saying  
12 there's -- did I say anything about something?

13 Q. When you were talking about -- initially when you started out  
14 at Skokie and you were moving through Skokie initially, because  
15 you had to change the equipment to make sure it was lined properly  
16 to go out or to run.

17 A. Okay, I just want to try to make sure I got your question and  
18 I got the information of what you're saying. We were walking  
19 through the yard, so I'm going to just go back to that part and  
20 then you tell me if I answered the question or not. We were  
21 walking through the yard and I was speaking with him on the  
22 procedures of actually lining up the equipment, so there are  
23 switch points and the switch points, how they need to be lined up,  
24 you have facings and you have trailings of switch points, and in  
25 order to get the equipment where you need to go and you need to

1 get it there safely, I was just speaking to him in reference to  
2 that.

3 Q. Just more general, not specific SOPs?

4 A. No, no SOPs at that time.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Yeah.

7 BY MR. RICHARDSON:

8 Q. Shane Richardson, NTSB. Just a couple, just to clear it up  
9 real quick. When you said that the diesel stopped and started to  
10 roll back --

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. -- was it -- were the wheels slipping or were they just  
13 locked up and sliding backward or was it just, you know, like --

14 A. It felt like a rollback.

15 Q. So it felt like the wheels were rolling back?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Not sliding back?

18 A. Yeah, it felt like it wasn't enough power to actually -- as  
19 you know, the closer you get to the signal, the incline is  
20 steeper. So when it got to that point where I guess there wasn't  
21 enough torque or power, there was momentary rollback.

22 Q. Just guesstimate how far you think you went back before you  
23 told him to put the brake on.

24 A. As soon as I felt the train rolling back, I told him, I  
25 instructed him to -- we don't --

1 Q. One foot, five foot?

2 A. Yeah. A couple feet, I'm not actually sure, but a couple  
3 feet.

4 MR. RICHARDSON: Okay, that's all I have.

5 BY MR. BACHMEIER:

6 Q. Okay. And on that, was it just that he didn't get into his  
7 brake -- this is Mike Bachmeier with the NTSB -- he didn't get  
8 into his brake fast enough, that's what caused the rollback, just  
9 because you're on the incline with heavy equipment?

10 A. It's just that it's heavy.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. The equipment is heavy, so I'm -- you know, when you put a  
13 brake on, it doesn't mean that it's going to stop the train on a  
14 dime.

15 Q. Okay. When you were sitting there at the signal, you were  
16 talking about you were on one end and the other guy was on the  
17 other end, you were with four guys, were you on the struck end or  
18 the opposite end?

19 A. I was on the opposite end.

20 Q. Okay. And there was all four of you. Once the impact, were  
21 you guys all -- stayed inside the cab?

22 A. My head went through the window of the door, like I said, I  
23 think it had to be the time when I was turning around because I  
24 was standing, definitely standing at the time, I was standing most  
25 of the time. Probably all of the time. But yeah, my head went



1 through that window that was there. I guess I didn't get cut, I  
2 mean, well, I did, on my face, if you look here.

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. All of this over here. And what was the question again? I'm  
5 sorry.

6 A. No, I was just -- I was just wondering if anyone got -- if  
7 you all stayed on the cab, if you were all in the cab still.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. After that, do you remember how the emergency response was,  
12 do you -- who came out there?

13 A. The fire, the CFD. CFD, I believe, showed up first.

14 Q. Okay. Okay. And maximum speed, what was your speed between  
15 Skokie or -- yeah, Skokie and Howard, what was the maximum speed?

16 A. So maximum is approximately about 30 miles. He actually  
17 asked me how fast and I told him 30.

18 Q. That's how fast equipment can run? Because you guys didn't  
19 have -- you guys didn't have ATC out there, so was it blocked for  
20 you or something or what was your protection?

21 A. So from my understanding, it should've been ATC.

22 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay. Okay. So 39 mph was your -- okay.

23 That's all I have.

24 Ro?

25 BY MR. GRAHAM:

1 Q. Just a couple, a couple more. Again, we appreciate you time.  
2 Graham, G-r-a-h-a-m, with CTA safety. Right before the event or  
3 the incident, when you approached the signal, what was the signal  
4 aspect?

5 A. Double red with the trip up.

6 Q. Double red --

7 A. Well, the aspect was double red. (Indiscernible), but  
8 normally that's -- when it's double red, then the trip should be  
9 up.

10 Q. You mentioned waiting at the signal for a little while or  
11 just outside of the signal. Was there a plan in terms of calling  
12 the tower to say we're still waiting or what's the --

13 A. Yeah. So normally, like I said, you -- because he responded  
14 to me, we -- it was an understanding that he knew we were there.  
15 You know, we can't make somebody do or hurry up, because a lot of  
16 times people want to get in fast, but that doesn't make it happen  
17 faster, so you have to be patient.

18 Q. In terms of the last two, would it be safe to say that you  
19 were the lead instructor of the two instructors?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. And the last one, what was the role of the two people in the  
22 other portion of the equipment?

23 A. Their role was simply to ride. Like I said, as the other  
24 instructor, he was getting briefed, there were no other seats or  
25 no other room in the front, so they had to ride.

1 Q. But they had no, like, activities back there?

2 A. No, no.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. No, nothing for them to do at that time.

5 MR. GRAHAM: That's it for me.

6 BY MR. WEEMS:

7 Q. Two quick follow-ups. Mark Weems, W-e-e-m-s. You spoke to  
8 when you came to the double red signal, that you were there for  
9 about four minutes.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Give or take. How long was it from the time of roll, of the  
12 rollback, to the collision?

13 A. It was probably a minute and a half, maybe. Approximately.

14 Q. So from your perspective, the rollback played no -- did it  
15 play any role in the collision?

16 A. No. The brakes were on and the train had stopped.

17 Q. All right. My final question is, there were some questions  
18 about moving and switch points within the yard, the procedures  
19 that you were teaching while you were teaching Chris Edgerton.  
20 Are spring space switches in that yard?

21 A. That is correct.

22 Q. And due to that being heavy equipment, did you give him some  
23 special instructions about the spring space switches?

24 A. Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

25 Q. What were they?

1 A. So with that equipment, it is -- of course, spacer switch  
2 points have to be lined for any equipment moving to the direction  
3 or the desired direction that you wanted to move into. However,  
4 trailing switch points, they do not have to be lined and the  
5 wheels of the train, if the equipment is heavy enough, will allow  
6 it to move over to the desired position.

7 And because of diesel equipment, I always say line both of  
8 them for safety reasons, I explained to him we are in November and  
9 yes, there could be snow, anything out here, even though it's not  
10 snow today, we're going to line both the facing and the trailing  
11 for safety reasons.

12 Q. And is that just an extra precaution?

13 A. Correct. Yes, it is.

14 MR. WEEMS: Thank you.

15 BY MR. ALLEN:

16 Q. Andre Allen, IDOT SSO. Have you been involved in any prior  
17 training for a snow fighter, ever been like the person in charge  
18 or the communications person in previous training?

19 A. Yes. Yes. And even as a supervisor, we ride tamping  
20 equipment, we ride all kinds of equipment, so yes, I've had  
21 experience in doing it.

22 Q. Specifically for the S500 ever before?

23 A. I have been on the S500 before, but mainly if I was along  
24 with -- I was actually along with another instructor and they may  
25 have been the one actually doing more of the communications and I

1 may have been the one throwing the switches. I have been on there  
2 when we have had blizzards and helped facilitate throwing switches  
3 and moving -- cleaning, clearing the yards of snow.

4 MR. ALLEN: That's all I have.

5 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay.

6 MR. RICHARDSON: I don't have any questions.

7 BY MR. BACHMEIER:

8 Q. Okay. Thank you, Eugene. Do you have anything you would  
9 like to add?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Is there anything that you can think of that could have  
12 helped prevent this accident?

13 A. I felt like I did everything that I could, I felt like I did  
14 what was necessary or more than necessary, I should say.

15 Q. If we have any follow-up questions, would you mind if we  
16 contacted you?

17 A. I have no problem with that.

18 MR. BACHMEIER: On behalf of the NTSB, the team here, thank  
19 you for your time and cooperation and hopefully, you'll start  
20 feeling better.

21 MR. SPELLS: Thank you.

22 MR. GRAHAM: Yeah, I'd like to add to that.

23 MR. SPELLS: Yeah.

24 MR. GRAHAM: We did hear of some actions of heroism --

25 MR. SPELLS: Pardon me?

1 MR. GRAHAM: -- by yourself. We heard of some things --

2 MR. SPELLS: Oh.

3 MR. GRAHAM: -- of heroism by yourself and the other  
4 instructor, so we commend you for that.

5 MR. SPELLS: Thank you.

6 MR. GRAHAM: Even though you were injured.

7 (Crosstalk)

8 MR. SPELLS: Thank you.

9 (Whereupon, at 3:11 p.m., the interview concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

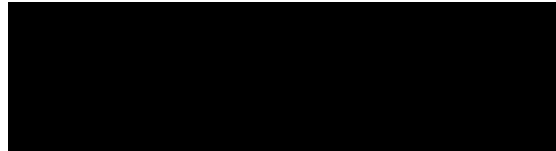
IN THE MATTER OF: CTA TRAIN COLLIDES WITH  
RAIL EQUIPMENT IN CHICAGO,  
ILLINOIS ON NOVEMBER 16, 2023  
Interview of Eugene Spells

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.



David A. Martini  
Transcriber