

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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HOUSATONIC RAILROAD WORKER FATALITY *

IN NORTH CANAAN, CONNECTICUT *

Accident No.: RRD21FR002

ON OCTOBER 14, 2020 *

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Interview of: TOM HOSKINSON, Trackman
Housatonic Railroad, Connecticut

Via Microsoft Teams

Monday,
October 19, 2020

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HOEPF
National Transportation Safety Board

TROY LLOYD
National Transportation Safety Board

OWEN SMITH, Investigator in Charge
Federal Railroad Administration

GREG DiPIETRO
Federal Railroad Administration

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Housatonic Railroad

P.J. BAILLY
Housatonic Railroad

JOHN YOUNG, Attorney
(On behalf of the owners of the Housatonic Railroad)

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I N T E R V I E W

(1:30 p.m.)

1
2
3 MR. SMITH: So it's about 1:30 now, I'd like to begin. Tom,
4 it's okay if we call you that, right?

5 MR. HOSKINSON: Correct.

INTERVIEW OF TOM HOSKINSON

6
7 BY MR. SMITH:

8 Q. Could you just give us kind of a general rundown of the first
9 few minutes leading up to the incident, you know, can you describe
10 what -- where the excavator was positioned the last time he was
11 stopped prior to moving again?

12 A. Basically right where he, right where he stopped short of
13 west about --

14 Q. Okay. So he, he basically -- we he engaged in any activity
15 prior to? Was Mr. Thompson engaged in any type of activity, you
16 know, prior to, you know, when you saw him laying on the ground
17 there?

18 A. Yes. We were making a measurement --

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. -- off of the new turnout to prepare it for installation.

21 Q. Okay. And you were holding the --

22 A. I was holding the end toward zero.

23 Q. Yeah, the zero end.

24 A. All right.

25 Q. That's more politically correct.

- 1 A. Okay.
- 2 Q. Yeah. And Mr. Thompson was holding the end with the coil?
- 3 A. He had walked to the back of the turnout package.
- 4 Q. Yeah, okay. So when he was at the back of the turnout
5 package, what did he do next?
- 6 A. We made a measurement to determine if we had enough material
7 excavated out of the existing --
- 8 Q. Okay. So did you measure the --
- 9 A. -- switch area.
- 10 Q. Did you measure the hole first and then your second
11 measurement was the switch?
- 12 A. He had a mark that he was going by off of the old stuff that
13 we had torn out.
- 14 Q. Okay. So made a measurement of the new panel?
- 15 A. Correct.
- 16 Q. Okay. So after he obtained that measurement, that would have
17 put him up near the frog area somewhere, correct? When he got the
18 measurement, when he took the measurement, was he near the frog or
19 the backend of the panel?
- 20 A. The last time that I saw Warren, he was still at the back of
21 the switch coming forward --
- 22 Q. Okay.
- 23 A. -- behind the machine.
- 24 Q. And that was just after, you know, finishing taking the
25 measurement?

- 1 A. Taking the measurement.
- 2 Q. Okay.
- 3 A. Correct.
- 4 Q. Did you see him engaged in any activity with the operator;
5 was he talking to the operator?
- 6 A. He was talking to the operator.
- 7 Q. Okay.
- 8 A. But I can't give you his position, because I had -- at that
9 time, when we finished taking the measurement, I turned my back to
10 both the machine and Warren to step into the gauge of the new
11 switch package --
- 12 Q. Yeah, yeah.
- 13 A. -- in case there was going to be a movement.
- 14 Q. Yeah. So you cleared out and you were kind of looking
15 towards the hole?
- 16 A. I had turned. Basically I was on the end of the new switch
17 package and just turned around.
- 18 Q. Okay.
- 19 A. Standing right next to it.
- 20 Q. Do you have any idea how long it was from the time you turned
21 away to when you saw Mr. Thompson again, a minute, two minutes?
- 22 A. I did not see him after I turned around.
- 23 Q. Okay. So it happened quickly?
- 24 A. Correct.
- 25 Q. All right.

1 BY MR. DiPIETRO:

2 Q. I just -- Tom, I was curious, I don't know, apologize if this
3 was already asked and I didn't catch it or not, when you guys were
4 measuring, were you guys on top of the panel taking measurements
5 or were you on the ground --

6 A. On the ground.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. On the ground.

9 Q. So, I mean, obviously I saw that there's close clearance over
10 there between the new panel and the track.

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. So you guys are basically standing on the -- like in between
13 the panel and the tracks --

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. -- not seeing any track?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. That's correct.

19 BY MR. SMITH:

20 Q. All right. So, you know, just basically to make sure I
21 understand this completely, where he'd finished taking the
22 measurement and where you last saw was not the exact same spot as
23 he was when you saw him laying on the ground?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Okay. And then we can estimate that. That's basic; it was

1 like almost a lead length to the switch.

2 A. You have, I mean, the basic switch layout on that side was
3 150 feet.

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. And I can't give you the measurement for the excavator
6 because I wasn't involved in --

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. -- doing all those measurements, but you guys have that.

9 BY MR. DiPIETRO:

10 Q. What were you guys about to do next once you got your
11 measurement, what was the next step in the plan?

12 A. The next step was to add more (indiscernible) to the
13 excavated area, bolt them together, determine if we had enough
14 rollers underneath.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And begin the process of installation.

17 Q. Roll the panel out onto the -- into the bed, track bed?

18 A. Correct.

19 BY MR. SMITH:

20 Q. So, if you don't mind, there's a few boilerplate questions we
21 ask about incidents like this, you know, involving your state of
22 mind and things like that. You know, it's not insinuating
23 anything; these are just kind of general questions that we ask
24 everybody.

25 A. Okay.

1 Q. So I'll read them if I don't think we hit on them directly,
2 and I'll skip it if we already addressed some of them. So, you
3 know, the first question was, what was going on at the time of the
4 accident? We discussed that at length, so we can skip that. Were
5 there any challenges that day that made it more difficult, wet
6 weather, noise, you know, equipment, anything or --

7 A. No.

8 Q. So it was going pretty smoothly?

9 A. Correct.

10 Q. Applicable procedures, were they clear, adequate? So I know
11 you guys are a tightknit crew; you've done this countless times.
12 Did you feel like, you know, the progression of the work was
13 going, you know, well and you understood what the next steps were?

14 A. Absolutely.

15 Q. So, you know, obviously doing panel installations and stuff,
16 pretty unforgiving work, you know, there's a lot of moving parts
17 to it. All right. You know, just thinking back, is there any
18 suggestions you think about what you could do, you know, to make
19 it safe for next time, any procedure changes that you could think
20 of?

21 A. No.

22 Q. Okay. You know, there's no wrong answers, you know. I mean,
23 that's something we're going to look at, you know, as --

24 A. (Indiscernible).

25 Q. -- the outside.

1 A. Yeah, yeah.

2 Q. But as far as --

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. -- no worries. So, again, these are some of these questions
5 that might be a little offensive, but no -- we mean no offense to
6 it at all, it's just kind of the general stuff. Any use of a cell
7 phone or anything?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Did anyone appear to be distracted?

10 A. (No audible response).

11 Q. All right. You guys feel well rested that day?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Did anyone seem like they didn't sleep well or tired?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Okay. Any alcohol or drug usage? And, you know, this would
16 include cough medicine or other stuff too that you might take over
17 the counter.

18 A. No. I don't take anything.

19 Q. That's the way to go, right, you know. Any other health
20 issues that you think --

21 A. My own? No.

22 Q. Well, you or even just some casual observation?

23 A. I can only speak for myself.

24 Q. Okay. But I guess knowing Mr. Thompson, did he appear like
25 he was functional and healthy and he wasn't --

- 1 A. Oh, absolutely.
- 2 Q. -- wasn't like staggering or anything?
- 3 A. (No audible response).
- 4 Q. Okay. Kind of touched about that. It's just a kind of
5 follow-up question about what we talked about, you know, your
6 coworkers feeling ill or looking, you know, a little off.
- 7 A. Understood.
- 8 Q. You know, I'm sure you guys would have picked up upon that.
9 Training, experience, I mean, that's kind of self-explanatory, I
10 mean, we kind of talked about this.
- 11 A. Uh-huh.
- 12 Q. But, you know, offhand, how many years do you have with the
13 railroad?
- 14 A. Just shy of two.
- 15 Q. Just two, okay. And Mr. Thompson had almost 21. And, you
16 know, even working two years here, you're going to pick up a lot,
17 so you feel like you're familiar enough with everything and --
- 18 A. Absolutely.
- 19 Q. -- you understand what you're supposed to be doing? And,
20 again, just another follow-up question, enough time to perform
21 work, could you comment on how you felt with the scheduling
22 progressing? Did it feel like you were ahead of schedule, behind
23 schedule or --
- 24 A. We were right on schedule.
- 25 Q. So things were going great until --

- 1 A. Correct.
- 2 Q. -- until then? All right.
- 3 BY MR. DiPIETRO:
- 4 Q. Hey, if I may, Tom. I just want to back up a minute. Job
5 briefings, would you say you had an adequate job --
- 6 A. Absolutely.
- 7 Q. -- briefing that morning? And did you have any rebriefs or
8 anything additional?
- 9 A. The track was held by Warren.
- 10 Q. Okay.
- 11 A. And the briefing was between he and I --
- 12 Q. Okay.
- 13 A. -- and Matt.
- 14 Q. All right. And --
- 15 A. Obviously.
- 16 Q. Would you be able to describe your practice for when you are
17 working around a machine for job briefing purposes and just
18 explanations about safe zones and things like that? Can you just
19 explain in your own words like how you guys work around that with
20 communicating?
- 21 A. Personally I've been working around heavy equipment almost
22 since I was 20 years old.
- 23 Q. Okay.
- 24 A. I'm going to be 62 in April.
- 25 Q. You have a long time around them?

1 A. I have a healthy respect for heavy equipment. I've worked
2 both in construction and in farming for that entire time. There's
3 basically nothing about equipment that I don't understand, and
4 none of it is forgiving.

5 Q. Okay. I guess, you know, really like --

6 A. I work as safely as I possibly can.

7 Q. Okay. And what I meant by that question was just that did
8 you guys have a job briefing about that included the machinery
9 that day?

10 A. Absolutely.

11 Q. Okay, all right.

12 A. Absolutely.

13 BY MR. SMITH:

14 Q. So if -- say you're working the ground like you were and you
15 needed to get within, you know, the danger zone of the excavator,
16 how would you go about that?

17 A. I wouldn't.

18 Q. You wouldn't, okay, you wouldn't. So basically you'd stay
19 outside the range of the boom at all --

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. -- at all times? And would there be a reason to be kind of
22 in that? Could you think of you doing this work any reason to be
23 inside that danger zone?

24 A. No.

25 Q. All right. You know, the reason I ask is every railroad's

1 got some different procedures, you know. Another major railroad
2 out here has defined red zones, and it's basically 10 feet from
3 the farthest extension of the machine. And if somebody needs to
4 go in there, say to free up something that the boom's tangled in,
5 they need to have a job briefing with the operator, you know, they
6 need to make a symbol like this, meaning the hands are off the
7 controls and is not going to move it. In your career here in
8 general, is that something you would do here, or is it more you
9 wait until the operator shuts the machine down and allow him to do
10 it?

11 A. That's generally how we work. I personally take it upon
12 myself to make sure that I'm clear of things.

13 Q. Yeah. Okay. Because I know just some -- you know, your RWP
14 plan, I've got a quick review of it. It says, you know, you're
15 allowed to enter these danger zones of the machine, you know,
16 provided it's necessary for the job. But I didn't get into too
17 much detail was how you determine that it's actually safe to do
18 that, you know. Because you can be allowed to do something but
19 really you can only do it when it's safe so --

20 A. Okay.

21 Q. I think that's what Greg and I were trying to nail down from
22 you is, you know, how that communication occurred.

23 A. I believe it says after communicating with the operator.

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. I believe is in that same thing.

1 Q. Yeah. You know, and that's -- you know, it's not pinning
2 anything on anybody.

3 A. No, no.

4 Q. It's just --

5 A. I'm just saying since you mentioned our RWP.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. I believe in that same, you know, in the same paragraph where
8 it says, you know, you're allowed to enter the zone, which is the
9 lines (ph.) are communicated so, you know.

10 Q. And the operator --

11 A. The operator, it says so on our RWP, like it says.

12 Q. And, you know, back to the incident last week, you know,
13 really any precursors to that -- you didn't really witness
14 because, you know, you saw him, you turned away, and then
15 something happens an undefined period of time later, but --
16 presumably several seconds just because of the distance that he
17 had to travel, you know --

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. -- something happened. And, you know, I know traumatic
20 incidents can seem like they take longer, so your judgement of
21 time might not be the best either. So, you know, I don't want to
22 push you too hard on that. It's just getting a picture for what
23 you saw.

24 MR. SMITH: And I think we have a pretty good understanding
25 of what he's saying. Do you think so?

1 MR. DiPIETRO: Yeah.

2 BY MR. DiPIETRO:

3 Q. Just another thing I was curious about, you might not know or
4 you might know, but moving the panel or getting ready to move that
5 panel, were you guys going to get a chain or a strap or anything
6 like that to move anything, or was it going to be --

7 A. We weren't prepared to move that panel until we had the skid
8 rails in place.

9 Q. Oh, the rails were going to go in first before the panels?

10 A. The skid rails had to go down into the excavated area before
11 that was going to happen.

12 Q. Okay. Where were those rails?

13 A. They were right alongside of the new switch.

14 Q. Okay. Between the machine and the panel.

15 A. Probably east of it --

16 Q. I think I saw them.

17 A. -- I would say.

18 Q. Do you know how you guys were going to grab those rails?

19 A. I already had a speed swing on the site.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. That's how we'd been moving the others previously there was a
22 grapple up at the east end --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. -- as well.

25 BY MR. SMITH:

1 Q. And, you know, those rails that were between the panel and
2 the track that the machine was on, was Mr. Thompson west of those
3 rails, just to help us nail down where he was, can you remember
4 that?

5 A. The last place I saw him was at the furthest end --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- of the package, so I would say he was west of that.

8 Q. Okay.

9 MR. DiPIETRO: Okay. So you saw him west of the package and
10 on the west end of that excavator, the excavator was in between
11 yourself and Warren?

12 MR. HOSKINSON: Correct.

13 MR. DiPIETRO: Got it, okay.

14 BY MR. SMITH:

15 Q. So, you know, are you -- just one other question too. Are
16 you familiar with the blind spots on those things? Do you know
17 how difficult it is for an operator to see there?

18 A. I run it.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. (Indiscernible).

21 Q. Can you comment on that blind spot there, how extensive would
22 you say that blind spot is, you know?

23 A. Looking for what?

24 Q. Well, say if somebody was standing next to it, somebody of
25 say your height who was -- if they were standing, you know?

1 A. It would have to -- you'd have to determine where he was
2 standing. I can't just give you -- there's mirrors on both sides
3 of the machine.

4 Q. Right. So you have the door, you know, right to kind of your
5 shoulder there, you know, that's open.

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. If somebody was standing, you know, next to that door on the
8 ground --

9 A. Right.

10 Q. -- would you be able to see them in the mirrors, do you
11 think?

12 A. It depends on what machine I'd be in, to tell you the truth.
13 All machines are different for blind spots.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. Whether it be the speed swing excavator, rotary dump loader.

16 Q. Yeah, I just, you know, I brought it up because I sat up
17 there, and I know it's quite an extensive blind spot, you know, in
18 order to see really a lot -- a good chunk of that area, like 45
19 degrees to your back, you have to lean out.

20 A. That's an operator question --

21 Q. Yes.

22 A. -- as far as I'm concerned.

23 MR. SMITH: Any other questions?

24 MR. DiPIETRO: No, I really don't.

25 MR. SMITH: Troy, any questions for you?

1 MR. LLOYD: Yeah. Mr. Haskins --

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Hoskinson.

3 MR. LLOYD: -- if he does -- what's that again?

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: His last name is Hoskinson.

5 MR. LLOYD: Okay, Hosk -- if he doesn't have a problem, I
6 just have a few questions if he doesn't mind.

7 MR. HOSKINSON: Go ahead.

8 BY MR. LLOYD:

9 Q. Okay. So just talking about your -- the work experience, I'm
10 not going to get into that. It sounded like you definitely had
11 some knowledge and skills working around heavy equipment all your
12 life. But I do just want to get into the day that this accident
13 did occur. So if you could just -- from that morning, what's your
14 normal routine from the time you leave your house, you get to the
15 worksite, you get together, you had your job safety briefing?
16 Just tell me about that whole day leading up to the time of the
17 accident.

18 A. All right. We got to the job trailer in the morning. Matt
19 and Warren and I were awaiting the delivery of a new grapple track
20 which was scheduled to show up at 7:00, which he did. And we got
21 a briefing from the owner of the truck company that brought it out
22 from Wisconsin. And Warren, Matt, Henry Beckwith, and I went over
23 all the procedures on the new truck, and at about 9 o'clock, we
24 came over to this site because we were waiting for the train to
25 come off, get done doing their work when Warren would be able to

1 get the track out of service.

2 In the morning, we talked about what material we would need
3 and what was already here and where each piece of equipment was
4 going to be placed. Then once we had the track -- control of the
5 track, we started to dismantle the existing switch package and
6 everything that went with it. I was working as a laborer that day
7 and ran no equipment. Okay?

8 MR. SMITH: Do you copy that, Troy?

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You lost him.

10 MR. SMITH: Troy, you might --

11 MR. LLOYD: Yeah.

12 MR. SMITH: -- be muted. I think -- yeah.

13 MR. LLOYD: Yeah, I am. Yeah, I apologize.

14 MR. SMITH: These conferences are terrible.

15 MR. LLOYD: Yeah, yeah. Just -- I heard all that. If he
16 could just -- if he just wants to continue on about when him and
17 Mr. Thompson were taking the measurement, you know, just want to
18 just keep on walking through that, walking through those duties,
19 you know, all that and just leading up just prior to things, right
20 before it took place where Mr. Thompson was standing at and all
21 that?

22 MR. SMITH: And I think he did discuss that pretty in-depth
23 in the beginning. We talked about, you know, obviously he was
24 holding the zero end and all that and, you know, basically when he
25 was done taking the measurement, he stepped out and turned away.

1 I think that was covered.

2 MR. LLOYD: Okay. Yeah, yeah, I'm good. I'm good, Owen.

3 Thank you.

4 MR. SMITH: Yeah.

5 All right, Mike, anything for you or are you good?

6 MR. HOEPF: No, I'm good. I just want to say thank you guys.
7 Thank you all so much for being out there. You know, typically
8 when we close our interviews -- and not to cut you guys off if you
9 had another round, but I just wanted to thank the interviewee, you
10 know, thank you so much for coming and listening to us,
11 particularly in this virtual environment.

12 And I know it's a difficult time for you and your family, and
13 we're really sorry to hear that. You know, all we're trying to do
14 is just to, you know, prevent a tragedy like this in the future.
15 So if you have any final thoughts you want to share with us,
16 anything else you want to get off your chest or suggestions for
17 safety, please feel free to go ahead and let us know. And if not,
18 I hope you won't mind -- if we have any follow-up questions, I
19 hope you don't mind if maybe we reach out to you or your
20 representative in an email or something like that.

21 So that's all for me. Thank you for your time.

22 MR. HOSKINSON: Okay. Thank you.

23 MR. SMITH: All right. We're going to hop off here and go
24 off the record. We'll talk to you later.

25 (Whereupon, at 1:53 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

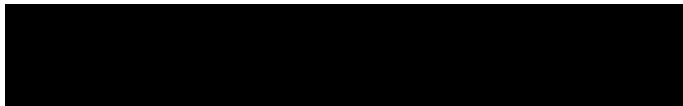
IN THE MATTER OF: HOUSATONIC RAILROAD WORKER FATALITY
 IN NORTH CANAAN, CONNECTICUT,
 ON OCTOBER 14, 2020
 Interview of Tom Hoskinson

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD21FR002

PLACE: Via Microsoft Teams

DATE: October 19, 2020

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.



Cheryl Farner Donovan
Transcriber