

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

FATAL UNION PACIFIC TRAIN CRASH *
IN SALTON SEA, CALIFORNIA *
ON SEPTEMBER 8, 2022, *

Accident No.: RRD22LR014

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Interview of: DOUG JOHNSON, Lane Superintendent
Union Pacific

Indio, California

Saturday
September 10, 2022

APPEARANCES:

RYAN FRIGO, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ISAAC MCKEITHEN, Operating Practices Track Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

KEN ABELL, Safety Task Force Investigator
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

DAVID CARR, Operating Practices Accident Chief
Federal Railroad Administration

KEVIN GARCIA, Senior Manager of Train Operations
Union Pacific

SCOTT JONES, National Safety Team Investigator
SMART Union

THAD LAFERRIERE, Investigator/Inspector
State of California PUC

JIM MAYNARD, Task Force Investigator
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. FRIGO: Good afternoon. My name is Ryan Frigo. I'm an
3 investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board. We're
4 here today in Indio, California. It's September 10th. We're here
5 with Mr. Doug Johnson of UP, and he's on the phone. I got some
6 folks here in the room. And this is in reference to the NTSB
7 Accident Number RRD22LR014, which is a UP collision with standing
8 cars on September 8th, in Imperial County, California.

9 Before we begin, we'll introduce ourselves for the
10 transcriptionist. Please say your name, identify the agency that
11 you're with, and spell your last name for the transcriptionist.
12 I'll start and then pass off to my right. Ryan Frigo, NTSB
13 Operations and System Safety, and that's F-r-i-g-o.

14 MR. MCKEITHEN: Isaac McKeithen. M-c-k-e-i-t-h-e-n, FRA
15 Operating Practices Inspector, Los Angeles.

16 MR. CARR: David Carr. Last name, C-a-r-r, FRA Operating
17 Practices.

18 MR. LAFERRIERE: Thad LaFerriere, L-a-f-e-r-r-i-e-r-e, State
19 of California PUC Operating Practices.

20 MR. MAYNARD: Jim Maynard, M-a-y-n-a-r-d, BLET, Safety Task
21 Force Investigator.

22 MR. ABELL: Ken Abell, A as in apple, B as in boy, e-l-l.
23 BLET Safety Task Force Investigator.

24 MR. GARCIA: Kevin Garcia, Union Pacific, G-a-r-c-i-a.

25 MR. JONES: Scott Jones, J-o-n-e-s, SMART Union's National

1 Safety Team Investigator.

2 MR. FRIGO: Mr. Johnson.

3 MR. JOHNSON: Douglas Johnson, Union Pacific Railroad, J-o-h-
4 n-s-o-n.

5 INTERVIEW OF DOUG JOHNSON

6 BY MR. FRIGO:

7 Q. Are you okay if we go on a first name basis?

8 A. Absolutely. Doug is fine.

9 Q. Great, Doug thanks. And do I have your permission to record
10 this conversation today?

11 A. Yes, sir. You do.

12 Q. All right, Doug. Thank you. Doug, what's your current
13 title?

14 A. Current title is Lane Superintendent in the Dispatching
15 Center for the Los Angeles Service Unit.

16 Q. Okay. How long you been on the railroad? How long you been
17 working on the railroad?

18 A. About 16 1/2 years right now.

19 Q. Okay. Have you been in the L.A. area the whole time?

20 A. Negative. I moved out here July 1st of last year, 2021.

21 Q. Where were you at before that?

22 A. I've been in Omaha since 2019.

23 Q. Okay. And doing the same type of work in Omaha?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Okay. So, you've got a lot of experience in the dispatching

1 center, huh?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. Okay. Can you walk us through some of the positions that
4 you've held? Such -- were you ever a train dispatcher?

5 A. Sure. I did hire on as a train dispatcher. I dispatched for
6 approximately just short of five years. And then I went to field
7 management, worked various locations as a transportation manager
8 around the Chicago area, and then went back to the dispatching
9 center in Chicago. Previously in 2016, after working in the field
10 for almost five years, I have been between Chicago and Omaha, now
11 Los Angeles, in dispatching roles as a director of train
12 management and now lane superintendent.

13 Q. Just to help me understand, what are the responsibilities of
14 a lane superintendent?

15 A. Basically, we're responsible for the main line dispatching
16 operations, so managing both the operation for the service unit
17 from a mainline perspective and then managing the corridor
18 managers and train dispatchers.

19 Q. Okay. And as far as corridor managers that might report to
20 you, are they are they all out of L.A. or are they kind of spread
21 out all over the place?

22 A. I have one desk here in San Bernardino and then I have one
23 desk there in the Harriman dispatching center.

24 Q. Okay. And the desk in the Harriman, which desk is that?

25 A. That is the (indiscernible) corridor manager.

1 Q. Okay. So, we've talked to a few people today. We talked to
2 the Mr. Terrell, the corridor manager that was on duty with the
3 accident. And then we also were able to speak to Mr. Walters, who
4 was the second trick dispatcher for the Yuma sub. And we were
5 talking a lot about the storage of cars and controlled sidings and
6 how that process works.

7 Can you shed some light on that for us from your perspective,
8 if cars are going to be stored in a controlled siding for a given
9 amount of time longer than a few days, what's supposed to occur?

10 A. So, I guess from that standpoint, as far as -- you just
11 talking about how, I guess, the decision or process, or just
12 strictly as far as how that would be protected or --

13 Q. Both.

14 A. Okay. Sure. It's a relatively frequent occurrence here.
15 Typically for empty (indiscernible) potentially, depending on a
16 dock terminal being able to process or handle the traffic. So,
17 those planning decisions are really -- as far as putting something
18 there -- is a decision that comes through either our assets teams
19 (indiscernible) the equipment or lows (ph.) based on our team down
20 at Long Beach here as far as when they could handle the traffic.
21 So, then that's pretty much it.

22 I guess a joint decision, but amongst us, once we identify,
23 we need to put some cars out to identify which siding location to
24 stage them in. At the point that decision is made, cars
25 scheduled, we notify the corridor manager, who would notify the

1 train dispatcher that (indiscernible) has completed the process
2 for protecting it, from our standpoint at the dispatching center,
3 would be to put a track block over it and a track tag identifying
4 what was stored there.

5 Q. Okay. Is there any coordination with maintenance away or any
6 anybody in the field to do anything else out there?

7 A. Dependent on the location, it depends on if we'd be required
8 to go chain (ph.) the cars down or not, so that that would have to
9 be done, because there are certain locations. But beyond that,
10 no.

11 Q. And Doug, what -- how can I better understand those
12 locations? Because I'm not familiar with the territory. Are
13 those listed somewhere or is there something that would prompt
14 that extra level of securement?

15 A. That would be likely a conversation with the team in the
16 field, when we're putting cars somewhere, if that's going to be
17 required. I don't know that we have that published anywhere.

18 Q. Okay, and is -- let's do the reverse of it, because I know
19 you mentioned the dispatcher applying a tag and a track block.
20 What about when it gets removed, when those cars get moved? How
21 does that process then work?

22 A. Essentially the reverse. So, we identify what train was
23 going to pick those cars up. That would all be coordinated
24 similarly and scheduled. And once we made the pickup and the cars
25 have been pulled clear from the siding, the train dispatcher would

1 remove the tag and the block.

2 Q. And is that process, is that documented anywhere? Or maybe a
3 rule?

4 A. Yeah. Besides the rule for protecting standing equipment,
5 that would be -- I mean, potentially, I don't know that we have a
6 separate process beyond that. No.

7 Q. Okay. And I'm just taking some notes here. So, just sorry
8 for my pause. In the rule that you're referencing, what -- is
9 that a GCOR rule or what rule is that?

10 A. I believe it is a train dispatcher rule. I'll get you the
11 exact number here. I believe, the one for removing protection is
12 22.4.2. I have that right?

13 Q. Okay. 122?

14 A. 22.

15 Q. 22. 22.4.2. Are you are you looking at that rule right now?

16 A. I am.

17 Q. Can you read it to us?

18 A. Removing Protection for Standing Equipment. The train
19 dispatcher must confirm that the track is clear of standing
20 equipment and portable derails removed before removing
21 protection. Do not use a Box 1 on a train's Track Warrant to VOID
22 the Track Warrant that was issued to protect the standing
23 equipment.

24 Q. And how would that be -- is that tracked anywhere? Or how
25 would that confirmation be logged within the system?

1 A. As far as confirming that the cars were clear?

2 Q. Yeah, exactly.

3 A. That confirmation would be from the crew performing the work
4 of picking up the cars and the indication, clearing the siding,
5 that the cars were clear.

6 Q. Okay. Have you had the -- so again, I'm not familiar with
7 what your area of responsibility, the territory of responsibility
8 is, but I understand that previously that this subdivision came
9 under San Bernardino. Is that accurate?

10 A. Not -- well, you mean, was either dispatched or the corridor
11 manager was out here or that -- it currently falls under myself.

12 Q. Yeah. Let me -- you know what, and I'm sorry, I -- let me
13 just go back to something else just popped to my mind just while
14 we were on the rule and the confirmation, and I jotted down the
15 confirmation from the crew. But could confirmation also be done
16 by indication only from what that board was telling you?

17 A. I guess I would say no, in my mind, that that is the
18 confirmation from the board with a tag that's still on there, I
19 would -- that's --

20 Q. And in your experience in doing this kind of work, I mean,
21 I'm just trying to understand this more. I come from the commuter
22 world, and we track a lot of stuff. And in some of these
23 conversations we've had today, it's not appearing to us that that
24 was going on. And I'm just trying to understand if that was right
25 or wrong or if that's just the common practice.

1 From your experience as a dispatcher and as a manager in your
2 current role, I mean, how can I come to expect how this is really
3 playing out in day to day in a dispatching center?

4 A. I guess I would say in my mind, I would think if we -- if
5 there was a -- it's not unusual for us to have a track block on a
6 controlled siding off of multiple mainline, typically just there's
7 usually a tool to prevent the automatic dispatch system from
8 potentially lining something in and out of the siding
9 unnecessarily. So, I wouldn't say having a track block there
10 would be unusual without equipment there.

11 But given that the protection for it is to put a track block
12 and a tag identifying what is there, I mean, those are remaining,
13 and there is no indication, I think that in my mind is sort of
14 confirming that the cars are clear, is the part of the rule there.

15 Q. And let's say that there's a track block and it applied, and
16 a tag applied, and occupancy disappears. So, it's no longer
17 magenta, but you've got the blue and maybe you got a little
18 notation that's showing up there. What is that? What would that
19 be telling you, looking at the screen?

20 A. It would be telling me potentially we had cleared those cars
21 from the siding. And someone potentially had not cleared the
22 protection yet.

23 Q. And in that case, I mean, how would one -- like if I was to
24 show up that day and ask that question, what happened to those
25 cars, what would be that verification method that I would have to

1 look for to see where those cars went or how to track them down?

2 A. I'd have somebody take a look that's going by.

3 Q. Okay. No, that -- I can appreciate that. So, was the Yuma
4 sub -- I know the desk is now in Omaha, but was it previously
5 under a desk in San Bernardino?

6 A. It was at some point, is my understanding, but that was
7 before my time out here.

8 Q. Okay. All right. I'm going to pass it off in the room here
9 to some of the folks that are with me. Okay, Doug, no one seems
10 to have any questions. Is there any -- oh, we do have one here.

11 BY MR. MCKEITHEN:

12 Q. Doug, this is Isaac with FRA. In your experience as a
13 dispatcher have you ever removed cars, a tag on a on a track,
14 without confirmation from a crew?

15 A. I don't -- well, that's a difficult one. I guess I would --
16 I haven't dispatched in ten plus years. Not that I recall, but
17 it's -- I haven't dispatched in while there.

18 Q. Have you -- you got to ask that.

19 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

20 Q. Hey, Doug. If you were supervising the dispatcher that took
21 a tag off without verifying, what would you do?

22 A. I think that would likely be a coachable event from a DTE
23 (ph.) Efficiency Test standpoint. If we've -- there something, a
24 tag protecting something and there's -- it wasn't confirmation.

25 Q. That's all I have.

1 MR. FRIGO: Okay, Doug, I got a few more questions in the
2 room and then I've got some as well.

3 BY MR. LAFERRIERE:

4 Q. Thad LaFerriere with the PUC, Doug. We talked to the
5 dispatcher earlier today. He made reference about cleaning up his
6 tags and things like that. So, you just told us that if you
7 observed somebody removing a tag without any verification -- but
8 if a dispatcher was looking at his screen and he had no
9 indication, would it be acceptable for him to remove that tag with
10 without verifying anything? Or is that something that they would
11 normally do?

12 Because we were led to believe that these tags are entered in
13 for multiple different things. One example was there's a fire
14 near the track and we're just letting the crews know that. So,
15 depending -- is it dependent on what the tag says or is it -- is
16 there some process or maybe some best practices or anything in
17 writing that would lead us to understand better about the
18 application and removal of these tags?

19 A. I guess I would think it would be potentially dependent on
20 the location or what is the wording in the tag or what you're
21 protecting with that tag or identifying. I mean, it's something
22 that --

23 Q. Just for my clarification, because I was never a dispatcher,
24 can you explain to me the difference between the tag itself and
25 the block? I think I get the idea that the block is preventing

1 anything from going in and out of the siding. But the tag is more
2 or less for my understanding, and I don't understand all of it,
3 but the tag, is that more just like a note that you're putting in
4 along there? It doesn't provide any protection. The block does
5 that, right?

6 So, two parts of my question. Explain to me the
7 difference --

8 A. Correct. The --

9 Q. -- between a tag and a block, and then does the tag by itself
10 really do anything to modify the dispatching or anything like
11 that?

12 A. No. So, the track block is the preventative measure there to
13 prevent from lining a signal into a location. The tag generally
14 would be informational to indicate what the track block was there
15 protecting.

16 Q. And then one other part that I -- based on your experience as
17 a dispatcher, have you ever encountered tags that were applied
18 without any blocks or any indications?

19 A. Yeah, I would say, just in previous dispatching, tags we're
20 used as -- you could use them to identify the name of a track or a
21 lead or that type of thing. So, they are used -- can be used
22 pretty generally for informational purposes, I guess, on the
23 screen also.

24 Q. So, just for my clarification, kind of the impression that
25 I'm getting is the tags are discretionary for the dispatcher to

1 apply and to remove. The block is actually the protection, right?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. Okay. Thank you.

4 BY MR. FRIGO:

5 Q. Doug, this is Ryan Frigo again with NTSB. So, I want to ask
6 a question about corridor managers and their job responsibilities.
7 How would you describe their job responsibilities?

8 A. They are essentially managing their mainline operations and
9 the train dispatchers that work for them. They handle all of
10 basically the support functions for the train dispatch as far as
11 boot (ph.) balancing and planning and those types of things. And
12 then also responsible for the safety piece there as far as doing
13 the efficiency tests on the train dispatchers, but basically, they
14 are the train dispatcher supervisor.

15 Q. Would they be considered a resource to that train dispatcher
16 during a shift?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. So, I was a little surprised today when I found out that the
19 corridor manager, he'd never been a train dispatcher before. And
20 he's in this role now where he's essentially managing that
21 function and providing guidance and support to that function. Can
22 you tell me from your seat, as lane superintendent, kind of how
23 you view that type of situation?

24 A. From that standpoint, I think it's having my own experience
25 kind of jumping between departments and experiences, it's -- some

1 of our corridor managers that we brought in from the field or with
2 a wealth of experience are some of our better employees from that
3 aspect, just because of the experience they bring to the role.
4 There's a bit more of a learning curve just because they don't
5 have the specific dispatching experience. But a lot of the other
6 experience they bring with that I think actually can be pretty
7 beneficial to some of the training dispatchers because they don't
8 have that that type of experience or knowledge.

9 Q. I can appreciate that. And how does that corridor manager
10 that doesn't really have that dispatching experience, how do they
11 gain that technical capacity to really do that job? We've heard
12 that there's training, but I mean, there's a lot that goes into
13 being a dispatcher. And it just seems to me that it'd be a hard
14 position to be in to offer someone guidance when you've never
15 actually experienced doing that job.

16 A. Absolutely. I would say a lot of that is done through --
17 when we have that type of situation, we -- I would say -- at least
18 that's what I've done in the past with my managers, is had them
19 spend time with the train dispatchers as part of their training.
20 And then we also have the resources as far as the NCTD (ph.) desk,
21 the rules, and operations managers there at the Harriman that are
22 a resource for them if there's any technical or dispatcher
23 knowledge they aren't familiar with, that they can go to.

24 Q. I've been over there at the Harriman, and I've seen how much
25 work is actually going on. I mean, there's a lot going on. Do

1 you think that there's sufficient time for that on-the-job
2 training and coaching to occur?

3 A. I think we've been able to make it when we've had those
4 situations for those employees, at least in my experience out
5 here.

6 Q. And so, have you ever worked the area where the Bertram
7 siding is? Have you ever worked that as a dispatcher?

8 A. No, I have not.

9 Q. Okay, Doug, I don't have any other questions. I'm looking
10 around the room, and I think we're tapped out in here. And I just
11 want to thank you again for making yourself available to us. And
12 with that, I'll stop our recording.

13 A. All right. You bet. Thank you.

14 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

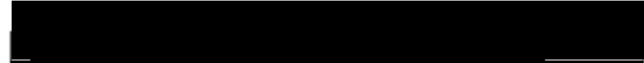
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was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Melissa Bousquette
Transcriber