

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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MULTIPLE FATALITIES TO PATCO

CONTRACTORS ON BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

BRIDGE NEAR CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY

ON OCTOBER 14, 2022

Accident No.: RRD23FR001

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Interview of: JULIE LUTHER, Dispatcher
PATCO

DoubleTree Inn
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Monday,
October 17, 2022

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL BACHMEIER, Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

RUBIN PAYAN, Signal and Train Control Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

PHILIP HERBERT, Accident Investigator
Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

ROBERT FINNEGAN, Chief Security and Safety Officer
Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA)

JOSEPH EBLING, Sergeant
DRPA Police Department

TODD KROPILAK, Program Manager
State Safety Oversight
New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT)

GENE STEWART, Compliance Safety and Health Officer
Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)

CALVIN WILBURN, Supervising Dispatcher
Port Authority Transit Corporation (PATCO)

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I N T E R V I E W

(7:20 a.m.)

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3 MR. BACHMEIER: My name is Michael Bachmeier, and I am the
4 NTSB operations group chairman for this accident. We are here
5 today, on October 17th at 7:20 a.m. in the DoubleTree Inn, to
6 conduct an interview with Julie Luther, who works for PATCO. This
7 interview is in conjunction with the NTSB's investigation of the
8 accident near the Ben Franklin Bridge. The NTSB reference number
9 is RRD23FR001. 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 a representative, 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 right.

16 Again, my name is Mike Bachmeier. The spelling of my last
17 name is B-a-c-h-m-e-i-e-r, and I am the NTSB operations group
18 chairman for this accident.

19 MR. HERBERT: Philip Herbert. Spelling of the last name is
20 H-e-r-b-e-r-t. I'm with the Federal Transit Administration. I'm
21 an accident investigator.

22 MR. FINNEGAN: I am Robert Finnegan, F-i-n-n-e-g-a-n, DRPA
23 chief security and safety officer.

24 SGT. EBLING: Joe Ebling, E-b-l-i-n-g. I am a sergeant with
25 DRPA Police, Badge 101.

1 MR. KROPILAK: Todd Kropilak, K-r-o-p as in Peter-i-l-a-k.
2 I'm with NJDOT, State Safety Oversight.

3 MR. STEWART: My name is Gene Stewart. I'm with the
4 Occupational Safety & Health Administration. S-t-e-w-a-r-t. I'm
5 a compliance safety and health officer.

6 MR. PAYAN: This is Rubin Payan; last name P-a-y-a-n. I'm
7 with the NTSB, and I'll be the signal and train control group
8 chairman.

9 MR. WILBURN: My name is Calvin Wilburn; last name W-i-l-b-u-
10 r-n. I'm supervising dispatcher for PATCO.

11 MS. LUTHER: I am Julie Luther, L-u-t-h-e-r, train dispatcher
12 for PATCO.

13 MR. BACHMEIER: Thank you.

14 Julie, do we have your permission to record our discussion
15 with you today?

16 MS. LUTHER: Sure.

17 MR. BACHMEIER: Do you understand the transcription will be
18 part of the public docket; as such, we cannot guarantee any
19 confidentiality?

20 MS. LUTHER: I've read them before.

21 MR. BACHMEIER: As we discussed, you have a representative
22 with you, Mr. Wilburn; is that correct?

23 MS. LUTHER: Yes.

24 MR. BACHMEIER: I'd like everyone to ask -- everyone to
25 clearly announce your name and title before questioning. With

1 that, let's proceed.

2 INTERVIEW OF JULIE LUTHER

3 BY MR. BACHMEIER:

4 Q. Julie, could you give us a synopsis of your work experience
5 taking us up to your present job?

6 A. How far back do you want me to start?

7 Q. How far back you want to go.

8 A. Do you want just PATCO or --

9 Q. Any rail experience or -- yeah.

10 A. Prior to coming down to this area, I was a 911
11 dispatcher/telecommunicator in Rochester, New York for 7 years.
12 We moved down to Pennsylvania in -- 2017? 2017. So I've been a
13 train dispatcher for 5 years for PATCO. I just -- my anniversary
14 was September 11th. So I just completed 5 years.

15 Q. Okay. And so, 5 years. How about in your current position?
16 In your --

17 A. Five years.

18 Q. And you worked the same position, like --

19 A. Yes. Yes.

20 Q. And what is your current schedule?

21 A. I work Monday through Friday, 3 p.m. to 11 p.m.

22 Q. Monday through Friday, 3 to 11. Okay. And with that, do you
23 have a lot of outages going on during your shift?

24 A. Normally one per shift.

25 Q. One per shift.

1 A. It usually starts around 9 o'clock at night, and it's most
2 likely been the bridge outages, either 1 track or 2 track,
3 depending on the work.

4 Q. Okay. And normally when you have an outage, how do the track
5 workers, contractors, get protection? Do you know how that all
6 works or -- do people contact you to make sure they're protected?

7 A. The typical way an outage goes is a maintainer who's in
8 charge of taking the track out of service calls on the radio to
9 Center Tower, which is where I work, and then I would acknowledge
10 them and then go through the process of removing the track once
11 that has happened.

12 Q. Okay. So you -- so it would be a PATCO employee --

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. -- calling you.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. And then you --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. As long as there's nothing else going on, on the railroad and
20 I have the ability to give them that track, then that's the next
21 step.

22 Q. Yep. Yep. To make sure there's no trains or --

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. -- yep, anything.

25 A. Correct.

1 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay. With that, Phil, I'll pass it off to
2 you.

3 BY MR. HERBERT:

4 Q. Phil Herbert, H-e-r-b-e-r-t, from the Federal Transit
5 Administration. Julie, you said you were a 911 operator for 9
6 years?

7 A. Seven.

8 Q. Seven. Okay. I want to make sure I clarify.

9 A. Sure.

10 Q. You kind of talked about when the maintainer calls you to
11 close the track, and you said it's usually around 9 p.m. Has that
12 been a norm?

13 A. That's when the track is scheduled to go out.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Once a week, people meet to discuss what the outages are
16 going to be for that week, and then there's a document that's
17 issued mid-week that begins on a Friday night and then it goes
18 through the whole week. And if changes are made, we're sent an
19 email, then we update our list for what we have.

20 So the track was scheduled for -- let's just stick to Friday
21 night, because I can't speak for everything else.

22 Q. Right.

23 A. So Friday night, the track was scheduled to go out at 9
24 o'clock at night. The outage was from Hall interlocking to Market
25 interlocking on 2 track on the bridge. Maintainer 5348 calls me

1 and says, you know, 5348 to Center. I said, 5348 stand by, I have
2 a train problem. Can't do anything, I got a train in the track
3 circuit -- one of the track circuits that needs to be cleared for
4 that outage to be established. So I put them on hold.

5 Q. So where would that maintainer be when he calls you?

6 A. Normally in Camden storage, but I don't know that for sure.

7 Q. Okay. So he's not with anybody out --

8 A. I don't know. I don't know.

9 Q. Okay. All right.

10 A. I don't have knowledge.

11 Q. And you said Hall, and to where? Do you know?

12 A. Hall interlocking to Market.

13 Q. Market. So far as that routine goes, the 9 o'clock
14 timeframe, right, is it -- I mean, is that the norm or is it --
15 does it bounce around? Like it could be 9:30 or it could be 10,
16 depending on what --

17 A. It's scheduled for 9 o'clock, and as soon as somebody calls
18 me, that's when we would start.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. So that's determined by the people in the field, not me.

21 Q. All right. Okay. Thanks.

22 A. Unless there's a train problem, then it's determined by me.

23 Q. Okay. Great. Thank you.

24 A. You're welcome.

25 MR. BACHMEIER: Robert?

1 BY MR. FINNEGAN:

2 Q. Robert Finnegan, DRPA, chief security and safety officer.
3 Just one question, Julie. Did you notice anything out of the
4 ordinary on that evening leading up to the closure request or the
5 track outage request?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Everything just was kind of the same as every other request
8 for a closure?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Thank you.

11 A. You're welcome.

12 BY SGT. EBLING:

13 Q. Sgt. Joseph Ebling, DRPA Police. I've got a few questions.

14 A. Sure.

15 Q. The week leading up to that when they started working night
16 work, did any train operators ever call you and tell you they saw
17 any other workers in that track area when they weren't supposed to
18 be there?

19 A. Not that I recall.

20 Q. Nothing? Okay. And you said maintainer 5348 called
21 dispatch. What did they call dispatch for?

22 A. He was the person who starts the outage. So he was the
23 person -- the person who calls me, no matter who that is that
24 night, is the one that's normally in charge of taking the track
25 out of service.

1 Q. Okay.

2 SGT. EBLING: That's it. Thank you.

3 MR. BACHMEIER: Todd? No questions for Todd.

4 Gene?

5 BY MR. STEWART:

6 Q. Gene Stewart, OSHA. Can you tell me a little bit about what
7 the process is in the event that you're notified of -- let's say
8 that there was an outage scheduled and there is a report of those
9 employees or somebody working on the tracks, and you notice there
10 is a train already on schedule to come through there. What's that
11 process? Who do you communicate with?

12 A. That wouldn't happen. If a track is out of service, there
13 should never be a train anywhere near the outage itself. The
14 track at this time was in service because I had a train problem,
15 so it's mine still. I had never given permission for anybody to
16 do anything outside of that.

17 MR. STEWART: That's all.

18 MR. PAYAN: No questions.

19 MR. BACHMEIER: I don't have no further questions right now.
20 Phil?

21 BY MR. HERBERT:

22 Q. One real quick one. That train that you had the problem
23 with --

24 A. Um-hum.

25 Q. -- what was that train's route? Was it across for storage or

1 was it going across and coming back on track 1?

2 A. It was in revenue service. It had just departed City Hall
3 and it encountered a problem, so it was stopped. And then its
4 destination was 16th and Locust on number 2 track.

5 Q. All right. So City Hall, Camden?

6 A. Correct. Yes.

7 Q. And its destination was -- I'm sorry?

8 A. 16th and Locust.

9 Q. All right. And what happened at that point? Did that train
10 then go out of service or --

11 A. At the time of the incident?

12 Q. No, I mean if it had completed its --

13 A. Oh, no. It would have stopped at 16th and Locust. The train
14 operator would change ends and it would come back east.

15 Q. Okay. All right. That's all I have.

16 A. No, no worries.

17 Q. Thanks.

18 A. Sure.

19 MR. FINNEGAN: Nothing.

20 SGT. EBLING: No questions.

21 MR. BACHMEIER: Todd?

22 MR. KROPILAK: No.

23 MR. BACHMEIER: Gene? Rubin?

24 MR. PAYAN: No further questions -- or no questions at all.

25 MR. BACHMEIER: Okay.

1 BY MR. BACHMEIER:

2 Q. I do have one question for you.

3 A. Sure.

4 Q. Like in a typical shift, how many trains do you dispatch?

5 A. Between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. is what we consider our PM load
6 line, we have, what, eight trains, nine trains. I think it's
7 eight or nine.

8 Q. Eight or nine trains?

9 A. I would have to look at the schedule to know for sure.

10 Q. Yep. Yeah, that's no problem.

11 A. And then after 6 o'clock, we send trains to the yard because
12 our headway opens up for like, say, 5 or 7 minutes to 15 on the
13 track work schedule and we're down to five trains. And at 8:28
14 that night, another train went to the yard, so I had four trains.

15 Q. Okay. So eight to nine, then it goes down to --

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. -- after 8:30 at night, it's just four trains. And that's --
18 and they go east and west?

19 A. And then depending on the length of the outage and what track
20 it's on, we could actually send another train to the yard and drop
21 it down to three. It's dependent on the work.

22 Q. Okay. Perfect. Okay. Is there anything that you would like
23 to add to this interview?

24 A. No.

25 Q. If we have any follow-up questions, could we contact you

1 to --

2 A. Yes.

3 MR. BACHMEIER: On behalf of the NTSB and our group here, I'd
4 like to thank you for your time and cooperation. Thank you.

5 MS. LUTHER: You're welcome.

6 MR. BACHMEIER: The interview is complete.

7 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: MULTIPLE FATALITIES TO PATCO
 CONTRACTORS ON BENJAMIN FRANKLIN BRIDGE
 IN CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY
 ON OCTOBER 14, 2022
 Interview of Julie Luther

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23FR001

PLACE: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

DATE: October 17, 2022

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.



Kay Maurer
Transcriber