

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Investigation of:)
SEPTA Fire) Accident No.: RRD25FR006

Interview of: FRANK BRANDIS, Assistant General Manager,
Operations Division, SEPTA

Pages: 1 through 57
Place: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Date: September 27, 2025

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:)
SEPTA Fire) Accident No.: RRD25FR006
)
)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Saturday,
September 27, 2025

Interview of: FRANK BRANDIS, Assistant General Manager,
Operations Division, SEPTA

APPEARANCES:

TODD KRAHOLIK, NTSB Assistant IIC

JOE GORDON, NTSB Railroad Division Chief

RICHARD SHERRY, Federal Railroad Administration

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Frank Brandis:	
By Mr. Kraholik	5
By Mr. Gordon	16
By Mr. Sherry	24
By Mr. Kraholik	32
By Mr. Gordon	38
By Mr. Sherry	46
By Mr. Gordon	54

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. KRAHOLIK: My name is Todd Kraholik. I'm the
3 NTSB Assistant IIC for this accident. We're here
4 today on September 27, 2025. We're at SEPTA
5 Headquarters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to
6 conduct an interview with Frank Brandis, who works
7 for SEPTA.

8 This interview is in conjunction with the fire
9 and smoke incidents that have been happening on the
10 SEPTA system. The Accident Reference Number for NTSB
11 is RRD25FR006.

12 The purpose of this investigation is to increase
13 safety, not to assign fault, blame, or liability.

14 Before we begin our interview and questions,
15 let's go around the table and introduce ourselves.
16 Please spell your last name, who you represent, and
17 your title. And just kindly speak clearly so we can
18 get an accurate recording.

19 I'll start off and pass it to my right. Again,
20 my name is Todd Kraholik. The spelling of my last
21 name is K-R-A-H-O-L-I-K, and I'm the NTSB Assistant
22 IIC.

23 MR. GORDON: Joe Gordon, G-O-R-D-O-N, NTSB
24 Railroad Division Chief.

25 MR. BRANDIS: Frank Brandis, Assistant General

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1 Manager, Operations Division, SEPTA. Last name,
2 B-R-A-N-D-I-S.

3 MR. SHERRY: Richard Sherry. Last name spelling
4 S-H-E-R-R-Y. FRA MP&E Inspector/Investigator,
5 Philadelphia Area.

6 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right, Frank, do we have your
7 permission to record our discussion today?

8 MR. BRANDIS: Yes.

9 MR. KRAHOLIK: And do you understand the
10 transcription will be part of a public docket, and as
11 such, we can't guarantee any confidentiality?

12 MR. BRANDIS: Yes.

13 MR. KRAHOLIK: And as we discussed, you don't
14 have any representative here today, is that correct?

15 MR. BRANDIS: Correct.

16 INTERVIEW OF FRANK BRANDIS

17 BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

18 Q All right, Frank, can you please give us a
19 synopsis of your work experience? Take us up to your
20 current job and how long you've been doing your
21 current job.

22 A I've been in the Assistant General Manager
23 position for Operations for a couple of months, three
24 or four months. Prior to that, I was Interim Service
25 Delivery, Chief Service Delivery Officer, around

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1 Thanksgiving 2004. It was the same job. It just
2 got, once it became permanent, they made it AGM.

3 Prior to that, I was the Deputy Chief Operating
4 Officer for Bus and Access, which was our bus
5 operation, both transportation maintenance, our
6 demand response operation, both internal staff and
7 contractor staff, and our non-revenue fleet.

8 Prior to that, I was the Chief Officer for
9 Access, which is our para-transit operation. I went
10 there shortly after the beginning of ADA in 1995 and
11 built that up. Went from a Contract Compliance
12 Manager to Senior Director of Operations, which was
13 consisting of fleet training, control center,
14 reservation scheduling. And then the last position
15 in that department was Chief Officer.

16 Prior to that, I had a dozen, 13 years in bus
17 maintenance. Started in 1983 as a General Helper,
18 progressed through the Mechanical levels in the
19 hourly ranks to first class, and then was promoted to
20 Superintendent, which is now called a Director in
21 SEPTA, in 1992.

22 Q All right. And from Thanksgiving of '24, you
23 were the Interim Service Delivery and that's rail?
24 Was that pretty much the same job now but --

25 A That consisted of all operations.

1 Q All operation. Okay. So do you have a working
2 knowledge of all the fires or smoke incidents that
3 we've been to since starting at the beginning of the
4 year in February? Are you caught up on all that?

5 A Yes. Since February, since the Ridley Park
6 fire.

7 Q Okay.

8 A I was on site for that one.

9 Q Okay. And so we had -- I'm just going to talk
10 about each, if you can talk. So the first fire we
11 had, do you remember what SEPTA did in response to
12 that first fire? Was there any procedural changes to
13 that one after that one?

14 A I don't believe -- nothing comes to mind. I
15 mean, that was the first incident for us. I was
16 pretty much becoming familiar with your process on
17 the investigation.

18 Q Okay. And then the second one, do you remember
19 anything after that one?

20 A The second one, you're referring to Levittown?

21 MR. SHERRY: Would that have been June?

22 MR. KRAHOLIK: That would have been June, yeah.

23 MR. BRANDIS: Levittown, I'm familiar with that.

24 We started to do campaigns. I believe some of it was
25 in conjunction with what the FRA and the NTSB came up

1 with with discussions with our Mechanical staff. I
2 know there was an agreement on duration on how long
3 that would take. That was consisting of inspecting
4 the resistor banks, the duct tube on the roof, and
5 then, subsequent to that, in the investigation, they
6 determined that the dynamic brake air pressure switch
7 and the cam controller were suspected of contributing
8 to the incident.

9 I believe the -- my recall is, is the commitment
10 to you from our Maintenance staff was 92 days. I
11 directed my staff that I wanted it done in 30 days.
12 That was an aggressive goal. I would have been
13 satisfied if he came to me in 45 or told me he needed
14 a couple more weeks. They did complete that within
15 the 92 days but fell short of what my expectations
16 were. That was a early indication to me that people
17 need to do what they're supposed to do or at least
18 explain to me why we're falling short. That was my
19 first incident like that with the rail side.

20 BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

21 Q I got you. And then, so, basically, after the
22 first two, we're only focused pretty much with the car
23 part of it, the mechanical part of it. So then the
24 third one happens in July, I think it was July 22,
25 and that's when I first started hearing the train

1 crews get involved. There was initially put out a
2 reporting, I'm going to call it bulletin, for
3 reporting equipment issues. I think that got put
4 out, like, the 24th of July or something like that.
5 Do you know what your expectation was for that
6 bulletin? What was that supposed to accomplish?

7 A Well, we had the second fire, a total loss of
8 the car, in late July. The ensuing inspection and
9 investigation into that, again, I have a very short
10 tenure, but it was obvious to me that we are missing
11 early indicators that can prevent these types of
12 things. There's defects, minor defects that are not
13 being reported. So the intent of that memo and I
14 looked at it last night I believe, I believe it went
15 out, the initial memo, cover memo, went out on August
16 the 5th, I could be corrected. That was from the new
17 head of the railroad explaining why we need to change
18 this rule that you cannot reset faults. You need to
19 report everything to the Mechanical Desk. We need
20 all this information to be able to analyze and find
21 out -- and obviously keep worse catastrophes from
22 happening.

23 I did the initial draft of the cover memo for
24 that rule. The railroad folks were modifying the
25 rule based on what my expectations were. We got the

1 unions involved in it so they understood, both the
2 conductors and the engineers. And given the recent
3 reorg with new people, I handed my draft to the -- to
4 Crystal Cooper, who's the new head of Rail
5 Transportation. She modified it a bit, but it went
6 out under her signature. The goal was is to get buy-
7 in from crews on why we need you to report
8 everything. And the expectation was is, if you
9 report something, if it's minor, the Mechanical Desk,
10 which has now moved into the 19th floor right inside
11 the Rail Control Center, that they can talk to the
12 crew and determine whether it's something that can be
13 resolved while it's in service and keep it in service,
14 and if it can't, they can pull it from service.

15 Q All right. How did you want that to get
16 conveyed to the crews? Not the unions but the actual
17 crews from SEPTA. Was your intent just to stick it
18 in
19 the tablet and hope they read it, or were you
20 expecting that it --

21 A No, it was multi-fold. I can't take full credit
22 for it because we were working with your agencies,
23 all good suggestions. We issued it by paper, we
24 issued it out to the tablets, and our managers went
25 out and spoke with the crews to tell them why it was

1 important.

2 Q Okay. And then -- so your understanding was
3 they were going to talk to crews, or your
4 understanding is they actually did talk to crews?

5 A They did talk to crews.

6 Q Okay.

7 A We have a record of that.

8 Q Okay. There is a record of that?

9 A Yes.

10 Q Okay. So I don't remember the number, two or
11 three after that one. Then we have the 26th the
12 dynamic brake light issues memo/bulletin got put out.
13 And that one, how was that one to be put out to the
14 crews?

15 A I believe that that was a -- it was all part of
16 the same communication. I think the rule itself was
17 revised a little bit just to make it clearer to the
18 crews. And I have to look at my calendar, it was
19 actually a week I was on vacation, but it may have
20 got reissued on a Wednesday, and by Thursday, the
21 crews were reporting numerous, numerous incidents of
22 lights --

23 Q Right.

24 A -- which, as an organization, we lived through
25 for two weeks.

1 MR. SHERRY: I was a part of that revision.

2 BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

3 Q So then the -- on the 12th of September, we put
4 out you've got to put out -- if you have a report of
5 an issue, you put it all on the MP-11, and that was
6 to be sent out the same way, through the tablet and
7 then also have people stand down with their -- with
8 the transportation people? The same kind of --

9 A If there was something put out on September 12
10 you said, I don't have knowledge of that. But
11 reporting everything on an MP-11 was part of the
12 initial bulletin and part of the initial cover memo.
13 Whether it was electronic or paper, the paper -- the
14 other thing we committed to is that the paper version
15 would not be available after September the 30th.

16 Q Okay. September 30 it was all going to have to
17 be on the thing. So if --

18 A Can I -- may I interrupt? No, no, it could be
19 on the record.

20 Q Okay.

21 A There may have been a clarification put out by
22 managers on the MP-11, but I don't recall getting a
23 copy of an email or a memo.

24 Q Okay. Okay. So, if I were to tell you that in
25 our interviews, three sets of interviews, that until

1 about two weeks ago nobody actually talked to the
2 crews, would that be a failure on your managers' part?
3 Or is that kind of an oversight, or what would that -
4 -

5 A The crews that you investigated or you
6 interviewed as part of this recent incident?

7 Q There was three sets from the third fire, smoke,
8 whatever. The third incident all the way to the one
9 we had the 25th, we talked to -- we had three sets of
10 interviews in there, and our understanding is up
11 until end of August/September nobody actually talked
12 to the crews. It was all pushed through on tablets.
13 Nobody actually went out and talked to any employees.
14 And, actually, it was stated that we don't have the
15 manpower to talk to employees. So is --

16 A It's a management failure.

17 Q Okay.

18 A We have a record of the people who we've spoken
19 to.

20 Q Okay. So your understanding is they actually
21 did go out?

22 A Correct. Actually --

23 Q Okay. Before the end of August, they should
24 have went out, and you have a record before August?

25 A I have the record up until current.

1 Q Okay.

2 A I looked at it yesterday.

3 Q Okay.

4 A Now I don't know who the crews are that are
5 involved in this recent investigation, so I didn't
6 look at it to see if they were actually part of the
7 group that was spoken with. There's some that, by
8 gleaning the sheet, engineers, I believe they got a
9 little over 80 percent of them done. Now some of
10 them may be long term out or whatever. And then
11 conductors, it was over 60.

12 So I instructed Crystal Cooper, who's the head of
13 the railroad, I said divide up all the rest of them
14 and get it done before Tuesday, and then immediately
15 following that we're going to repeat and do it again
16 and we're just going to have to reinforce it over and
17 over again until the message is received.

18 Q Okay. Another part of this would be, is this
19 something that you plan on doing, compliance test I
20 think is the word you guys use, operational test and
21 compliance test. Is that something you guys are
22 going to plan to go out and make sure that all this
23 is happening by the crew part of it? Is that
24 something you're going to enforce with testing? Or is
25 that something --

1 A My understanding is, is from the conversation we
2 had at Wayne the other day, that the Transportation
3 Managers board the train and they have a compliance
4 check that they do, that they have to do so many of
5 them.

6 Beyond that, for this specific incident on what,
7 you know, they're doing in the cab, if they're paying
8 attention to lights and stuff, it was always our
9 intention to audit the MP-11s. Again, we're very
10 early in this. We've got, like, a month's worth of
11 data now to check that for compliance, check for
12 reports reported to the Mechanical Desk and that that
13 has a corresponding MP-11 and that ones that needed
14 attention determined by the Mechanical Desk that a
15 work order was opened and that train was looked at
16 and taken care of.

17 What we're adding as of yesterday is to come up
18 with a daily check of the cab video where we check so
19 many of them a day randomly at different times of the
20 day. I asked Crystal, I said kind of think of it
21 like we do drug and alcohol testing. We don't pick
22 the same time of the day to do it. We also have the
23 capability of reviewing the day before so we can pick
24 the hour. But the example I used was is day one we're
25 checking 6:00 in the morning, day two we'll check

1 7:00, we'll just go around the clock and start over
2 again so we're assured of getting a good mix of the
3 crews that are out there during a service day.

4 Q I got you. Okay. So there will be some
5 compliance checks with that?

6 A Yes.

7 MR. KRAHOLIK: Right. Got you. All right. I'm
8 going to pass it to Joe for now.

9 MR. GORDON: All right. Thanks, Frank, for
10 sitting with us, and this is really helpful. You
11 know, one of our challenges is always what we hear in
12 interviews and then, you know, just verifying what
13 we're hearing, so, you know, the fact that you guys
14 were tracking who you talked to and getting a copy of
15 those will definitely help us, help us to, you know,
16 better understand some of what we heard yesterday.

17 BY MR. GORDON:

18 Q So, outside of the vehicle fleet, are there
19 other warning lights, let's talk about control
20 center, you know, anywhere in the system, SCATA
21 systems or anything like that, are there other
22 warning lights that are used to give whoever's
23 interfacing with that, be it a vehicle or control
24 desk or anything like that, in the system that you
25 know of, like, just kind of your knowledge of the

1 system, are there other warning lights that people
2 may receive?

3 A Not that I'm aware of. I know the control center
4 can see switches and stuff like that on our board and
5 know if there's switch or signal violations and stuff.
6 We get that immediately in the control center. But,
7 on board, something on board where it says the
8 telemetry, I guess, is the word --

9 Q Right.

10 A -- we don't have that technology.

11 Q Okay.

12 A The trains we're talking about are most 1970s
13 technology.

14 Q Okay. Okay. So there's -- we've worked on some
15 transit properties in the past probably with more
16 fidelity and, like, where the trains are, that they
17 might get a warning light that a train's in a location
18 that it's not supposed to be or something like that,
19 but you guys don't -- yours --

20 A Oh, I think they can tell that. They can tell
21 that in the control center.

22 Q Okay. Okay.

23 A I'm still with a lot of this stuff in the stage
24 of asking a lot of the staff questions so I
25 understand it.

1 Q Yeah. Okay.

2 A But I've, you know, over my career, I've been in
3 the command center for major events, so I've seen
4 these boards and asked questions before I was in this
5 position.

6 Q Yeah.

7 A So I've got a basic understanding of how it
8 works.

9 Q Okay. Yeah, and that may be, you know, just
10 something to take away, just like, you know, do we
11 possibly, because we know in this one already we've
12 identified that there was an issue with, you know, a
13 warning light that over the years people have just
14 gotten conditioned to, so just kind of looking at the
15 system and seeing if there may be some other places
16 like that.

17 So these warning lights, the indicator lights
18 that they were getting on the trains, dynamic brake
19 out lights, whatever, you know, the lunar that we're
20 kind of focusing on now, when did that come to
21 leadership attention that the crews were kind of
22 conditioned to these lights being on? Was that only
23 after Ridley Park that there was an understanding
24 that --

25 A I never had anybody tell me this.

1 Q Okay.

2 A This is just something I concluded after looking
3 at two catastrophes.

4 Q Okay.

5 A That we're missing small things.

6 Q Okay. All right. And we've already talked about
7 the plan going forward to handle that. So I think
8 Todd's got to a lot of my questions before. I'm just
9 rolling through here and taking a look real quick.

10 So can you talk to us a little bit about change
11 management within SEPTA? Like, if there's going to be
12 a new procedure that comes out, a change to a piece
13 of equipment, change management, just kind of how you
14 guys look at the downstream effects of change that
15 may take place?

16 A Well, there's a number of things. I mean, for
17 simpler things, there's memos that just reinforce
18 things. Something that's a drastic change in
19 equipment, there are change management. I'm more
20 familiar with the bus side.

21 Q Mm-hmm.

22 A We're adding some safety features on our buses
23 because of operator assaults, and all of them have a
24 change management document that gets signed off by
25 everybody, including our union that uses that

1 equipment, and it explains what we're doing. It has a
2 risk analysis in it that, you know, determines, like,
3 hey, this is a good option to do, it's going to lower
4 the risk.

5 And then, for, like, employees for work rules,
6 we have a authority rules committee. It's comprised
7 of, Systems Safety's on it, but there's
8 representatives from all the different departments
9 and operations. It's chaired by the head of the
10 control center. And when a rule change is proposed,
11 the draft goes to them and they discuss it and adopt
12 it, and if it's adopted, it gets pushed out to
13 tablets, posted on bulletin boards. It's different
14 depending on the department.
15 We're still in the throes of striving to get
16 everything electronic.

17 Q Mm-hmm.

18 A The railroad's actually ahead of that, but we'd
19 like to -- we're still convincing our other rubber
20 tire folks that this is the way to go.

21 Q Okay. Thank you for that. So I'm just going to
22 refer to the documents that were put out post Ridley
23 Park, the notices, alerts, as directives, right?

24 A Mm-hmm.

25 Q That's their mandatory directive. So are there

1 different roll-out procedures for mandatory
2 directives? So, like, do you have some directives
3 that might come out that might require that the
4 control operator talks to every engineer? And I'm
5 just thinking about, like, things that come up along,
6 you know, with the right of way. So, if there's a
7 speed restriction, that speed restriction goes out to
8 the tablet. Is that also a requirement that the
9 controller says, hey, operator of Train 123, did you
10 receive this speed restriction? Do you know if
11 there's, like, a difference in kind of that contact?

12 A I don't know that.

13 Q Okay.

14 A I know the control center's aware when there's
15 Form W's, Form D's, temporary speed restrictions,
16 single tracking. They're aware of all that stuff. We
17 have an Operations meeting every morning at 8:45, and
18 we go over a lot of things that impacts on service,
19 including, like, track projects, where things are
20 going on, so that everybody -- Infrastructure,
21 Maintenance, Operations -- is all aware of what's
22 going on out there in the theater.

23 Q Okay. And, you know, that may be a question for
24 your assistant, kind of understanding better how some
25 directives may call for, you know, direct

1 communication between the control operator and the
2 train crew. But we did hear that in some of the
3 interviews, that, you know, if they're operating on
4 Amtrak's tracks, the Amtrak, instead of just getting
5 something to the tablet, maybe because Amtrak can't
6 push something to the tablet, they actually get a
7 message that morning from the controller to the train
8 crew saying, you know, hey, you've got this work order
9 in this location, verify that you understand, you
10 know, the expectation. So just something to consider
11 there and maybe ask some questions about.

12 A We have reached out to Amtrak.

13 Q Okay.

14 A And we're in discussion or dialogue on how to
15 improve communications. The head of our control
16 center is leading that effort. That was actually
17 after the Paoli fire I think it was that that was --
18 that communication was one of the things that really
19 hampered it. I mean, all things considered, if the
20 pans went down and power was shut off at Villanova,
21 that wouldn't have happened.

22 Q Right.

23 A Or it would have been less severe, but that
24 didn't happen. And by the time it got to Paoli,
25 they're out of contact with us. So we're looking to

1 improve that. It's necessary. And that, along with a
2 lot of other just operational issues. We have a
3 regular cadence meeting with Amtrak.

4 Q Good to hear. Good to hear you guys are
5 thinking in these lines there. So risk management on
6 SEPTA's system, and you've talked a little bit about
7 it, but, like, as far as how it's formally documented,
8 is
9 there -- do you guys use a risk register or database
10 or anything like that? Like, when you've gone out and
11 done a risk assessment, is that formally documented,
12 like, we identified this as a hazard, these are the
13 mitigation tools?

14 A I don't know. I'm not -- when I spoke with you
15 earlier, that was what I'm more familiar with on that
16 side.

17 Q Okay. Yeah. So we'll talk to, yeah, Safety.
18 We'll talk to the Safety folks.

19 A What they do on the rail side and what Systems
20 Safety does. I mean, everything we do up here has to
21 get Systems Safety's sign-off.

22 Q Okay.

23 A But, in my role right now, and I've done this in
24 smaller departments, I -- I'm using something that you
25 hear in literature all the time, we're not working in

1 silos anymore. If there's a good practice on the bus
2 side that we can make rail better, we're going to
3 share that.

4 MR. GORDON: Okay. And we'll talk to you off the
5 record and get a contact of someone in Systems Safety
6 that would be good for us to talk to just to
7 understand kind of the risk management side of it.
8 So I think that's what I've got for my first round. I
9 really appreciate it.

10 MR. SHERRY: Richard Sherry, FRA.

11 BY MR. SHERRY:

12 Q Frank, how does information flow up to you? Is
13 it through a chain of command and/or can a front-line
14 manager reach you directly?

15 A They can. I've had hourly employees contact me
16 and front-line managers. It's often something that
17 they want to speak about in confidence, but I
18 consider myself accessible.

19 Q Okay.

20 A Yeah, actually, any level. And I'm not afraid to
21 reach down.

22 Q Yeah.

23 A And sometimes people reach up and tell me
24 things.

25 Q Is the normal chain -- is the normal flow a

1 chain of command, though? Or do you talk -- or do
2 you cut out the middle mud I should say or middle
3 management and have communication? Do you ever have
4 meetings with just your front-line managers?

5 A I have. Not on a regular cadence, though. For,
6 like, a special event or special reason.

7 Q Okay.

8 A I've gone out and visited locations off hours,
9 you know, it's a surprise when I show up, but I'm
10 really, hey, what's on your mind.

11 Q Yeah. All right. With these directives that
12 have come out, what is the accountability that SEPTA
13 puts on this if these directives aren't followed and
14 has that been put into words or writing or a
15 document?

16 A The document that went out spelled out the
17 reasons why we needed to do something. We didn't get
18 into the ramifications if it's not followed. It was
19 trying to make a sound argument that this is for --
20 to protect you and protect our riders. But there are
21 rules, there are rules for not following procedures,
22 and people need to be held accountable.

23 Again, I'm waiting -- in this case, I'm waiting
24 to hear all the facts. You guys are doing your
25 investigation, so I don't know everything. But, if

1 somebody's wrong, they have to be held accountable.

2 Does that mean the most severe? I don't know yet.

3 But it doesn't have to be the least severe.

4 Q How do you feel SEPTA has dealt with
5 accountability over the years?

6 A I hold managers accountable, but I don't think
7 everybody does the best they can at that.

8 Q So do you think SEPTA could do better holding
9 everybody accountable?

10 A Yes. I'm a believer in, if you bring something
11 to somebody's attention, 90 percent of the people or
12 better are going to react in a positive way. But,
13 you know, you can't jump right to discharge, right?

14 Q Correct.

15 A My experience in my day is, if I bring something
16 to your attention in a memo or I write some
17 constructive criticism in a, both good and bad in a
18 performance appraisal, that you'll respond to that,
19 and then I expect you to do better at that. That's
20 actually the words I use. I expect what I expect and
21 I don't expect to visit the same thing the following
22 year.

23 And most people, when they get that, they do
24 better. Or I hold one-on-one meetings with my
25 managers. If there's something that's an obstacle to

1 them, I'll do what I can to remove it. I think that's
2 part of we get, like, \$30 million of management
3 salaries in this division. I can't do everything. I
4 expect my managers to take care of their areas.
5 They're empowered to do that, but I'm not going to do
6 the job for them, but I will help to remove an
7 obstacle if it comes up.

8 The other, I guess, when it comes to
9 disciplinary matters, whether it's a written warning
10 or higher, if you're not experienced at doing it, you
11 should ask for help because it's really corrective
12 behavior that we're looking for. We're not looking
13 for -- to get rid of people. We've got a lot of
14 investment in our folks.

15 Q Yeah.

16 A And you need to correct it. But, you know,
17 adults are often afraid to ask for help for something
18 they're not good at, but it's out there, you know.

19 Q Yeah.

20 A When I speak with people about it, I'm thinking,
21 like, ask for help. There's a lot of departments in
22 here that can help you, whether it's a EEO issue or a
23 labor issue or a legal issue. Pick up the phone and
24 call that department. Of course, I'm here.

25 Q You've been in this role for three or four months

1 you stated, and during these fire/thermal events, as
2 you've picked up information of what we would call
3 deceptive culture of the past and you're seeing that
4 culture, what things are being put in place to change
5 that culture and rolled out?

6 A I think SEPTA as an organization has the
7 structure for safety culture. Sometimes these terms
8 are used interchangeable, but I think they're
9 different. I think SEPTA climate is where we -- or
10 pardon me, safety climate is where we struggle
11 because we need individuals to understand their
12 impact on the things they do day in and day out and
13 how that prevents things from happening, prevents
14 accidents and safety things. And that's where the
15 eyes and ears of everybody come in. Don't be afraid
16 to report it.

17 Just the other day I was walking down the
18 street. I make eye contact with our bus operators,
19 many of them who I know, I don't want them to think I
20 ignored them, I just want to say hello. But I'm
21 disappointed when I see somebody looking down in
22 their lap and it's a, I guess the better way, I can't
23 rule out the possibility that they were looking at a
24 cell phone, which is prohibited. So I reported that.
25 And we have video that can prove that, and that

1 person will be held accountable for that.

2 Q Do you pass that accountability down to your
3 front-line managers and how to handle that? I know
4 how you're telling me you handle it, but is that
5 getting conveyed to your middle management and front-
6 line management, how you want the railroad or the bus
7 operation to be run?

8 A I have discussions about accountability with the
9 staff that report to me, the really senior staff and
10 when I'm in the presence of middle managers, and you
11 use -- you know, you encourage them, like, if you
12 need help, ask for it. But also, you know, the
13 things I've already mentioned, like, nothing changes
14 and nothing changes. And when you see a problem, you
15 can't look at it like it'll go away or that it's a
16 one-off because a lot of unsafe acts, we dodged a
17 bullet. But, out of a couple hundred thousand of
18 them, there's always one catastrophe, and that's what
19 we're trying to prevent. That's what they need to
20 understand. Don't take that chance every day.

21 Q Do you feel that your message is getting down to
22 your front-line managers?

23 A Obviously not. But we'll improve at that.

24 Q All right.

25 A I also, I see a difference in transit and rail.

1 Q Okay.

2 A And I think being early in my tenure in the rail
3 side, the part governed by the FRA, I think there's an
4 over-reliance that people are qualified and they know
5 what to do, so you don't have to follow behind them.
6 But that's the role of every manager at every level.
7 And I think that's come out as starkly clear in this
8 case, that you can't rely on people to do -- it's
9 human behavior. You know, you step over the line
10 once and back and nobody notices. Before, when
11 something really bad happens, we're way out here, and
12 that's the message that has to get out, that every
13 level of manager is responsible to check the one
14 under them.

15 Q I agree. Thank you. One final question. You
16 talked earlier about reviewing video every morning on
17 so many train sets. Can you go into detail what you
18 would be looking for and what part were you looking
19 at? What you'd be looking at and for?

20 A I think initially we'd be looking at the cab on
21 what the engineer's doing. I mean, the focus of this
22 investigation is the general fault light.

23 Q Okay.

24 A But there's a number of things you can look at.
25 You know, are they on the cell phone? Are they, you

1 know.

2 Q So, in that review, would you have a Mechanical
3 manager, an Operations person, because everybody --
4 not that we have silos, but everybody has an
5 expertise. Would they be reviewing that with you or
6 whoever you put in charge of that so you have
7 different disciplines with that person?

8 A My -- I'd be happy to hear any suggestions, but
9 my initial is to give it to Operations.

10 Q Okay.

11 A Give it to Transportation. It's their employee
12 that's in that cab.

13 Q Okay.

14 A And they're accountable. If we're saying we're
15 doing this and it's not being done, you're missing
16 something. What's the good part of -- I don't know
17 if it's -- I know, in crime investigations, they're
18 trained to look for what's not there, right? I'm sure
19 your investigations are the same way.

20 Q Sort of.

21 A You know, things just don't come out and hit you
22 on the head. You've got to look a little deeper on
23 what should be there and it's not.

24 Q And we're looking at the engineer, what the
25 engineer's doing in the cab. Will you also be

1 putting -- rolling the same process out for what a
2 corpsman or electrician would be doing on the
3 Mechanical side in the cab as well?

4 A The outlying areas? Yes.

5 Q And/or the shops in the morning. I mean, we
6 have Roberts Yard, we have Wayne, we have different
7 yards that do Class 1 inspections at the yard at
8 night. Would you be also looking at the yards and
9 your outlying --

10 A Yes. That's actually starting Sunday night.

11 Q Okay.

12 A I authorized people to take vehicles home for
13 that specific purpose. But that should have been
14 done all along. That's another example of every level
15 of manager should be checking what their folks do,
16 not waiting for something to happen, and that's why
17 we're here.

18 Q It's not a problem until it's a problem.

19 A Yeah, it's another one of my lines. Everything's
20 okay until it's not. Don't take that -- don't write
21 that.

22 MR. SHERRY: No further questions at this time.

23 MR. KRAHOLIK: Todd Kraholik, NTSB.

24 BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

25 Q So, along with SEPTA, the unions have a big

Heritage Corporation

([REDACTED])

1 piece of this, right, and up until recently, and I'm
2 only saying what I've heard, so I don't know it to be
3 true or not, but up until recently, it seems like the
4 unions weren't involved much. I think recently, when
5 you went out to convey the last directive, you had
6 the manager and a union guy go out.

7 A Mm-hmm.

8 Q And I think that's a good thing.

9 A So do I.

10 Q But going forward, are we going to try and get
11 buy-in more from the union? Because the union's going
12 to be able to effect more change with their
13 employees. So are you going to have, like -- do you
14 plan on doing meetings with the union reps, or is
15 that already happening? I guess I don't know all
16 that.

17 A I haven't had one. I met the head of the
18 Engineers union and the head of the Conductors union
19 on the road test we did to review the operation of
20 the DBOL light. I introduced myself. I'm accessible
21 if they need me. I mentioned to them that we
22 referenced them in a letter that I sent to the FRA on
23 I think it was August the 22nd, and then I forwarded
24 them a copy of it just so they were aware of it.
25 They are an essential part in buy-in and we're going

1 to need them to do that. How that comes about, I'd
2 prefer to be off the record, all right?

3 Q Got you.

4 A But, you know, my approach to unions, I mean, we
5 have 16 of them on the property. At the very -- it's
6 a relationship and there's not always trust, and
7 you're not going to get to the trust until you get
8 confidence, you know, in a relationship. I have more
9 experience with our transit-side unions. But they
10 check on you and once they find that you do what you
11 say you're going to do, whether it's something they
12 like or not, they know that you're a person that means
13 what you say and then, you know, that, you just get
14 closer and closer to trust. That's been successful
15 for me. And then they have an election and there's
16 new people and you've got to start all over again, you
17 know. That's the world.

18 Q Right.

19 A They've got to start over a lot with new bosses
20 too, so I wasn't aware that they didn't have that
21 relationship or if they do or don't on the rail side.

22 Q I got you.

23 A You know, I've had conversations with Rich Mahon,
24 who's the Assistant Chief Operating Officer, and in
25 those conversations, I got the impression that they

1 talk to them. But, if it's always as a result of
2 somebody in trouble, we can do better than that. We
3 do have Safety Committees and Joint Health and Safety
4 Committees, and that's part of our whole safety
5 culture here. You know, get together and solve
6 problems jointly, so --

7 Q Got you. So then, to tie into what Joe was
8 talking about with the tablets, and I know you may
9 not know. I think you said you didn't know. So my
10 understanding is bulletins come out Monday. They hit
11 the tablet Monday. If anything comes up after
12 Monday, the dispatcher is supposed to say, hey, did
13 you check your bulletin? Did you check your tablet
14 or whatever?

15 But, if Monday has everything for the week and there's
16 nothing new in between, and then the next Monday
17 comes, there's no way of knowing that there was
18 something new on the Monday bulletins from the
19 previous Monday.

20 And just a suggestion or whatever is, you know,
21 maybe, like, in email form, you know, hey, there's
22 this bulletin and it shows unread if you haven't read
23 it. But I know that can be difficult, but I guess my
24 point is, is there -- are you guys looking to get
25 ideas on how to make this better from every employee?

1 Like, is there a suggestion box at offices that say,
2 hey, if you have a suggestion, put it in the
3 suggestion box? Is that already currently? Or is
4 there any plans of that to come?

5 A Well, there's a number of ways. There's phone
6 numbers. There's a safety line besides telling your
7 immediate manager, which is my preferred method. But
8 give me a shot first before you. There's SEPTA just
9 created a or developed a Employee Safety Response
10 Program which is online, and that'll be the whole
11 authority. That got a review. We had a visit last
12 week or the week before by the FTA and they
13 complimented that it's the most comprehensive program
14 that they've seen yet at a transit authority. So
15 that's something going forward.

16 To your point about the tablets, I'm not aware
17 that a train dispatcher in the control center has to
18 tell every crew, did you check your tablets? I don't
19 think that's a protocol here. I'll have to check on
20 that. But the crews -- I've heard this. The crews
21 are responsible to check their tablet every day for
22 new orders, so --

23 Q Right. I think somewhere along the line
24 somebody said to do that and I don't think it's being
25 followed 100 percent at all, but --

1 A Okay. The -- I will discuss with the head of IT
2 some way to get an acknowledgment that you at least
3 opened that document. I can't say whether you read
4 the whole thing, but you did know it was there, you
5 opened it, and see if there's some sort of a report we
6 can get who did it and who didn't do it.

7 Q All right.

8 MR. GORDON: Yeah. And there are a lot of
9 railroads now, Joe Gordon, NTSB, that are using,
10 like, a lock screen. Anything that -- you know, they
11 need to use these tablets for their jobs, right, to
12 get their orders and everything else. But, like,
13 there's a lock screen that they have to acknowledge
14 that they've -- at least acknowledge that they've
15 opened the document, to your point, right. We don't
16 know that they've taken the time to read it, but at
17 least acknowledge that they've opened it.

18 MR. BRANDIS: I'm sure there's -- that's the
19 best, but I'm sure there's a log-on to our network
20 history. I mean, they have that initially, like, how
21 many people opened up their tablet and actually
22 turned it on today. I'll talk to her about getting a
23 report like that and then building out for the
24 acknowledgment. It's a good suggestion.

25 MR. KRAHOLIK: Yeah. Plausible deniability. I

1 mean, you know, I read it, but I didn't understand it
2 and you weren't here to tell me. You know what I
3 mean? Like, that's an easy out for the crews, see
4 what I'm saying? So, if they have to say they read
5 it, it's their responsibility that if they don't
6 understand it to talk to somebody.

7 MR. BRANDIS: Correct.

8 MR. KRAHOLIK: So -- but we don't even know if
9 they're reading it, so I'm just belaboring the point.
10 But I'm going to pass it to Joe from here.

11 MR. GORDON: All right. And this is the second
12 round, so it's going to be shorter, like we promised.
13 And we're almost done.

14 //

15 BY MR. GORDON:

16 Q So we've talked a lot about some of the elements
17 of safety culture as we've been going through this
18 discussion. But, like, just in your words, there's no
19 right, there's no wrong, key elements of a safety
20 culture. Like, if you're looking at the safety
21 culture of the people in your charge, what are you
22 looking for?

23 A Everybody should be looking out for safety
24 issues and reporting them. You know, see something,
25 say something. You know, raise the flag. And

1 nobody's ever got in trouble for reporting something.
2 You know, even if something went wrong, report it.

3 On the side we're talking about, railroad, they
4 actually have the confidential reporting thing that
5 they can use that's been successful. There's
6 different ways to do it, but, you know, it's not going
7 to go away unless you report it. Some of the
8 disappointing -- I just -- I got some feedback from
9 the interviews you did with the crew. If you don't
10 write it up, then we don't know about it to address
11 it. And, you know, I've heard it before, earlier
12 times in my career, they don't fix things. Well, that
13 doesn't excuse -- like, report it. That's the first
14 step. We'll deal with the other stuff later, you
15 know, but that's not an excuse not to write it up. We
16 don't know it, we don't -- we can't fix it.

17 Q Mm-hmm. Agreed.

18 A And, you know, just emphasizing this is all
19 based on we want you to go home at night and we want
20 to keep our passengers safe. This isn't just a rule
21 to inconvenience you. You know, there's a purpose,
22 there's a higher purpose for this. And, you know, a
23 lot of things that go, whether they're mechanical or
24 safety-related, I mean, our objective is to reduce
25 that kind of stuff because that makes us more

1 efficient and that's what -- that's how we serve our
2 customers. But safety always comes first. And I
3 think more recently we demonstrated that by saying
4 take it off the line. I mean, I had trains that I
5 couldn't fit any more into the yards. That's okay,
6 we'll fix them one at a time and get them back out.

7 Q Thank you for that. Yeah. And you talked about
8 the close call reporting. So we did hear a little
9 bit about that yesterday in interviews as well. Are
10 there two systems as they're -- and I'm just going to
11 categorize them kind of the way that I recollect from
12 what we heard. Close call reporting system anonymous
13 through the FRA system. I know it's not run by FRA,
14 but it's the FRA regulated. And then is there an
15 internal, like a safety hotline type?

16 A Yes.

17 Q Okay.

18 A Yes, there's safety. I mean, our website has
19 various ways that you can report a safety problem.
20 And then the Employee Safety Reporting Program is
21 very near being launched, so people can let us know.
22 And then it's probably not worth saying, we were
23 looking at it for the transit side with the Bureau of
24 Labor Statistics, but recent changes at your level of
25 government, there's not funding or an appetite to help

1 us with that right now. But that can change too,
2 we'll come back at it.

3 Q Yeah. So, as far as the two systems, and, you
4 know, I don't expect that you've got the data or
5 anything with you, but, like, equal amount? Or are
6 you seeing a whole lot more anonymous, use of the
7 anonymous system than the safety hotline, safety
8 reporting, or is it about equal?

9 A I don't know that.

10 Q Okay.

11 A But I can tell you, and, you know, maybe I
12 should have mentioned it earlier, we have a Chief
13 Safety Officer. He and I are aligned. I'm going to a
14 staff meeting to reinforce that particular point with
15 his staff. But we work together very well. If
16 there's a problem, we both have the same objective.
17 We want to fix it. There's no finger-pointing. It's
18 about solving the problem. And then we get down to
19 the levels of, if they perceive somebody in
20 Operations is giving them a hard time about something
21 or not paying attention to it, I deal with that. You
22 find out it's something else, but that's what brings
23 the two sides together and lets them know that, hey,
24 we're here to do something, you know.

25 Q Yeah. So a lot of what we hear, you know, not

1 necessarily here but just any, you know, everybody's
2 trying to get the job done, right? If the job's
3 moving freight, everybody's trying to move the
4 freight. If your job's moving passengers, you know,
5 that's the priority. What steps do you take to send
6 the message out that we're not, you know, we're not
7 putting on-time performance over safety? Is there a
8 way that you're working to communicate that to the
9 employees?

10 A We do pay attention to on-time performance. We
11 have a lot of KPIs that we look at, mean distance
12 between failures, but nothing trumps safety. And,
13 you know, some things are difficult to put in a memo
14 because then they stop paying attention to something
15 else. I mean, our job is to put service out there
16 and support our customers safely and efficiently.
17 But, through our actions with recent incidents, they
18 didn't hear from me about downing trains. And if I
19 have to go through another spell of that because we
20 reinforced this and crews start reporting things
21 more, I hope they're accurate, but we're going to have
22 to check the train.

23 Q Okay.

24 A You know, this particular incident with the DBOL
25 lights, one way to fix this problem is fix it. You

1 know, it's as simple as that. Fix every train and get
2 it back to where it needs to be and the problem will
3 go away.

4 Q Agreed. Is anybody looking at, and, you know,
5 this might be early on, but just something to
6 consider, is anybody looking at technology in that
7 space? Like, you know, we've got an indicator light
8 that's on, so there's a circuit showing that there's an
9 issue in the train. Any way of communicating that
10 back remotely to where it's not left up to the
11 operator to report it, but it's actually the control
12 center sees that this train has a light on? Because
13 one of the other things that we heard, you know, in
14 the interviews yesterday was sometimes, I mean,
15 they're the incandescent bulbs, right? So sometimes
16 the bulb burns out. So I could have a bulb out and
17 not know that I've got a light. And so we even heard
18 from some of them that they would change bulbs out,
19 push on the bulbs, you know, try to make sure that
20 they were working. So just something to consider,
21 you know, is their technology, and I know this is an
22 older fleet.

23 A We can look at that. We have that on the bus
24 side, our newer buses. We get alerts when something's
25 about to overheat or, you know, oil pressure or even

1 the predictive stuff. Like, hey, this trend line is
2 climbing, and then we know to get it off the road
3 before it happens.

4 We have a contractor that's coming in to do a --
5 we committed to a comprehensive look at the
6 Silverliner IV and what we need to do to keep them
7 going until our new railcars come. We do have a
8 commitment from the General Manager and the Board,
9 we're going to the October Board with permission to
10 solicit for new railcars. That technology will
11 hopefully be available on that. It'll be definitely
12 more advanced than what we have now, but in this
13 comprehensive review, we can look at that and see if
14 there's some way that we can communicate to the
15 control center you've got an alert.

16 Q All right. Thank you for that. And I'm almost
17 done. Just going to the initial rollout of the
18 directives in dealing with these fault lights,
19 reporting the fault lights, safe to say there was a
20 spike of trains going to the yard. You guys had --
21 you said you ran out of capacity at some points to
22 park trains, and then that fell off. Was the -- can
23 you talk to us about the thought process there? Was
24 there -- was the thought that we're getting them
25 reported, we're getting them off the line, we're

1 getting them repaired, hence the numbers are going
2 down?

3 A I never imagined the number of DBOL lights that
4 would come on.

5 Q Right.

6 A But the only way to address it is to address it.
7 And they had to dig into the technical information to
8 figure out because this was just being overlooked or
9 ignored for a long time, and I guess you've got crews
10 that think this is normal, but that was also part of
11 the intention with the communication. Like, it's not
12 normal. We need to know this.

13 The -- my impression was we have a lot of lights
14 coming on for DBOL. Keep fixing them. I mean, we
15 invested in keeping people late, over weekends and
16 stuff like that, so we could address it. Then we got
17 to a point where we understood how it's supposed to
18 operate as designed. It comes on sometimes and then
19 resets. And Rich came out and met with us, with our
20 union and all levels of management in transportation,
21 and we went out and demonstrated that.

22 That gave us some relief that we didn't have to
23 pull it for the intermittent ones. There were still
24 DBOL lights that came on. I think they were the
25 stragglers, or at least that's the impression. I

1 didn't look at it like we didn't get something. We
2 had a lot of cars to address, and they addressed them
3 one at a time, and it just subsided to where they
4 were less frequent. Again, we're talking weeks here,
5 not months.

6 Q Mm-hmm.

7 A This incident happened. The incident with the
8 roof resister cable happened. I mentioned earlier in
9 the interview a lot of things went right. I was very
10 disappointed and embarrassed about the general fault
11 light because, again, the limited knowledge I have of
12 the car, we're missing the small things. I said to
13 people who work for me, I said now that we've
14 conquered the DBOL lights, I may have not used the
15 word conquer. Now that we've addressed that, now we
16 can turn our focus on the general fault light because
17 that's where, ignore that, catastrophes happen, and I
18 think that's what happened in this incident.

19 So, from that, that's a -- another learning
20 experience, but it's proof it's not a hypothetical,
21 like this could happen. I think everybody knows now
22 the mission is you've got to report the light and
23 we've got to pull it off before that happens.

24 MR. GORDON: Appreciate that. That's all I've
25 got for questions.

1 MR. SHERRY: Richard Sherry, FRA.

2 BY MR. SHERRY:

3 Q As you are aware of our last incident with the
4 traction motor fire, we put failsafes in place with
5 your bulletin, your directive, and we had steps in
6 there relying on employees, but we had steps on
7 there, if communication didn't get up to the
8 Mechanical Desk, they're still to put a MP-11 in. So
9 that's two failsafe process right there, and we failed
10 on that seven times in that 14 hours, six
11 transportation employees, one mechanical employee.
12 So we have two failsafes and it got through seven
13 individuals.

14 What can we do to change that? What is in place
15 to change that? Do we need a third failsafe, as Joe
16 was talking about, of bringing electronics it, or can
17 we fix this internally with employees?

18 A Well, the communication as far as face-to-face
19 and a follow-up memo can happen immediately with the
20 operations side or the engineers and the crews.

21 I mentioned earlier that the emphasis with the
22 shop personnel is starting Sunday night. It'll start
23 with the outlying areas and then they're doing the
24 individual shops. Again, we had some history that
25 we're not proud of, but we can actually use it as a

1 strong example that what we're expecting you to do
2 will prevent this kind of thing from happening.

3 I wrote down, I'll commit to investigating if
4 there's telemetry that the control center can see if
5 something's going wrong. I mean, technology's going
6 to come by way of new cars eventually, but if there's
7 something out there that can do that that we can add
8 to the car. I don't want to say I'm not a fan of
9 that, but we've put a lot of redundancies, and
10 redundancies are good for safety, but I also find
11 that they end up being the primary. You know, people
12 rely on that. You've seen it in aviation with auto
13 pilot. And, you know, we have a parking brake on a
14 bus, and if the operator doesn't pull the parking
15 brake and gets off because they're in a hurry, the bus
16 rolls away. So we have a device now that we're
17 piloting where, if you come out of the seat, it
18 senses it and it triggers, it pops the parking brake.
19 Well, that's going to become the primary, you know.
20 You know, it's just human behavior again, but if you
21 have redundancies, bad things don't happen, you know.

22 Q Do you feel the memo and bulletin practice is
23 working the best? Or do you think SEPTA might need
24 to change to a lot more face-to-face?

25 A They're both important. You have to have the

1 official message, but then you have to get out there
2 and talk to people.

3 Q Do you think SEPTA is putting more emphasis on
4 talking to people instead of relying on a memo?

5 A If they're not, they will be. I mean, the
6 records that I looked at yesterday, what I could
7 glean from it, more than 80 percent of them were
8 spoken to. If we find that to not be the case, then
9 we've got a problem with another level of management
10 or possibly a couple levels of management. But we'll
11 deal with that accordingly if that's what we find.

12 Q And in this face-to-face, we talked about
13 deceptive normal. They were so used to seeing these
14 fault lights. How do we break that process and what
15 is SEPTA doing to break that process?

16 A Besides what I already covered with Maintenance
17 doing what they're doing this coming week and what
18 Transportation will do, we can do things like
19 broadcasts from the control center. Attention all
20 engineers, blah, blah, you know.

21 Q Okay.

22 A Just to keep, I use the term carpet bomb with
23 the message, you know.

24 Q Yeah. And not to always bring out defects, we
25 talked in our interviews and with labor yesterday,

1 you know, because we missed talking this over,
2 calling this into dispatch and failing to fill out an
3 MP-11 on all these levels, would it be a thing that
4 SEPTA would put out a sticker in these cabs, did you
5 forget to fill out your MP-11, did you forget to call
6 in a defect, something that they have to see? I
7 mean, they're saying they're missing this light.
8 Maybe a bright green sticker there to get their
9 attention. Keep it simple, but --

10 A Yeah. We have a sign shop. We can produce
11 stickers very quickly.

12 Q It's just a thought from NTSB and the FRA,
13 sometimes the simplest things get things done.

14 A That's not a heavy lift. We can do that.

15 Q You said you've been on with SEPTA since 1983, is
16 that correct?

17 A Yes.

18 Q When NTSB or the FRA comes to a railroad, we're
19 usually catching the railroad on their worst day.
20 That being said, we can also see a safety culture on
21 many different railroads. We get to see NNS, CSX,
22 Conrail, you know, Metro, SEPTA, and we see different
23 things on all those railroads. You have been with
24 this company since 1983. Has yourself or any of your
25 higher managements ever gone to another railroad for

1 a week and learned how their operation works and
2 brought ideas back?

3 A We've visited other properties, other agencies,
4 and there's also industry organizations, APTA, that we
5 send people to their meetings --

6 Q Mm-hmm. Okay.

7 A -- where they can get ideas and it's kind of like
8 an incubator. There's also subcommittees for APTA
9 that depending on your specialty the persons on that,
10 you know, accessibility, operations. The travel to
11 the conferences and stuff has been curtailed recently
12 because of our budget situation, but we're lifting
13 that. We're not going to send 12 people, but we're
14 going to send somebody. We're trying to do it all
15 because, you know, you learn from other agencies.

16 Q Correct.

17 A And my takeaway, you know, personally, the size
18 of the agency doesn't necessarily mean you've got the
19 greatest ideas.

20 Q Correct.

21 A Sometimes you can learn from the small agency
22 because it's simpler and it's right there in front of
23 your nose, but you never saw it. And in my career
24 here at SEPTA, I've been at both ends of that
25 spectrum. I started at the smallest division. It

1 was viewed as the step-child, you know, or they felt
2 that, you know, and the problems that were there were
3 not the problems at the big location. They were
4 actually the opposite. The ideal location is right
5 in the middle where, you know, it runs the most
6 stable. But you can get a lot of great ideas from
7 other agencies. And you guys have shared ideas with
8 us, so --

9 Q And a lot of it is what we see out there of what
10 a safety culture is at a NNS and/or a different
11 agency that, like you said, if you were to attend
12 some of those after-meetings, I mean, you can get a
13 lot of good things to bring in.

14 A There's a lot of bright people here, but none of
15 us is as smart as all of us together. That's the
16 reason why you've got to get together and you've got
17 to talk. And, you know, my role is breaking down
18 silos. There have been -- we do get interruptions on
19 the rail. Not too long ago, it was, you know, a bus
20 going to the rescue. That was a difficult challenge,
21 you know. But we've got customers that are, you know,
22 waiting to go home or whatever, and we've got to get
23 them to where they're going. I just said, I said, why
24 don't you get an hourglass. We're going to be done
25 that within the hour, and it's happening faster than

1 that now.

2 Q Yeah.

3 A So, you know, when a railroad talks to the other
4 mode, hey, I need three buses to do this, I've got 300
5 passengers on the train, I don't have to intervene
6 anymore. It's happening. You know, they understand
7 we're all in it for the same reason.

8 Q Yeah. And I saw or we saw with our DBOL light
9 of how I can love that you came down and we brought
10 labor in and myself and all the managers to put all
11 our heads together on that and understand that
12 problem, and I think that definitely has to happen
13 more.

14 A Well, we appreciated your time. We had a
15 meeting before that, it was the day I was returning
16 from vacation, so I considered myself an attendee.
17 But they weren't prepared. They were not organized.
18 And I didn't blame the FRA one bit to say no, we're
19 not changing. But they learned from it, learned
20 more, and you came back and we convinced you, so --

21 Q It wasn't a convincing. It was a show and an
22 understanding that went much better the second time
23 around.

24 A Well, we need more of that. The meeting August
25 the 8th, the Teams meeting, I heard loud and clear

1 from your leadership a lack of confidence. I'm new,
2 but I own it. You know, that's just the circumstance
3 right now. And I've mentioned to my folks a number of
4 times we need to change that. This was a setback,
5 but we're going to still go in that direction. But I
6 want to get to the point where your organizations are
7 like, no, they turned the corner and, you know,
8 they're not doing the right thing as individuals,
9 they're doing it as an organization.

10 MR. SHERRY: I have no further questions, Todd.
11 I'm sorry.

12 MR. KRAHOLIK: Todd Kraholik, NTSB. So we asked
13 you a lot of questions, but was there a question you
14 were expecting that we didn't ask or a question that
15 we missed?

16 MR. BRANDIS: No.

17 MR. KRAHOLIK: Is there anything you want to
18 add?

19 MR. BRANDIS: No.

20 MR. GORDON: I've got just a couple more, so this
21 is the extension of my second round. It's not a third
22 round. No, just real quick, Joe Gordon, NTSB.

23 BY MR. GORDON:

24 Q We mentioned APTA. Have you guys had an APTA
25 peer review that you can recall?

1 A Yeah, we've had them.

2 Q Recently? And are those kind of focused on an
3 area when they come in and do a peer review?

4 A No, they do the authority in general. I mean,
5 comparisons, we are multi-modal, one of the few that
6 have every mode except for ferry boat. But, you
7 know, they review the whole organization. I think a
8 lot of things in the industry were interrupted with
9 the pandemic. I mean, they were happening more
10 frequently.

11 Q Yeah.

12 A But, you know, we've had those reviews. We get
13 audited by the FTA with triennial reviews and
14 substance abuse reviews. I mean, it's a normal thing
15 here.

16 Q All right. And the last question. Real-time
17 information. Have you heard of, like, the reports
18 since this incident? Like, last night, like, from
19 yesterday when we were out doing our investigation
20 and, you know, started to put additional focus on
21 these lights. Have you heard anything about trains
22 being reported with fault lights increasing or
23 anything?

24 A No. I would expect that once we reinforce it
25 that it wouldn't surprise me if I see something.

1 Q Okay. Yeah. And that data's being tracked?
2 That's something we can ask for?

3 A Yes.

4 Q Okay. All right.

5 A Yes. The Mechanical Desk should have a record
6 of everything.

7 MR. GORDON: Okay. That's all I've got. Thank
8 you.

9 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right. If we have any
10 follow-up questions, do you mind if we contact you?

11 MR. BRANDIS: All the time, yeah. I'll give you
12 a copy of my -- I'll give you one of my business
13 cards.

14 MR. KRAHOLIK: Sounds good.

15 MR. BRANDIS: Okay.

16 MR. KRAHOLIK: On behalf of the NTSB, thank you
17 for your time and cooperation.

18 MR. BRANDIS: Thanks.

19 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled
20 matter was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

CASE TITLE: SEPTA Fire

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD25FR006

LOCATION: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

DATE: September 27, 2025

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the National Transportation Safety Board 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.

Date: October 10, 2025

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