

Appendix D

Interview Transcript, Battalion Chief Joseph Castro

Survival Factors Group Chairman's Factual Report

Metrolink train 111  
Union Pacific train LOF 65-12  
Los Angeles, California  
September 12, 2008  
DCA-08-MR-009

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES

\* \* \* \* \*  
Investigation of: \*  
\*  
HEAD-ON COLLISION OF A METROLINK \*  
COMMUTER TRAIN WITH A UNION \*  
PACIFIC FREIGHT TRAIN, \* Docket No.: DCA-08-MR-009  
September 12, 2008 \*  
Los Angeles, California \*  
\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: CHIEF JOSEPH CASTRO

Los Angeles, California

Tuesday,  
September 16, 2008

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to  
notice.

BEFORE: DANA SANZO

## APPEARANCES:

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National Transportation Safety Board  
Washington, D.C.  
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Los Angeles Fire Department  
Liaison with Metro Rail

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California Public Utilities Commission  
Railroad Operations Safety Branch

SGT. NINA SUTTER  
Sheriff's Department  
County of Los Angeles

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 MS. SANZO: My name is Dana Sanzo. I'm an  
3 Investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board, and  
4 today we're conducting an interview for Accident Number DCA-08-  
5 MR-009, collision of Metrolink train and UP train in Los  
6 Angeles, California.

7 And if I may ask, we'll go around the table and  
8 everybody can state your name and your organization please.

9 CHIEF QUINTANAR: My name is John Quintanar. I'm a  
10 Battalion Chief with the Los Angeles City Fire Department. I'm  
11 assigned to Metro Rail as a liaison officer. I've been asked  
12 to participate in the NTSB investigation of the crash.

13 MR. OJEDA: Jesus Ojeda, Metrolink Safety and  
14 Security Division. I have also been asked to participate and  
15 assist.

16 SGT. SUTTER: Nina Sutter, Sergeant with the LA  
17 County Sheriff's Department, assigned to the Metrolink Bureau.  
18 I've been asked to assist in the -- anything I can do.

19 MR. CASTRO: Joe Castro, Battalion Chief, Los Angeles  
20 City Fire Department, assigned to the LAFD Homeland Security  
21 Division.

22 MR. TAPIA: Carlos Tapia, Motor Power and Equipment  
23 Inspector with the California Public Utilities Commission, and  
24 I've also been asked to participate in this investigation.

25 INTERVIEW OF CHIEF JOSEPH CASTRO

1 BY MS. SANZO:

2 Q. Okay. Chief, if I can just ask you if you can tell  
3 us about when you were notified of the accident and just take  
4 us through that afternoon.

5 A. Okay. I was working an overtime day in the field. I  
6 have a staff assignment with the LAFD as the tactical training  
7 commander of the Homeland Security Division, but I was working  
8 an overtime day at Battalion 12, which is located in Pacoima.  
9 At about 4:30, and I'm not sure of my exact dispatch time,  
10 Battalion 12 was dispatched as part of a large additional  
11 assignment to a -- I think it was given a Metro Rail derailment  
12 or Metro train derailment. I can't remember the exact term,  
13 but my staff assistant and I jumped in a Battalion sedan and we  
14 began responding. Right when we -- right before we left,  
15 actually some -- there was a firefighter in the kitchen, and he  
16 yelled out that it's on TV and it's bad. That's all we heard.  
17 And coming in, responding in, I think our response time was  
18 about nine minutes. We jumped on the freeway. We didn't have  
19 a lot of traffic, and we got off. I kind of identified on the  
20 map where it was and was trying to, through our dispatch,  
21 determine the command post location. They didn't know where  
22 the command post location was. I saw a couple of helicopters.  
23 We kind of wound our way through these streets, and then I saw  
24 a big LA County Sheriff helicopter land, touchdown, big Chinook  
25 looking helicopter. At that point I saw our Division 3

1 commander, Chief Mottram, and he was -- his Suburban was moving  
2 at this point, and I later found out that he had placed his  
3 division sedan and he was moving. He had gotten the prop wash  
4 of -- the LA County Sheriff helicopter had kind of washed him  
5 out where he had thought that he was going to implement his  
6 command post. He -- I -- he opened his door when he saw me,  
7 and he said that he hadn't seen the train wreck yet and that he  
8 had assigned one Battalion Commander, Mark Jones, as medical  
9 group and that he needed me to go to the train and establish  
10 myself as fire suppression and extrication group supervisor,  
11 and that he -- as soon as I got there, he wanted me to give him  
12 a size up of the conditions because he really didn't know what  
13 he had. So my staff assistant and I parked the Suburban. We  
14 got in our personal protective equipment and then ran maybe 500  
15 yards to the train. We approached the train from the -- I kind  
16 of lost direction there, but the direction that the Metrolink  
17 was traveling, we -- so that was probably kind of to the  
18 northwest is the direction we were traveling, up the tracks. I  
19 saw -- what I saw was maybe 30 or 40 people already on that  
20 dirt road with pretty profound injuries at that point. As I  
21 was running by them, I saw one person convulsing, I saw  
22 compound fractures, and everyone was yelling to help, and  
23 everyone was telling me that there were people trapped in both  
24 of the first two trains. I saw -- it was still burning at that  
25 point, and at that point I stopped and I gave the IC a size up

1 that we had a, what I considered a catastrophic collision of  
2 two trains. I think I initially said that I'm guesstimating  
3 approximately 100 casualties and several fatalities. We do  
4 have a fire situation, and I can see about a quarter of a mile  
5 of wreckage behind to the north of what looks like a freight  
6 train. And he rogered back and told me who I had assigned to  
7 me, and at that point, I started trying to develop objectives  
8 to begin to mitigate this. And then realistically for the next  
9 what, eight hours, I was at one point reassigned from a group  
10 supervisor status to the operations section chief, which is  
11 responsible for all of the tactical operations of the fire. I  
12 remained in that position for probably another hour. We had a  
13 deputy chief come on scene, Andy Fox, who then took over  
14 operations and made me deputy operations. I stayed in that  
15 position for probably another hour, and he had to leave, and  
16 then I came back into the operations section chief position  
17 where I stayed until about 1:00 in the morning, the following  
18 morning. And at that point, we had deescalated and an ops  
19 section chief was no longer needed, and I was returned back to  
20 quarters. Within that, I can get as specific as you'd like as  
21 far as actions and observations and things like that, but the  
22 gist of my duties I think are kind of encapsulated in that  
23 context as being basically in charge of all of the tactical  
24 operations especially at the actual train site. I was there  
25 for the vast majority of all the -- through that period from

1 4:40 to about 1:00 in the morning.

2 Q. Okay. If you could, describe your observations of  
3 fire conditions --

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. -- at the scene.

6 A. The -- again, in my first stop was the number of  
7 patients and the severity of the injuries. That was something  
8 that -- and that was even before I actually got to the front of  
9 the train. When I first got there and I saw all these  
10 injuries, and I really, I didn't understand, and one of the  
11 thoughts in my mind was trying to rule out some concept of  
12 terrorist activity. I didn't know if we were dealing with an  
13 explosion. I didn't know if we had radiological contamination.  
14 There were a lot of things going through my mind. When I ran  
15 to the front, and my first concern truly was the fire. The  
16 fire was still burning, and when I got to the front, they were  
17 putting water on the fire and they said they needed foam, and  
18 it was at that point I kind of ran farther north, and I could  
19 see the other locomotive, and then I kind of determined that  
20 this was a head-on collision. And then that in my mind kind of  
21 solidified the reason for the significant injuries. I saw that  
22 the one passenger car had kind of derailed from the other two.  
23 The -- at some point, I think it was, I'm not sure, but I think  
24 it was a member from 87, Engine 87 or Task Force 87 -- what is  
25 it now? Task Force. They've changed it recently. At any

1 rate, he said that they were putting water on the fire and they  
2 heard a pounding, and they looked and they saw the conductors  
3 or the train operators from the Southern Pacific Railroad, and  
4 they were inside and they were pounding on the glass as the  
5 fire was burning. They had broken the window and pulled them  
6 out, and I said later on, if we can get some recon down north  
7 to make sure we don't have other people trapped, that we could  
8 just focus on the --

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Door 2.

10 THE WITNESS: Yes. I believe that's what he said.  
11 This was still during that very chaotic and -- stage. At that  
12 point, I was kind of convinced the fire situation was going to  
13 go pretty quick. I met up with the task force commanders from  
14 88, 70s and 87s, to try to begin to determine appropriate  
15 objectives to take care of the rescue of that lead train. I  
16 could see there were two or three people outside of that laying  
17 on the ground. One I know was DOA, and the other two had  
18 really bad injuries. We determined that the best way to  
19 probably gain access, we could get into the back, but our path  
20 was blocked pretty quick. The best course of action was to  
21 ladder the top of the -- get up on the side, which was now the  
22 top, and use saws to kind of cut away the aluminum siding to  
23 gain access that way. So when that was happening, I went back  
24 and conferred with the medical group supervisor to ensure the  
25 location of the triage and treatment areas, and he assured me

1 that he was set up and would be ready to receive patients. I  
2 requested more bodies to start transporting those patients that  
3 were already on the road that had self-evacuated or law  
4 enforcement people had evacuated from that -- those other two  
5 trains to get them moving in that direction. I requested more  
6 bodies, and at that time, there was nobody attending to all  
7 those 40 patients because the task at hand at that point was  
8 this car. I spoke with a LAPD -- I saw a bunch of law  
9 enforcement, both Sheriff's and LAPD, and I asked for one of  
10 them to come up and talk to me that was in a supervision role.  
11 A sergeant from LAPD, and I think a sergeant from LA County  
12 came up, and I kind of gave them some tasks, and they were  
13 basically to start taking patients from this dirt road to the  
14 treatment area. And it's -- I was kind of remarking to  
15 somebody, I've been doing this 30 years. I know, it's hard to  
16 believe, you know, that I look so young and --

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good looking.

18 THE WITNESS: -- yeah, good looking, that they hire  
19 11-year-old firefighters, but it is true. I had my 30-year  
20 anniversary September 9th. And one of the things that really  
21 is a very lasting impression was this synergy between law  
22 enforcement and fire. And again it hasn't always been that  
23 way, not through any malice or misintention, but we usually had  
24 their job and -- or we had our job and they had theirs, but  
25 the -- I can't tell you how beneficial they were because I

1 looked and I saw police officers carrying people that were  
2 bloody and hurt and carrying them to the treatment areas, and  
3 it really saved us at that point. About that time, I looked  
4 and they were up on top of the -- the extrication group were on  
5 top of the main train and the saws were going and they were  
6 starting to peel back the skin. At that point, Captain Glenn  
7 Ames (ph.) yelled down to me that they had made access and they  
8 have several fatalities right at the top of the train, and he  
9 thinks that there are live bodies underneath, and he asked for  
10 permission to move the bodies. I asked him if there was any  
11 alternative. Can we -- I know that from an investigative  
12 point, we don't like to move DOAs, patients that are obviously  
13 dead, but in this rescue phase, I asked them, is there any way  
14 we can move them to the side or can we -- and he said  
15 absolutely not. They're all on top of each other. We need to  
16 remove them from the train. So I at that point told them,  
17 okay, I'm going to designate this area, and I pointed to an  
18 area right to the west of the train, as the morgue. I had a  
19 couple of salvage covers. I had -- I found a couple of LA  
20 County Sheriffs and said that we were going to make this a  
21 morgue. We're going to bringing bodies here. We're going to  
22 cover them up, but I need you to stay here and provide  
23 security, and the two officers said they would do it. I didn't  
24 dictate how to remove the bodies, and at some point I saw an  
25 aerial ladder come up to the -- and a lifeline come down. My

1 impression was that they were going to put them in Stokes  
2 litter baskets. There is a time issue involved in strapping  
3 somebody into a Stokes litter basket. At that point, I saw the  
4 aerial come up, and they had placed a harness over a DOA and  
5 had just clipped onto the harness, and I know that that's that  
6 picture that Associated Press, but they had done that, and it  
7 was, it was somewhat ironic and my hearing is actually  
8 horrible, but from the people standing on the bridge that were  
9 maybe what, 500 feet away, I heard a collective scream when  
10 that body came up. I asked Glenn that all subsequent bodies be  
11 draped in a sheet and they did that. I think, I don't know, I  
12 want to say we did that with nine different bodies that we did.  
13 At that point, it opened up a void where they could begin  
14 working. So now they've put bodies inside the train, and Glenn  
15 said that now we're going to start a technical cutting and  
16 spreading operation. He said that the problem is that  
17 everything is condensed and compressed, and it's going to be  
18 very slow, but we see movement and we see bodies down there  
19 that we have to get to. At some point, I requested the IC to  
20 get in touch with NTSB and any rail authority people that would  
21 be responsible for bringing heavy equipment out because I just  
22 knew that at some point we have to right these cars and pull  
23 them apart to fully conclude, and then I started planning for  
24 subsequent operational periods, as far as rehab, lights, things  
25 of that nature that I knew we were going to need well into the

1 night. And again at this point, I was constantly checking back  
2 with the status of all the other patients that were on the  
3 road, and we were slowly whittling away with the help of the  
4 law enforcement people, that 40 people that were on the road  
5 were now down to about half of that and they were -- I had some  
6 medics back there that were actually triaging the more  
7 significantly injured patients so that we could prioritize them  
8 and get them to the treatment areas. The fire situation was  
9 all taken care of. We laid some foam down. I was concerned  
10 still about hazmat. I started asking somebody to try to  
11 determine some type of manifest for the Southern Pacific  
12 railroad cars, we could determine if we had a hazardous  
13 material component, that I was starting to worry now about  
14 cascading events. I could live with dealing with the train and  
15 the extrication effort, but if I had some chlorine cloud  
16 shooting through Chatsworth, that's what was my concern at that  
17 point. They continued the rescue effort. At one point,  
18 Captain Ames asked me to come to the top of the car. He had  
19 something he wanted to tell me and I said can't -- I was busy  
20 at that point. I said can't you just tell me. He goes no, I  
21 need a face-to-face, and I went up there and he showed me the  
22 scene that they had spread apart some metal and they had  
23 uncovered -- I could see a shoulder of a uniformed LAPD  
24 officer. So at that point, I asked him if we could spread it a  
25 little more so I could get a name tag, and we crawled down

1 there together and I saw the name tag. I wrote down the name,  
2 and I went and informed our Deputy Commander, Mario Ruwada and  
3 Assistant Chief Charlie Beck from LAPD, that we do have a  
4 confirmed LAPD fatality, last name was DeSha, and that they  
5 would need to start making some arrangements for that. I was  
6 actually cognizant that although she is one of ours, that she  
7 is just 1 of 25 fatalities. So I really didn't want to --  
8 while I wanted to do the proper respect for one of our sisters  
9 in uniform, I didn't want to make it seem like we were  
10 belittling the other 25. So -- but they actually made a plan  
11 which was very good and for us to -- how to extricate her, what  
12 to do with her body and then to hand her off to the LAPD  
13 people, and they had a chaplain there. So we went through  
14 that. It actually took us probably another hour to cut her  
15 out. It was a very technical issue with spreading the metal  
16 and stuff. Again that continued on until 1:00 in the morning.  
17 At one point, I was asked to run up to the command post and  
18 give a briefing to the Mayor and Chief Baca from LA County,  
19 Chief Bratton (ph.) and all of the major political entities,  
20 R. F. Alacon (ph.) from the Deputy Mayor, and all those people.  
21 So I ran up to the command post and did that, came back down  
22 and again kind of just managed that effort. I did -- when I  
23 was -- as my position as operations section, I couldn't spend  
24 as much time over in the medical component as I would have  
25 liked to. I heard there were problems with getting ambulances

1 back there, and there were problems with air traffic, as far as  
2 the -- it was a constant battle with the prop wash from all the  
3 air ambulances, listening to the radio. So it was just -- it  
4 was kind of -- it was a very tense, stressful eight hours  
5 especially for somebody of my age. But the -- it continued  
6 along those lines until about 1:00 in the morning when we had  
7 an operational briefing with the relief companies, and at that  
8 point, I was released from my duties and went home.

9 MS. SANZO: Okay. I'll pause, and we can go around  
10 the table and give everybody an opportunity to ask some  
11 questions.

12 BY CHIEF QUINTANAR:

13 Q. My question would be you were wearing basically three  
14 hats, suppression, extrication, and ops. Did you -- it sounds  
15 like you did a hell of a job, but were you overwhelmed at  
16 anytime?

17 A. Well, what happened was when I initially -- when I  
18 was given the position of operations section chief, I asked for  
19 more chief officers. I received Jeff Marcus, Tim Ernst and  
20 Vidovich. And at what time -- at that point, I gave them each  
21 specific group supervisor positions. I established as a USAR  
22 group, an extrication group, and a safety officer at that  
23 point. I was real concerned. At some point I need to step  
24 back and consider the safety of the responders. I had -- I  
25 probably had 12 LA County Sheriffs inside the car as it was --

1 it was still burning at that point, getting debris out. We --  
2 what happened was some of the guys -- firefighters in the cars  
3 said we have to -- because all the seats were de-bolted, and  
4 we needed to start getting debris out and start passing bodies  
5 out through the back. The -- again in a perfect world, I had  
6 firefighters there with PPEs. I didn't have that, but there  
7 were a lot of sheriffs there. I asked one of the guys, can you  
8 guys start getting this debris out, and what happened is they  
9 self-dispatched themselves in -- they saw that it wasn't  
10 working staying out. They self-dispatched themselves inside  
11 and were daisy chaining all of the debris out, and then they  
12 started daisy chaining bodies out. But at some point I became  
13 getting -- when I, I -- concerned about the safety of the  
14 responders, and so then when I saw Vidovich, I ask him to be  
15 the safety officer and to start circling with no other thought  
16 than what can we do to best protect these rescuers during the  
17 rescue effort. Again, he came up to me and said right off the  
18 bat, you have a lot of law enforcement people working in the  
19 hot zone with no personal protective equipment. And although I  
20 would have loved to get them out, we had no alternative. They  
21 were performing critical functions, but that became a goal of  
22 mine was to get people in PPEs and replace the officers, which  
23 I eventually did maybe two hours into it. There was a point  
24 when -- so I did relinquish those group supervisor spots when I  
25 became ops section. But even as the operations section chief,

1 I'm responsible for all the tactical direction, which includes  
2 the medical group which logistically I couldn't do. My  
3 suggestion would have been it would have been better to give me  
4 a branch supervisor position, and when I got Ernst there, I  
5 kind of ultimately made him a train branch director, and that  
6 allowed me and Fox to walk back and forth to the different  
7 functional entities within the medical, which they were having  
8 problems getting ambulances in. Obviously we -- I heard,  
9 although I wasn't involved, that we dropped a lot of people in  
10 the tracking element, which probably could have been precluded  
11 by a little better management, but it was -- we were filled  
12 with chaos and paradox and uncertainty and lack of information.

13 I mean initial action at an incident of that scope and  
14 complexity and novelty, is, you know, you do the best you can  
15 and, you know, at that point. So --

16 Q. One of the questions Dana had yesterday was, and  
17 asked Captain Cooper from 96, is if to the best of knowledge,  
18 did you observe any patients that were overcome by the fire,  
19 either smoke, heat, whatever?

20 A. No. No. Most of the fire was north of that, that  
21 number one passenger car, the affected passenger car. It  
22 looked to be in the locomotive, and there was diesel fuel and  
23 it looked like motor oil that was leaking and that some of that  
24 was burning also. I really didn't have, even though the fire  
25 was kind of spectacular looking, I knew that once we got some

1 water on it, that there's just not a lot of combustible stuff  
2 there, and I knew once we got some water and foam, that that  
3 was going to go away pretty quick. The only thing I heard was  
4 that there was two train operators from the Southern Pacific  
5 Railroad that had been rescued, but I asked -- I didn't even --  
6 I never saw them, and I never really even verified that it  
7 occurred, although I was told firsthand by the person who  
8 pulled them out that they had done that.

9 Q. That was 87s?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. Do you remember the captain?

12 A. I really don't.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. I really don't.

15 Q. There was also an indication that there was a person  
16 that could have -- that was thrown from the train and was  
17 somehow treated or rescued or whatever. Were you aware of  
18 that?

19 A. No, I -- and rightfully so, I wasn't getting that far  
20 down in the weeds. I mean, there was, you know, my whole goal  
21 was really to organizationally set this thing up, and that's  
22 why I really tried to stay non-specific. Once I've placed  
23 somebody in charge, I wasn't dictating how they got the bodies  
24 out of the train, other than giving the approval to do that and  
25 I leave that, you know, down in the weeds tactical direction to

1 the individual group supervisors. But I got very little  
2 information about that, you know. I purposely stay back and  
3 talk to the IC, and I didn't get hardly any specific  
4 information. I think probably the only specific bit of  
5 information I got was the two Southern Pacific train operators  
6 but --

7 Q. Did you see another Southern Pacific employee, but  
8 there was rumored that there was three?

9 A. I only heard two, but again, and that was really --  
10 things were still really -- the fire was still burning at that  
11 point. So it was really kind of, you know, my thought in  
12 walking north was I wanted to find out exactly what caused  
13 this, to kind of rule out any foul play or crime scene issue,  
14 and when I saw the head on, I mean I didn't know what caused  
15 the head on, but I just -- I didn't know if it was bomb. That  
16 was kind of one of my thoughts initially especially when I saw  
17 the two cars still on the road and the other one off. It kind  
18 of reeked of a bomb to me, like I couldn't see how two would  
19 stay on and one would go off unless it was something, and I  
20 don't know obviously a lot about trains, but that was kind of  
21 my reasoning for going to the front and trying to determine at  
22 least to some level of certainty what -- why we're here and to  
23 kind of shape my decisions afterwards.

24 Q. Knowing that we're conducting this investigation, you  
25 know, we don't want to get to the boots on the ground

1 specifically, but could you recommend somebody that might give  
2 us more information, somebody else to interview. We are  
3 planning to interview Chief Ernst.

4 A. Uh-huh.

5 Q. We're going to interview Chief Jones, the medical  
6 group. Who else would you --

7 A. To me, and I don't even know who was first on scene.  
8 To me, like Chief Ernst got there probably an hour and a half  
9 into it as did Chief Fox. A lot -- at that point, a lot of the  
10 initial stuff, you know, the minutia of the incident had  
11 already been moved over to the treatment area. To me, you  
12 know, when I'm like conducting an investigation for our  
13 department, I find the most vital information comes from the  
14 first people on scene.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. And they're not always uniformed people.

17 Q. Right.

18 A. I mean, there are a myriad of other people that was  
19 on scene. Ironically, the logistics of that incident, there  
20 were a lot of civilians, or I saw a lot of -- and I don't know  
21 if it was like another train passenger helping another train  
22 passenger, but I did see a lot of civilian people helping  
23 civilian people. So many law enforcement people were on scene  
24 quickly and, you know, before us that I think that they would  
25 have a lot of really great information about, you know, what

1 they saw in terms of some of that, you know, very specific  
2 things.

3 Q. Okay.

4 BY MR. OJEDA:

5 Q. What were some of the difficulties that you  
6 encountered in terms of the equipment? I know that there were  
7 two cars left upright. Did your crew encounter any  
8 difficulties getting through the doors or windows?

9 A. Not in the cars that were upright. In fact, at one  
10 point, I had somebody ask me that there were -- I think there  
11 was one fatality that was in the car, one of the upright cars  
12 on the tracks. I instructed them to leave that body in place.  
13 There was a time when I had the USAR group search all the cars  
14 and mark them, to do a recon. I know that you saw they had  
15 marked where the conductor of the Metrolink, and they covered  
16 him up with a sheet and they had marked all the cars that were  
17 searched and fatalities and things. The majority of the  
18 problem came from the compression aspect. The locomotive  
19 intrusion into the passenger car condensed everything.  
20 Ordinarily those things are too tough to spread apart and break  
21 apart, but all of a sudden it would be like -- the analogy I  
22 would give would be like a beer can, a beer can in its normal  
23 state is pretty easy to manipulate and tear, but if you crush  
24 it down to that, it becomes dense, and that's what we were  
25 faced with. There were numerous instances of blade breaks,

1 cutters not being able to cut, and because of that, there was a  
2 period when we had begun to get most of the obviously -- the  
3 obvious patients out, but we could see in the condensed metal,  
4 body parts, arms, things of that, we knew there people were in  
5 there. But there became a point when we weren't going to be  
6 able to get it, and there was a LA County Assistant Chief there  
7 who was managing their USAR task force, and he mentioned to me  
8 that they could get a bulldozer, he's like I can have some  
9 dozers here in 20 minutes. Well, my question to him is what do  
10 we need dozers for? And he said, first of all, we can't get  
11 anymore heavy equipment in and, secondly, the dozers from that  
12 bridge up there, cut a track, come down here, and we can use  
13 them with chains to pull these cars apart. There was a big air  
14 conditioning unit, kind of welded to the side of that number  
15 one car, and we eventually put chains around that, used the  
16 dozer to pull that off and start pulling bit chunks of the car  
17 apart so we could get in to access. My biggest concern  
18 probably at about the 10:00 mark was that there was a void I  
19 couldn't see and I had -- I would have a viable patient, and  
20 there was -- there's always the -- in emergency management, we  
21 have what we call the initial action, where we're in the rescue  
22 phase, and then at some point, we have to call it and go into a  
23 body recovery mode in this. The liability in doing that is  
24 that we may have somebody -- if we can't see everything, we may  
25 have somebody alive. What we kind of factor into our decision-

1 making process, and first and foremost, is there any of our  
2 people at risk. If there's -- we have -- if we're in an  
3 environment that is so risky to our members, and I can say with  
4 98 percent certainty there's nobody alive in there, we're going  
5 to pull our members off because it's not worth the risk for  
6 that, you know, minute possibility. Here I was convinced that  
7 we had no members at significant risk. I mean, there was  
8 psychological trauma that was taking place and whatnot, but I  
9 was convinced that we really had nobody at significant risk,  
10 and Jeff Marcus came up to me several times and asked to go  
11 into the body recovery mode, and my conclusion was no, I want  
12 to stay in here until I'm happy what the technical expert's  
13 telling me, there's nobody alive in there. We didn't do that  
14 until about 1:00. And then at that point, we're into -- we  
15 actually at that point really subscribed to your direction, and  
16 once we got into the body recovery mode, we kind of leave  
17 everything set because there is no longer an urgency in the  
18 rescue effort. And we didn't do that until about 1:00, but --

19 BY SGT. SUTTER:

20 Q. Chatsworth Fire Station, what number's that?

21 A. The --

22 Q. Chatsworth Fire Station.

23 CHIEF QUINTANAR: 96.

24 THE WITNESS: 96.

25 BY SGT. SUTTER:

1 Q. Who was the chief at that time on scene?

2 CHIEF QUINTANAR: It was Captain Cooper.

3 SGT. SUTTER: Captain Cooper.

4 CHIEF QUINTANAR: And the Captain 1 is Al Barrios  
5 (ph.).

6 THE WITNESS: Was that first in, John? Were they--

7 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Yeah, they were first on.

8 THE WITNESS: Okay.

9 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Yeah, the engine beat them in. We  
10 interviewed them yesterday. Al was an EMT, but we got a chance  
11 to talk to Cooper.

12 THE WITNESS: Okay.

13 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Cooper was at the IC for a short  
14 time.

15 THE WITNESS: He was a little midget guy.

16 SGT. SUTTER: I didn't see him.

17 THE WITNESS: A little midget guy. Like I said, I'm  
18 taller than him.

19 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Not that guy. He's from 28s.

20 THE WITNESS: Oh, that's who it was.

21 CHIEF QUINTANAR: You're talking about Scott.

22 THE WITNESS: You're right. You're right. Scott  
23 Cooper.

24 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Yeah.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't see anything wrong

1 with short people.

2 MS. SANZO: No.

3 THE WITNESS: Neither do I. They're cute. They're  
4 cute. They're cute little guys.

5 BY SGT. SUTTER:

6 Q. Is there anything you saw, our first deputy went in  
7 with I believe with Chatsworth Fire. Anything you saw  
8 important in terms of law enforcement, our deputies on scene,  
9 that could have been done better?

10 A. Really, no. You know, I'll tell you that was  
11 probably a component that -- in fact, I was able to give a  
12 briefing to Chief Baca at the command post, and in the process  
13 of kind of crafting it to both fire or both police chiefs, just  
14 praising the efforts of law enforcement. I don't think I've  
15 ever seen an incident in the 30 years where we had that synergy  
16 between the two disciplines, and that was such a -- they  
17 provided such a vital service. You know, at the scene usually  
18 I want to talk to supervision type personnel, and so I only  
19 have to talk to one police officer, and when I ask for that,  
20 within a minute I had a Sheriff and a PD person, LAPD come up  
21 to me, and basically say whatever you need, and again it was  
22 particularly commendable because at that time, the situation  
23 was still hot. They were operating underneath the car and  
24 inside the car, and really without even, you know, the proper  
25 personal protective stuff, carrying bodies that were, you know,

1 bleeding and things of that nature. So to me the concept of  
2 unified command, you know, we teach that down in my shop, and  
3 we usually talk about it in terms of a collected command  
4 agreement to develop common objectives, but it does trickle  
5 down into synergy at the actual, you know, ground zero, boom,  
6 and that was probably the best example I've ever seen of people  
7 taking, you know, in the old days, they -- cops didn't listen  
8 to firemen and vice versa. It just didn't work that way, but  
9 we had police officers reporting to me, me giving them tasks  
10 and then completing them, exceeding my expectations in all  
11 sense. So --

12 Q. And you as a Battalion Chief began rotating personnel  
13 from what I've been told from media reports. Is that true?  
14 They rotated --

15 A. Well, our first rotation came at 0100 hours. So  
16 from -- that's what, nine hours after on scene.

17 Q. What about the recovery and the triage area? Were  
18 they rotating people through like every hour, every two hours,  
19 every three hours?

20 A. Not -- you mean as far as the responders?

21 Q. In terms of responders. We had responders there for  
22 like solid six hours before you pulled them out.

23 A. There was a time -- I told each of the group  
24 supervisors during this time to watch your people for issues  
25 regarding the need for rehab, but at that point, realistically

1 I don't know what time we transported the last immediate  
2 patient, but from that point, there really was no opportunity  
3 to rotate people. Everybody just had to kind of stay and do  
4 their jobs.

5 CHIEF QUINTANAR: I got there about 8:00, 8:15, and I  
6 think all of the patients were transported.

7 THE WITNESS: Okay. So maybe that three and a half  
8 hour period -- I remember distinctly on the radio saying we've  
9 transported the last immediate patient, which is -- that's a  
10 big milestone because we're at least assured that all of the  
11 immediate patients are now either en route or at a hospital  
12 receiving, you know, appropriate trauma care, the flesh wounds  
13 and things like that, you know, a little less critical, but I  
14 really can't remember what time it was. It's kind of one of  
15 the -- from my position, as the operations section chief, being  
16 without a command post vehicle, meaning I had to walk -- once  
17 you leave the confines of the back of your Suburban which  
18 provides you the ability to document and the ability to  
19 communicate, and you leave that with one HandiTalkie and a  
20 staff assistant and a clipboard. You're very vulnerable at  
21 that time especially when it talks about the concept of  
22 resource accountability. That would be -- and it was a symptom  
23 of chaotic environment, but I had very little resource  
24 accountability. Now, it's not like a structure fire where I  
25 have to account for every single body because they're at

1 extreme personal risk. This was -- they were outside, but I --  
2 at no point did I have the accountability we're used to because  
3 there were probably at that point 200 people working on the  
4 scene at that incident but --

5 BY MR. TAPIA:

6 Q. This is really something -- you kind of answered the  
7 question already that I had in connection with the equipment  
8 that you used to break metal apart.

9 A. Uh-huh.

10 Q. You said you brought the bulldozers?

11 A. Uh-huh.

12 Q. But was there anything else inside the passenger car  
13 that you went to, when one piece of equipment wouldn't work,  
14 did you go to anything else?

15 A. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, they had a multitude of  
16 different types of equipment. The hamottro (ph.), the sweet of  
17 hydraulic equipment was our primary thing. That with  
18 reciprocating saws, rotary saws, but the hamottro and the air  
19 bags, all the spreading equipment, and what it is at that  
20 point, it becomes a very piecemeal type of extrication, and for  
21 meaning in a perfect world, we'd look at it, we design a plan  
22 and then we kind of implement that plan. This was, okay, we  
23 see a body here. It's covered with metal. It's twisted.  
24 There's no symmetry. It's not opening up a car or something.  
25 So there's no symmetry. So what we have to do at that point is

1 get the reciprocating saw and remove that bar, and then spread  
2 this bar and then the problem is because it's so -- it's a  
3 confluence of twisted metal, our plans don't work frequently.  
4 We cut, cut, cut, we spread, and it doesn't spread the way we  
5 thought. So we have to do another plan and then, and then in  
6 the process of spreading and cutting, then we start shoring.  
7 We start bringing blocks in there because once we spread it  
8 with the spreaders, and then we remove a body and we take this  
9 tool out to go put it in another place, then metal comes back.  
10 So it's just a -- and it was in a truly horrific environment.  
11 It was probably an area that was maybe 10 x 10 that was full of  
12 body parts and blood and decapitated corpses. I mean, it was  
13 really -- and those guys worked in there for about six hours  
14 without any break. So it was, you know, pretty traumatic for  
15 them but they did a great job.

16 MR. TAPIA: That's it.

17 BY MS. SANZO:

18 Q. If I may ask if you could give some advice or  
19 recommendations to your counterparts, in other parts of the  
20 country, what worked well and what would you advise them to  
21 plan or prepare for?

22 A. Well, the tenets of the incident command system, as  
23 it's outlined NIMS is absolutely vital in this case. One of  
24 the things that we have, like if I was speaking to other large  
25 departments, we're rarely resource-strapped here in the LAFD

1 and LAPD. We have -- we usually have more bodies than we have  
2 objectives. Here it was just the opposite. We rolled on  
3 scene. We had a myriad of objectives and at this point, due to  
4 a number of circumstances, it was at rush hour traffic on a  
5 Friday. It was tough to get to. We had one road in. It took  
6 us a long time to get enough bodies in there. But the -- and  
7 what becomes very important at that point is for whatever  
8 command element to really determine a prioritized list of  
9 objectives and then, with whatever resources you have, to begin  
10 to start accomplishing that. The unified command concept,  
11 throughout all phases, not just the initial action phase, but  
12 there was a point when I saw NTSB and I saw Metrolink  
13 supervision personnel and Southern Pacific, where we got  
14 together right there and did a quick huddle at the actual scene  
15 and they finally produced the manifest. I didn't know where it  
16 was and one of the -- the person from Southern Pacific said,  
17 well, it's probably here. We've got some people in to get it.  
18 Things of that nature, that the concept of -- that this is no  
19 longer just a fire deal, it's not a law deal, it's not a NTSB,  
20 but the collective effort of all responders needs to be  
21 utilized. And to me that's what went well. The -- we -- I  
22 know from listening to the media that what didn't go well was  
23 patient tracking, which that's nothing new. Every major  
24 medical catastrophe we have, we have a problem with not being  
25 able to account for every patient, and as much as I -- because

1 I heard that people were about ready to burn that school down,  
2 that obviously were concerned. They had -- their daughter was  
3 on that train. They hadn't heard anything. There was no  
4 record of her daughter being transported, and we were missing  
5 60 people on that transport list based on cross-referencing the  
6 number of patients. There still remains the ultimate priority  
7 of getting those trauma patients to the hospital, and sometimes  
8 that tracking element falls second fiddle and we regret it  
9 later, but that's something for people a lot higher in the food  
10 chain and smarter than me to determine an appropriate solution  
11 to that. But to me I think identifying the areas of  
12 improvement, that's where we can improve. I was -- like it had  
13 been really for most significant incidents, the individual  
14 efforts of the firefighters and police officers are what saved  
15 us and, you know, I march to the tune of a command structure,  
16 and it's my job at that point just to try to provide some  
17 clarity and purpose and organization to their fine individual  
18 efforts to -- because in this, we can't just throw more bodies  
19 on it. We have to make some decisions that are fluent and  
20 lucid and actually contribute to the success.

21 Q. I'd like to ask a follow-up about what you had  
22 mentioned about the contents of the UP train and learning what  
23 was on that. Can you talk about that?

24 A. I'm sorry.

25 Q. The contents of the UP train, learning what was in

1 those cars.

2 A. Right.

3 Q. Can you talk about when you learned about what was in  
4 each of those cars?

5 A. Well, the first thing I did I sent -- when a 70s got  
6 on scene, Denise Jones, I sent them up line to let me know, do  
7 I -- is there anything placarded? Is there chemicals leaking?  
8 They came back and reported nothing overt, nothing jumped out  
9 to get them. At some point though, I wanted to see whatever  
10 manifest was going to tell me. I didn't -- I talked to a  
11 Southern Pacific Railroad person. He told me likely where it  
12 was, but at that point we didn't have bodies to get in and find  
13 it. When I did go up to the command post to give a briefing to  
14 the Mayor and Chief Baca and Brad Noon (ph.), Chief Barry,  
15 somebody at that point had a couple hundred page document that  
16 said this is the manifest and they had given it to the incident  
17 commander. So that was the first time, and then again I heard  
18 later that there was no concerns regarding hazardous materials  
19 in the train.

20 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

21 Q. Chief, I was told through Hidalgo Squad 4 that the  
22 manifest or bill of lading did not match up to what was  
23 actually in there.

24 A. Okay.

25 Q. Because we were -- when I got there and I was working

1 with Metrolink and the contract, they wanted to know what was  
2 inside and basically got to Hidalgo, and Hidalgo -- Captain  
3 Hidalgo and he mentioned that most of the cars were empty, that  
4 they were strawberries or --

5 A. I heard strawberries.

6 Q. Right, in a refrigerated car and so forth, but he  
7 said that the bill of lading did not match.

8 A. Okay. I never --

9 Q. Did you hear that?

10 A. I never reconciled that myself. I -- once the IC --  
11 at that point now we had had more of an executive level  
12 incident command structure, and at that point they had it and  
13 it would be -- make sense to be turned over to whoever was the  
14 plan section chief, and then for them to go ahead and reconcile  
15 that, but I never heard the fruits of that reconciliation  
16 between the bill of lading and what actually existed. But I  
17 was just told that there was no hazmat concern, and so I was  
18 good on that.

19 MS. SANZO: Let's take a second, continue on with the  
20 second round of questions if we have additional questions?

21 CHIEF QUINTANAR: I know that -- before everybody --  
22 I'm not sure if we're all aware of this, but Chief Castro  
23 teaches -- goes around teaching NIMS and has classes. So he's  
24 well-versed in that field as you can tell. So I just want to  
25 give him that a boy for a great job he did.

1           MR. OJEDA: From the Metrolink side, we want to thank  
2 you guys and all of your staff for the great effort you guys  
3 did for us and our passengers. Thank you.

4           SGT. SUTTER: I agree as well because actually on  
5 scene we had a limited number of supervisors. There was only  
6 supervisor (indiscernible) at the command post. We never  
7 actually had on scene for probably a half an hour  
8 (indiscernible) so the deputies did take their self-initiated.  
9 We had a first deputy on scene, and then about 10 more  
10 followed. So thank you for taking control.

11          THE WITNESS: I mean it was -- again, we couldn't  
12 have done a lot of the stuff without their -- right now  
13 obviously I'll try to, you know, make some type of command  
14 presentation based on that, but it was ironic. I'm searching  
15 on the Internet for photos, and how many photos I had of  
16 deputies and LAPD officers carrying patients speaks to the  
17 issue of their contribution.

18          MR. TAPIA: I hear on TV, my twin, Arnold --

19          THE WITNESS: Uh-huh. He was there. Yeah, you do  
20 look alike.

21          MR. TAPIA: But I heard him on TV saying things like  
22 the tremendous work that you guys did, and right now it's like  
23 a (indiscernible). So thank you very much for all that you  
24 did. It's really something.

25          BY MS. SANZO:

1 Q. Chief, is there anything else that you would like to  
2 add?

3 A. I don't think so. I think I've pontificated long  
4 enough.

5 BY MR. OJEDA:

6 Q. I have one last question if I may. The relationship  
7 between the fire personnel on the ground and the heavy  
8 equipment operators, were you satisfied with that communication  
9 when we brought in the heavy equipment to start removing the  
10 freight cars that were off the ground? Off the rail, excuse  
11 me.

12 A. Well, I left at 1:00, and when I left, there were  
13 rail people there that were talking about being able to move  
14 the cars back, and at that point, I turned them over to Chief  
15 Ernst who was kind of taking over as a branch director  
16 position, and to communicate -- and what he told me is that in  
17 an hour and a half they could have the locomotive moved back,  
18 that was, you know, pushing the other locomotive into the  
19 passenger car. To me that seems really impressive that they  
20 could move that many cars to the point where they could get to  
21 the head locomotive in an hour and a half. I always look at  
22 that from my layman's standpoint, I was thinking that would  
23 take them eight hours to move all those cars. But again, the  
24 fact that, that people now understand that this whole command  
25 system is part of a machine, and they represent one crucial

1 part of that machine. In the old days, they probably would  
2 have started moving cars without talking to anybody. Now  
3 people came up to the incident command post, talked to the  
4 operations section chief, and said, here's what we want to do.  
5 Will this help you? Here's how it's going to affect you, and  
6 then again, we allowed all of that technical expertise to  
7 ultimate vet out into a viable objective, and that's what that  
8 whole unified command structure is about, is about me being a  
9 dumb fireman and not knowing anything about rail movement and  
10 having expertise coming in and allowing that to fit into one of  
11 my goals and allow us to determine how to do it timely, to  
12 synchronize it safely, and ultimately have a positive effect on  
13 the incident.

14 Q. Thank you.

15 MS. SANZO: Thank you so much for your time today to  
16 talk to us.

17 THE WITNESS: My pleasure.

18 MS. SANZO: It's going to be extremely helpful for us  
19 as we move along, and thank everyone for their great questions,  
20 and that will conclude this interview.

21 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled  
22 matter was concluded.)

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:           HEAD-ON COLLISION OF A METROLINK  
                                  COMMUTER TRAIN WITH A UNION  
                                  PACIFIC FREIGHT TRAIN  
                                  September 12, 2008,  
                                  Los Angeles, California  
                                  Interview of Chief Joseph Castro

DOCKET NUMBER:           DCA-08-MR-009

PLACE:                    Los Angeles, California

DATE:                     September 16, 2008

was held according to the record, and that this is the  
original, complete, true and accurate transcript which has been  
compared to the recording accomplished at the hearing.

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Kathryn A. Mirfin  
Transcriber