



# PRELIMINARY REPORT

## HIGHWAY

### HWY15MH006

*The information in this report is preliminary and will be supplemented or corrected during the course of the investigation.*

At about 5:44 a.m., on Tuesday, February 24, 2015, a Metrolink commuter train carrying 46 passengers and 3 crew members collided with a unoccupied 2005 Ford F450 utility service truck towing a two-axle utility trailer in Oxnard, California. The collision occurred about 80 feet prior to a highway-rail grade crossing intersection at S. Rice Avenue. The Metrolink engineer died 7 days after being injured, and 31 passengers and 2 crew sustained injuries ranging from minor to serious.

The Metrolink commuter train had departed from East Ventura County and was en route to Los Angeles. The train had a three-person crew: an engineer, a student engineer, and a conductor. The student engineer was operating the train. Train #102 consisted of a cab/coach car (#645)<sup>1</sup> at the lead end of the train, which was coupled to three coach cars—car #206,<sup>2</sup> car #211,<sup>3</sup> and car #263;<sup>4</sup> and an unoccupied locomotive (#870),<sup>5</sup> which was located at the rear of the train.

Prior to the impact, the driver of the Ford F450 utility service truck, towing a 2000 Wells Cargo tandem [two]-axle utility trailer, was traveling south on S. Rice Avenue, approaching the intersection of E. 5th Street. Approximately 55 feet before the intersection, the driver of the truck encountered highway-rail grade crossing DOT #745855H, consisting of a warning system that included a combination of warning lights, gates, signs, and pavement markings.

The truck driver had intended to turn right at the intersection and proceed west on E. 5th Street.<sup>6</sup> However, he entered the railroad right-of-way and turned onto the track instead of turning right onto E. 5th Street, located beyond the grade crossing. Because train #102 had not yet approached the grade crossing, the crossing's active warning system was not activated.

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<sup>1</sup> Cab/coach car #645 (which is also referred to as a cab-control car) was manufactured by Hyundai-Rotem and had a 121-passenger capacity.

<sup>2</sup> Coach car #206 was manufactured by Bombardier and had a 141-passenger capacity.

<sup>3</sup> Coach car #211 was manufactured by Hyundai-Rotem and had a 132-passenger capacity.

<sup>4</sup> Coach car #263 was manufactured by Hyundai-Rotem and had a 132-passenger capacity.

<sup>5</sup> Locomotive #870 was manufactured by the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors Corporation.

<sup>6</sup> NTSB interview testimony (during the on-scene phase of the investigation)



Driver's forward view of crossing.



Driver's view to the right, looking at tracks.

The truck continued traveling westbound on the railroad right-of-way, while partially on the railroad tracks. After traveling approximately 80 feet west of the nearest curb line of S. Rice Avenue, the truck became lodged<sup>7</sup> on the southernmost rail of the track—at some point after which,<sup>8</sup> the driver exited the truck.<sup>9</sup> The truck's headlights were on [illuminated], the hazard lights were flashing, and the driver-side door was in the open position.

Both the student engineer and the engineer were in the cab-control car. The student engineer was operating the train, and the engineer was monitoring. The conductor was tending to his duties with the passengers. As the Metrolink train approached the S. Rice Avenue grade crossing, the engineer-in-training began to sound the train horn as required,<sup>10</sup> approximately 0.25 mile west of the grade crossing.

While sounding the train horn, the student engineer placed the train into emergency braking. About 8 seconds later, the train collided with the truck and utility trailer. A post-collision fire ensued on the pavement of the grade crossing, in which the utility trailer was partially consumed by the fire. A portion of the utility trailer came to rest next to the grade crossing; and most of the truck was carried eastward along the track, where remnants of the vehicle came to rest on the south side of the track bed. During the collision sequence, all four of the train's cars derailed,

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<sup>7</sup> This condition is also referred to as “high-centered.”

<sup>8</sup> No determination could be made as to how long the truck was positioned on the track.

<sup>9</sup> Emergency responders determined that the truck cab, which was found in a severely crushed condition, had been unoccupied.

<sup>10</sup> Pursuant to Federal Railroad Administration regulation.

three of which overturned and came to rest on their sides.<sup>11</sup> The locomotive at the rear of the train did not derail.

A 1998 Toyota Camry that had stopped at the highway-rail grade crossing at the moment of the collision and was struck by debris; the sole occupant of the vehicle was not injured. The grade crossing warning system and several hundred feet of railroad track were damaged.



Ford F-450 truck at final rest.

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<sup>11</sup> Train cars #645, #202, and #211 overturned; train car #263 derailed but remained upright; and locomotive #870 did not derail.