

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Railroad Accident Brief Report

ATL 97 FR 002
EMPLOYEE FATALITY
NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION
SECAUCUS, NEW JERSEY
NOVEMBER 27, 1996

On Wednesday, November 27, 1996, at about 6:07 a.m., eastern standard time, a westbound National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) passenger train 101, operating on eastward track No. 1 over the Metropolitan Division at a recorded speed of 86 mph, struck and fatally injured an Amtrak maintenance-of-way employee (flagman) at milepost (MP) 4.84 in Secaucus, New Jersey. Reported weather conditions were broken overcast skies, windy and cold with an ambient temperature of 25 ° F. Visibility was restricted due to early dawn.

The three-member traincrew reported for duty at 5:20 a.m., at their assigned location in Penn Station in New York City. The train departed Penn Station at its scheduled time of 6:00 a.m. The crew consisted of an engineer who was operating the train from the lead locomotive, a conductor, and an assistant conductor who were riding in the passenger cars. No derailment or damage to the train equipment occurred as a result of the accident. Neither the passengers nor the crewmembers of train 101 sustained any injuries.

The train consisted of one locomotive, Engine 921, and seven Amfleet type passenger cars. No anomalies were noted or reported during the initial terminal air brake test that had been performed on the train earlier. All safety and operational equipment on the train was reported to be functioning properly before the train departed Penn Station.

The train was operating west on track No. 1, on a clear signal aspect at a speed of 86 mph when the accident occurred. Although the train was operating westbound on the eastbound main track, this type of operation was not new to the flagman. This operation had been in progress for as long as 3 weeks prior to the accident, and had taken place the day before on the shift this employee was working.

As part of the New York Zone Construction - Secaucus Transfer Project, caissons were being installed. A contractor's survey crew was assigned to

measure track settlement prior to the full work crew starting the work shift. A three-man Amtrak crew, which consisted of a track foreman and two flagmen, was assigned to provide flag protection for this part of the project. The flagman assigned to work with the survey crew reported to the work location on the north side of the main tracks at 5:30 a.m., and found that a piece of machinery that had broken down was blocking the access route. The north side was the customary access route the flagman used to reach the work site, via a stairway and path on the north side of the right-of-way. He was scheduled to report to work 1/2 hour prior to the surveyors' starting time. This would allow him time to attend a job briefing and be prepared to furnish flagging protection to the three contractor surveyors performing work in the area. The surveyors' starting time was scheduled for 6:00 a.m.

When the flagman found the north side access entrance blocked, he directed the surveyors to the south side of the embankment and rode with them in their vehicle to the south side. The survey crew stated they noticed that the flagman was wearing work attire that included a safety vest, hard hat, and hat liner when he rode in their vehicle to the south side of the embankment. When they arrived at the south side the flagman exited the vehicle and walked from the roadway to the stairway. They stated that they saw him as he started up the stairway, but then directed their attention on getting ready for their duties.

In order for the flagman to get to the track area, he walked up a stairway that only reached from the bottom of the embankment to within 15 feet of the top. The remaining climb was on dirt and rock ballast, and the end of the ties was the only level area the flagman had to stand on after reaching the top of the embankment. The surveyors were near their vehicle at the bottom of the embankment and did not witness the accident. They reported that a few moments after they saw the flagman start up the stairway, they heard a watchman's whistle, looked up toward the track, heard a thud and saw some type of movement but could not determine if it was a person. A few moments later they observed the flagman laying on the south shoulder of track No. 1.

The engineer stated that as he approached the area where the accident occurred, he observed an object next to the track just moments before impact and did not have time to sound the locomotive's horn.

PROBABLE CAUSE

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of this accident was the unsafe condition presented by the inadequate construction of the stairway leading to the right-of-way of the high-speed main track. The stairway did not provide the flagman a safe location to observe the track for approaching trains.

Adopted: August 18, 1998