Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Newark, NJ	**Accident Number:**	DCA26FA194
Date & Time:	May 3, 2026, 17:50 UTC	**Registration:**	N77066
Aircraft:	Boeing 767-424ER	**Injuries:**	1 Minor, 231 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 121: Air carrier - Scheduled		

On May 3, 2026, about 13:50 eastern daylight time (EDT), United Airlines flight 169, Boeing B767-424ER, N77066, struck a light pole on the New Jersey turnpike while on final approach to runway 29 at Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR), Newark, New Jersey. Debris from the light pole subsequently impacted a tractor-trailer traveling southbound on the New Jersey turnpike. The airplane landed and taxied to the gate without further incident. The 3 flight crew members, 8 cabin crew members and 220 passengers deplaned at the gate without any injury. The driver of the tractor-trailer sustained minor injuries. The damage to the airplane was substantial.

The flight was operated under the provisions of Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* Part 121 as a scheduled international passenger flight from Venice Marco Polo Airport (VCE), Venice, Italy to EWR.

As part of the investigative process, the NTSB invited qualified parties to participate in the investigation. These included the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), United Airlines, Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), and the Boeing Company.

An operations group was formed, and the accident flight crew were interviewed. The flight data recorder (FDR) and cockpit voice recorder (CVR) were shipped to NTSB headquarters for download by the Research and Engineering Recorders Lab. Both recorders were downloaded successfully and a CVR group was formed. A vehicle performance specialist reviewed data from the FDR, CVR, Automatic Dependent Surveillance – Broadcast (ADS-B), and radar, along with security video. The ground proximity warning computer was also shipped to NTSB headquarters and will be downloaded at the manufacturer at a later date. Recovered pieces of the struck light pole were collected.

Crew Experience

The flight times for the 3 flight crew members were as follows: the captain had 2,724 hours in the B757 and B767 with 378 hours as captain. The first officer had 1,958 hours and the relief officer (for the international flight) had 853 hours in the B757 and B767. Total time with United; the captain had 16,385 hours with 5,205.5 as captain and 11,179.5 as first officer, the first office had 1,958 hours, and the relief officer had 1,075 hours. Note: the flight crew members' flight time is their time at United and does not include their flight time before being hired at United.

History of Flight

The flight crew was originally scheduled to depart May 1st in a Boeing 757-200 from EWR, fly to Shannon Airport (SNN) in Shannon, Ireland, and back to EWR. However, the flight crew was reassigned by crew scheduling to a different airplane and route shortly before their planned departure to SNN. They were now to depart EWR in a Boeing 767-400, fly to VCE, and return to EWR.

The first officer was the pilot flying (PF) on the outbound leg to VCE, and the captain was the PF for the return leg to EWR with the first officer the pilot monitoring (PM). Everything on the flight from VCE was normal until the descent. The flight crew planned to land on runway 4R but was changed to runway 22L during the descent. The crew was asked to prepare for holding while the airport arrival and departure pattern was changed. However, the flight did not have to hold.

The crew slowed to 250 knots in anticipation of holding. The runway was changed again, this time to runway 29 and the crew was assigned the RNAV W RWY 29 approach, see figure 1. The captain stated he briefed the new approach after each change and that even though they were compressed briefings, all required items were covered.

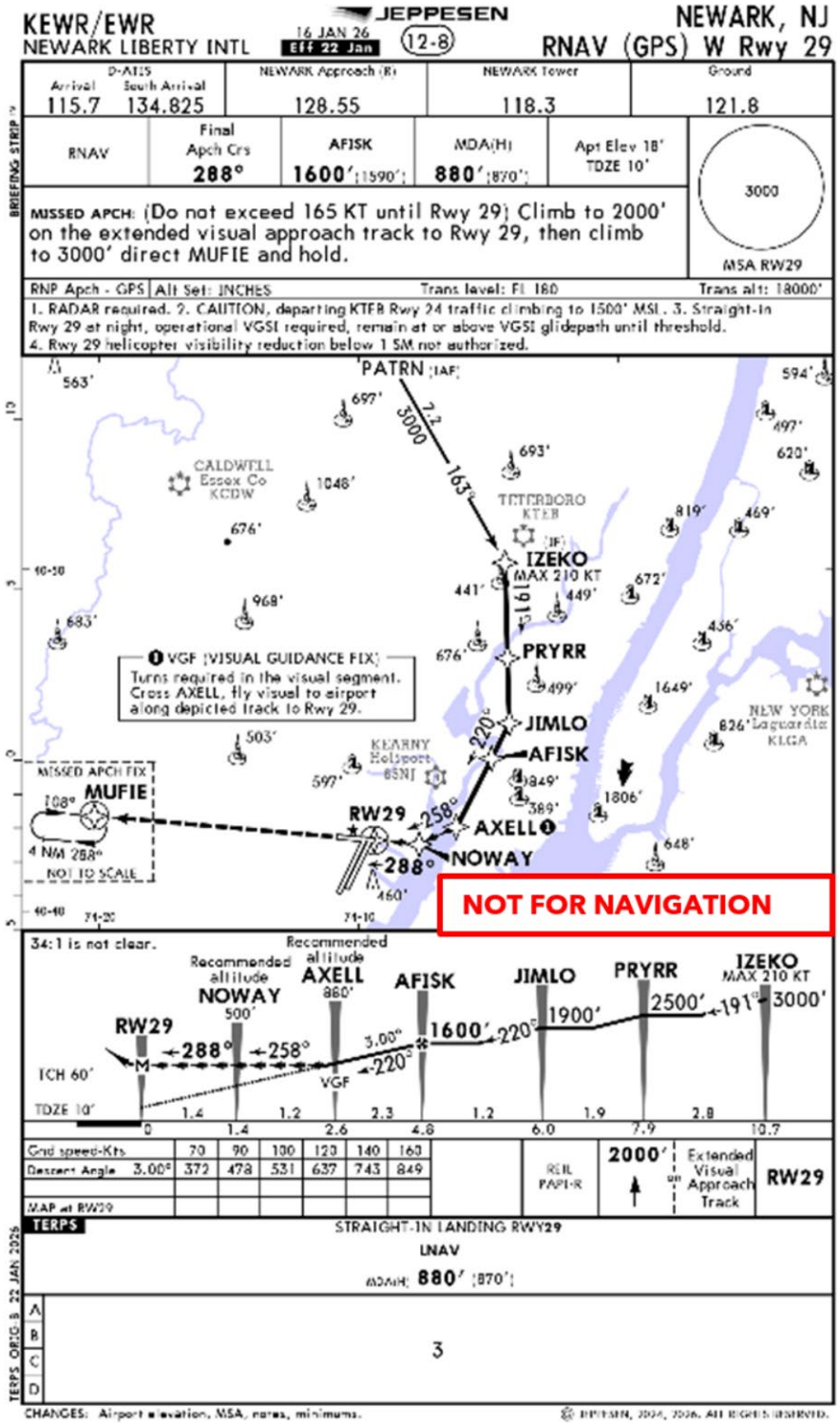

Figure 1. RNAV (GPS) W Rwy 29 approach into Newark. Note: after crossing AXELL, a visual approach is to be flown along the depicted track to runway 29.

The captain stated they had no CRM [crew resource management] issues on the flight. The captain was not concerned about the approach. He stated that he expected to fly the final

portion of the approach at 3 red and 1 white on the Precision Approach Path Indicator (PAPI). This was his desired sight picture for runway 29. The CVR did not capture any discussion of PAPI lights for runway 29 prior to landing.

The captain stated that he turned off the autopilot and the auto-throttles at approximately 880 ft MSL or just around AXELL. He said that he “got fast” while he turned the airplane into the headwind and pulled the power levers back to compensate. The airplane shortly returned to a stable airspeed even though the wind gusts were producing “moderate turbulence.”

The captain stated he heard the first officer call out “airspeed slow” while on short final (inside ½ mile). He mentioned that he did not receive any windshear alerts and that he always felt that the airplane was in a safe position to land. He responded to the automated 500 ft callout with the statement “stable”.

At 500 ft, the first officer stated, they were on speed and on profile, and the captain was maintaining his planned profile of 3 red and 1 white on the PAPI. Once again, the CVR did not capture any discussion of PAPI lights for runway 29 prior to landing. Additionally, the captain, as the PF, was looking outside the airplane, and the first officer as the PM was “more committed to being inside the airplane, looking for trends.”

As they descended, the airspeed began to decay, and the first officer recalled that he stated, “hey you are slow,” followed moments later by, “you are still slow and a little low.” The PM then looked back outside, and at that point recalled “I thought we were low”, however they were just about to touch down, and he didn’t process the information in time to get a go-around callout verbalized. The airplane landed, taxied to the gate, and all passengers and crew deplaned normally.

The captain stated that just before touchdown “he heard a thump”. The first officer recalled feeling a mild jolt as they neared the threshold. The relief officer stated that he heard an audible thump as they went over the airport boundary a second or two before landing. After the flight landed, the purser called the flight deck and said the aft flight attendants heard a loud bang just prior to landing.

After parking at the gate, the captain went outside to assess the airplane and found damage along the aft fuselage.

Figures 2 and 3 show the accident flight track for the RNAV approach. Figure 4 shows airspeed, ground speed, and throttle information.

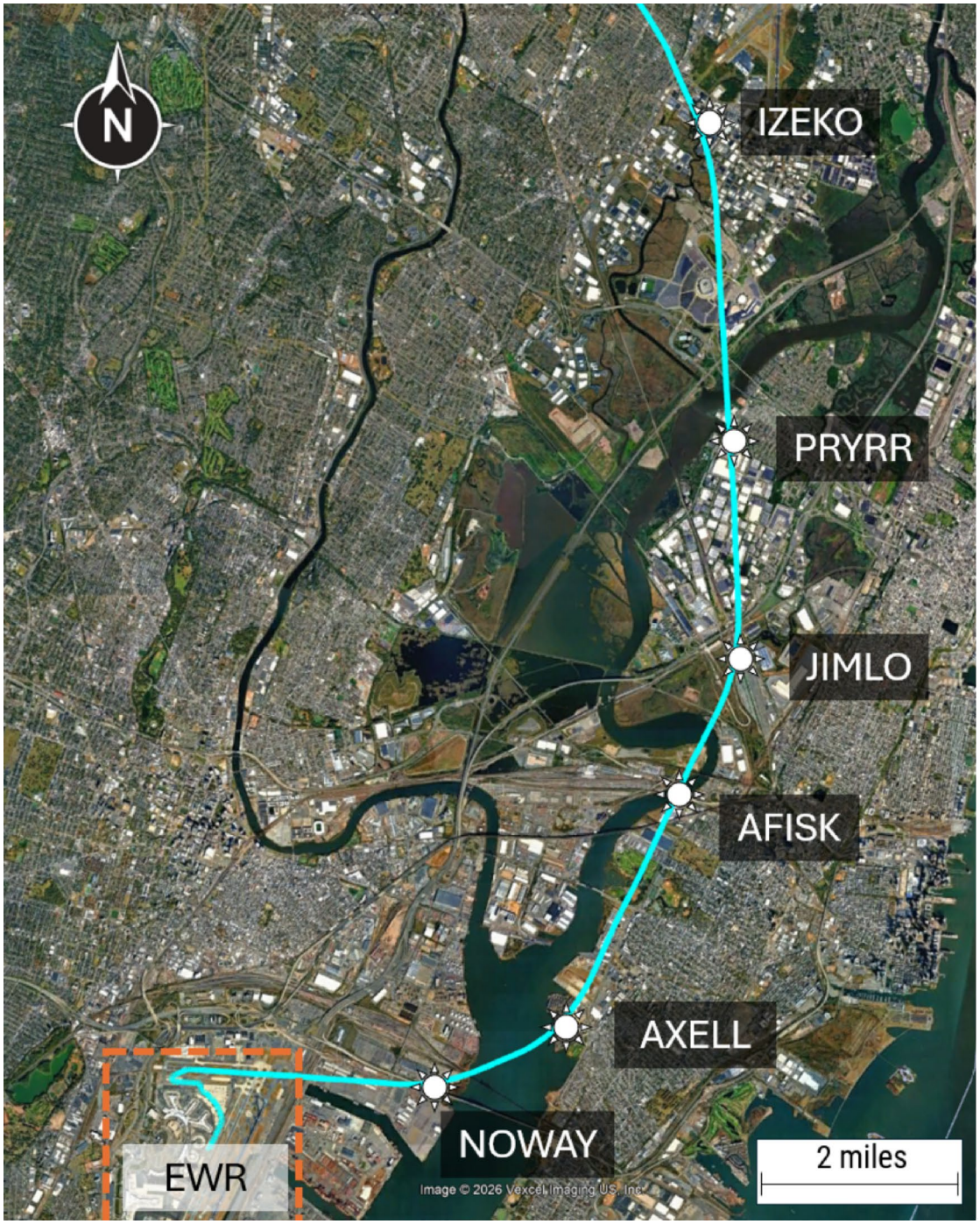

Figure 2. Google Earth image with accident airplane's flight path overlayed.

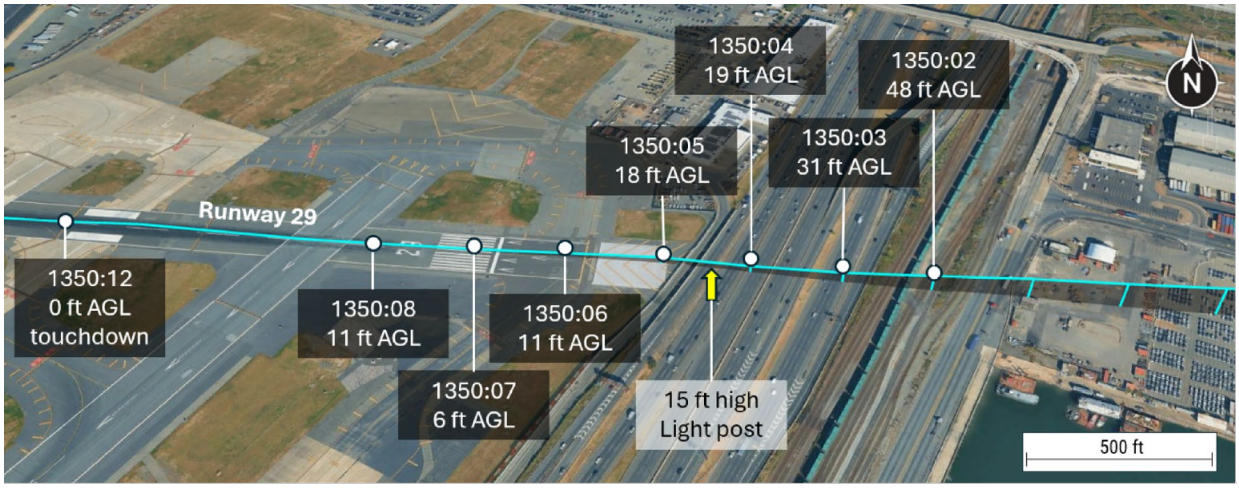

Figure 3. Google Earth image showing the New Jersey turnpike, light post and approach end of runway 29. Note: the turnpike is 5 ft higher than the runway and altitude is depicted as height above ground, so the airplane descended a total of 6 ft between 1350:04 and 1350:05.

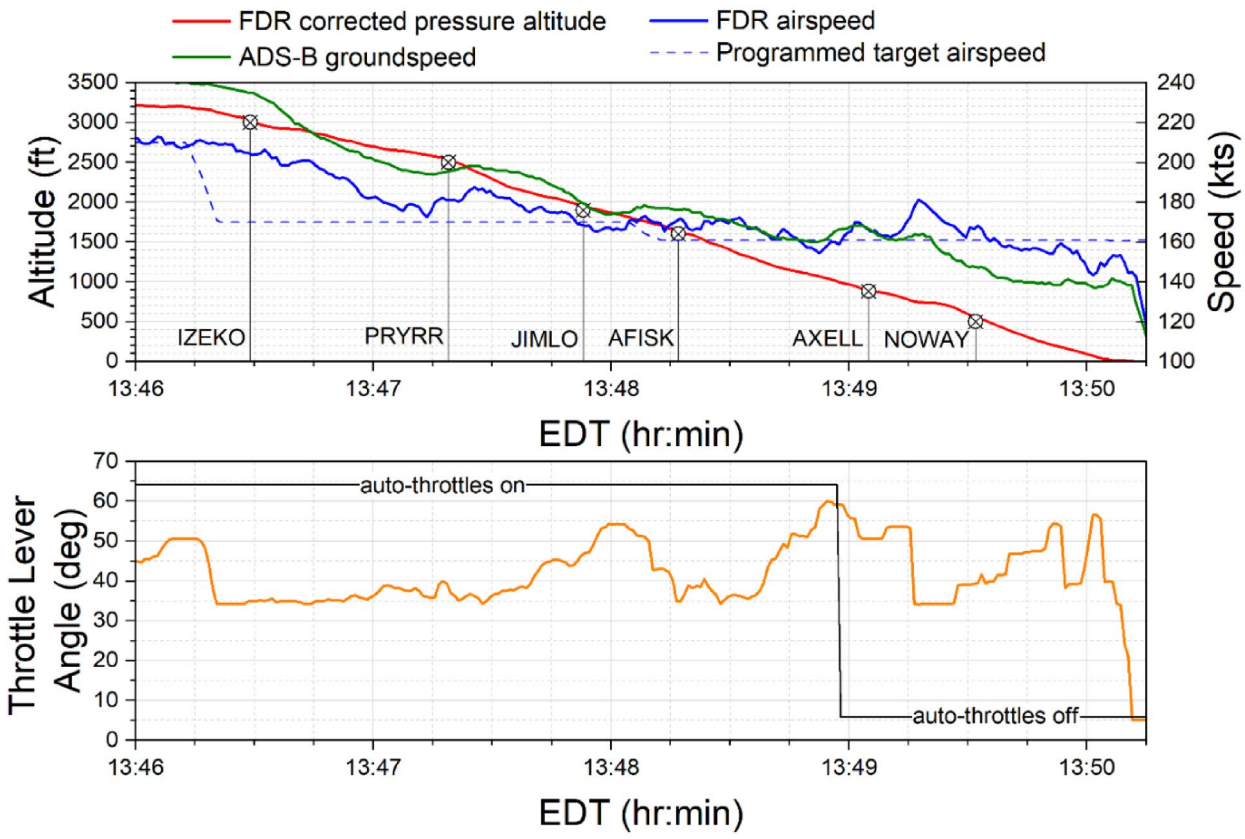

Figure 4. The upper plot depicts FDR pressure altitude corrected for the barometric setting, ADS-B groundspeed, FDR airspeed and the programmed target airspeed. The lower plot indicates when the auto-throttles were on/off and the throttle lever angle.

At the last Meteorological Aerodrome Report (METAR) prior to landing (16:51 UTC), the wind was at 290 degrees at 19 knots, gusting to 30 knots, visibility was 10 statute miles, and the altimeter was 29.88 inches of mercury. The Terminal Area Forecast (TAF) issued at 17:24 UTC forecasted gusts up to 30 knots. The TAF issued at 14:32 UTC forecasted gusts up to 28 knots. Figure 5 shows the wind speed and direction from the FDR.

Postaccident inspection showed all three altimeters (the captain's, first officer's and the standby) were accurately set to the reported altimeter setting of 29.88 Inches of mercury. To view the captain and first officer's altimeter settings, the APU had to be started.

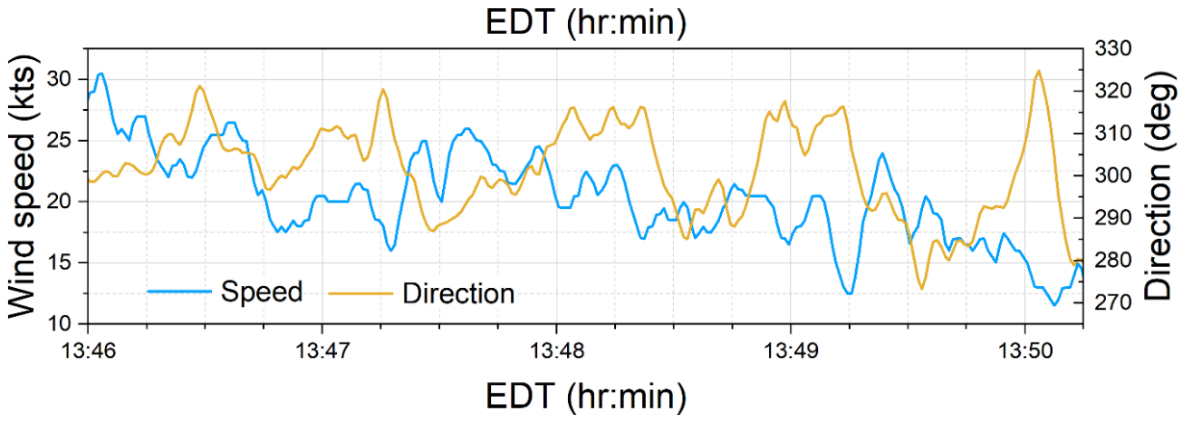

Figure 5. Plot depicts wind speed (blue line) and direction (yellow line) from the FDR. There is a gust just prior to the airplane reaching NOWAY at 1349:25.

Runway 29

A precision Instrument Landing System (ILS) approach is not installed on runway 29 at EWR. An RNAV approach is available. It provides vertical and lateral guidance until a published Visual Guidance Fix (VGF), at which point pilots are to fly via visual reference.

Visual guidance lighting systems (VGLS) provide visual guidance to pilots during the approach and landing phases of flight. There are multiple VGLSs with the Precision Approach Path Indicators (PAPIs) as the current standard Visual Glide Slope Indicator (VGSI) consisting of four light boxes arranged perpendicular to the edge of a runway. It projects a pattern of red and white lights that provide visual approach information along the descent path, indicating to pilots if they are high or low.

PAPIs are designed to reduce controlled flight into terrain (CFIT) and landing distance over and under runs by assisting the pilot in establishing a stabilized descent. The display of two red lights and two white lights indicate to pilots that they are on the desired glide path to the runway.

PAPIs are normally located on the left side of runways, however the PAPIs on runway 29 at EWR are located on the right side of the runway. Figure 6 depicts the glideslope for the

accident flight (red line). The green dotted line shows the altitude for a 3-degree glide slope path when the crew would see two red/two white on the PAPI. Altiudes below the grey dashed line would result in three red/one white on the PAPI. Altitudes below the grey dotted line would result in viewing four red lights on the PAPI.

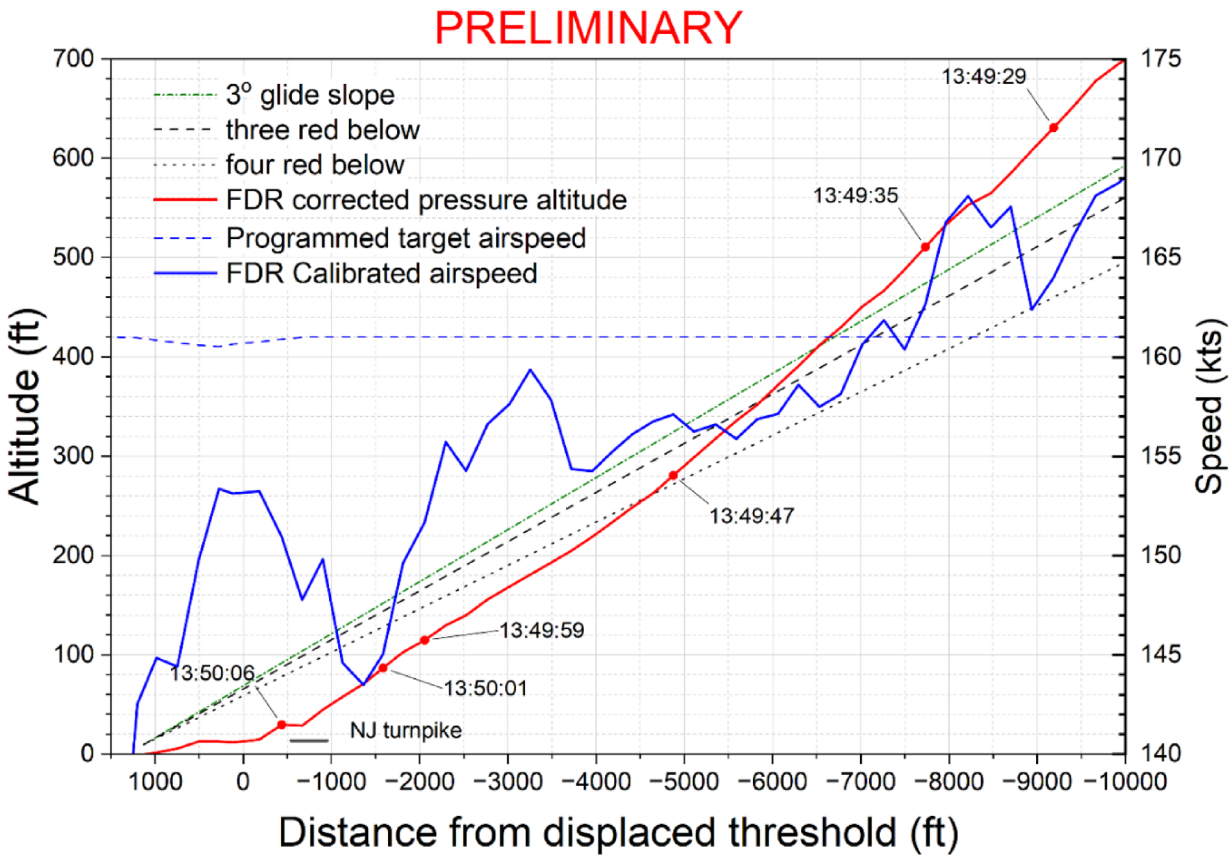

Figure 6. Plot that depicts the altitude, speed and distance from the displaced threshold for runway 29. The red line is the FDR corrected pressure altitude; the blue line is the FDR calibrated airspeed; the dotted green line shows the altitude for a 3-degree glide slope path (crew would see two red/two white on PAPI) and altitudes below the dotted gray line would result in viewing four red lights on the PAPI.

Airplane and Tractor-Trailer Examination

On site examination of the airplane revealed three punctures to the left lower aft fuselage. The damage runs from fuselage stations 1219 to 1373 and between stringers 27L and 31L. The forward puncture was about 6” long and 1” wide, the middle puncture was about 46” long and 4” wide and the aft puncture was about 8.5” long and 1” wide. Between the damaged areas there were also dents and creases on the skin. The total size of the holes was larger than the outflow valve and the damage affected all 3 elements of the fuselage structure making the damage to the airplane substantial. The #1 tire on the left main landing gear (MLG) had evidence of slash marks. See figure 7 for pictures of airplane and tire damage.

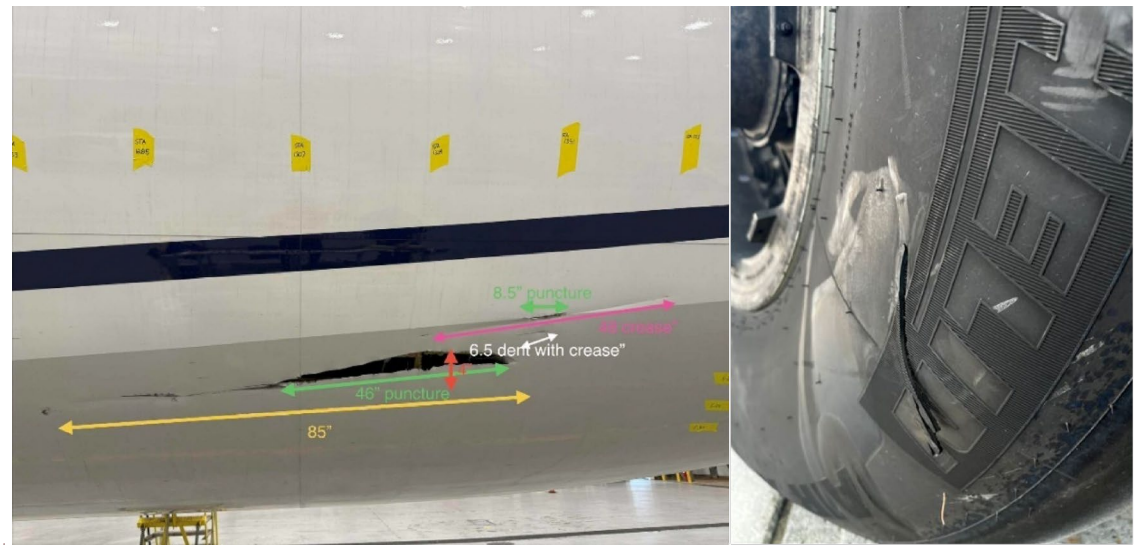

Figure 7. Right photo shows the left lower aft fuselage damage, and the left photo shows the damage to the #1 left MLG tire. (Source: United Airlines)

The tractor-trailer that was struck by the light pole had damage to the windshield and the side of the trailer, see figure 8. The windshield appeared to have impact damage and there were impact marks on the forward upper left corner of the trailer, and punctures in the aluminum siding. One major puncture was on the front face of the trailer, and the second puncture was minor and on the forward left side of the trailer. There was no evidence of tire marks on either the tractor cab or trailer.

Figure 8. Left photo shows the damage to the tractor cab's windshield, and the right photo is front face of the trailer. (Source: left photo Port Authority, right photo NTSB)

Safety Actions

After the accident, United Flight Operations issued an Ops Alert that applied to EWR arrivals specific to the RNAV vertical guidance for runway 29. It reminded pilots that the visual glideslope indicator (VGSI) was designed to provide safe obstruction clearance within 10 degrees of the runway centerline up to 4 NM. In addition, United Flight Operations issued Pilot Bulletin 26-069 revision 1 to all pilots that applied to short runway landing guidance. It mentioned that a hazard was identified through their Safety Management System (SMS) that the pilot technique of shifting the aimpoint of electronic or visual glide path indications, or "ducking under", contributes to low approach altitudes during the visual segment into certain airports and runways. It emphasized that all approaches shall be conducted so that touchdown occurs 1500' from the runway threshold, but not prior to 1000' from the threshold, in accordance with their Flight Manual, Chapter 3.

The investigation is ongoing.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Boeing	**Registration:**	N77066
Model/Series:	767-424ER	**Aircraft Category:**	Airplane
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	UNITED AIRLINES INC	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	Flag carrier (121)
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:		**Condition of Light:**	
Observation Facility, Elevation:		**Observation Time:**	
Distance from Accident Site:		**Temperature/Dew Point:**	
Lowest Cloud Condition:		**Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:**	
Lowest Ceiling:		**Visibility:**	
Altimeter Setting:		**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	
Departure Point:	Venice, Italy (VCE)	**Destination:**	Newark, NJ

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	11 None	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	220 None	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	1 Minor	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	1 Minor, 231 None	**Latitude, Longitude:**	40.701083,-74.155361

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Ward, Effie Iorenda
Additional Participating Persons:	Kate Keogh; United Airlines Todd Gentry; Federal Aviation Administration Brody Wilson; United Airlines Patrick Lusch; Federal Aviation Administration Mike Wickboldt; Air Line Pilots Association Rebecca Ragar; The Boeing Company
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	