

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Railroad Accident Brief Report

LAX 96 FR 011
DERAILMENT
MONTANA RAIL LINK
NOXON, MONTANA
JUNE 2, 1996

On June 2, 1996, a Montana Rail Link freight train 05 021 MS 02, en route from Missoula, Montana, to Seattle, Washington, derailed the third and fourth locomotives and 15 loaded freight cars while traveling 58 mph near Noxon, Montana. The assistant engineer was at the controls as the train descended a slight grade. He stated he was coasting when he heard a loud bang and the automatic air brakes were applied in emergency application. The assistant engineer turned around and saw the ensuing derailment.

No release of hazardous materials, injuries, or fire occurred in the accident. Monetary damages were estimated to be \$2.5 million.

A broken rail with a vertical split head was discovered at the initial point of derailment. The last ultrasonic inspection of this rail section did not disclose any internal defects.

PROBABLE CAUSE

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of this accident was a rail section that fractured in vertical split head mode under the passing train, which was induced from rail with reduced load bearing capacity because of head and gauge face wear. Contributing to the cause of the accident was the inability of the ultrasonic rail detection equipment to readily identify internal defects in rail with surface defects.

Adopted: August 18, 1998