

SP-20

Log R-499

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: March 20, 1985

Forwarded to:

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Vice President and General Manager
General Electric Company
Building 50
2901 East Lake Road
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-85-18

About 6:45 p.m., on March 5, 1984, southbound Amtrak train No. 81, The Silver Star, traveling at 79 mph and consisting of 3 locomotive units and 18 cars, derailed 1 locomotive unit and 18 cars on Seaboard System Railroad track near Kittrell, North Carolina. Of the 274 passengers and 19 crewmembers on board, 52 persons were injured in the accident. Damage was estimated to be \$2,536,000. 1/

Postaccident inspection revealed that the No. 1 axle of the third locomotive unit (Amtrak 378) was broken on the pinion (left) end in the traction motor support bearing area. The bearing was destroyed, the lubricator wick burned and charred, and the axle in the bearing area showed evidence of intense heat. The axle was broken at an uneven angle; the short end was 6 7/8 to 8 inches long when measured from the face of the axle gear hub. All other support bearings, lubricator wick assemblies, and axles on the locomotive unit were inspected and found to be lubricated and in good condition.

The traction motor/wheel/axle assembly was a D 77B traction motor manufactured by the Electro-Motive Division (EMD) of the General Motors Corporation and carried serial No. 83-F-3-1028. Amtrak maintenance records indicated that the traction motor/wheel/axle assembly was assembled from new and reconditioned parts at Amtrak's New Haven, Connecticut, shop and was installed in an overhauled locomotive truck assembly at the facility on February 7, 1984. The overhauled locomotive truck was transported on February 27, 1984, by truck, to Amtrak's Rensselaer, New York, shop, where it was installed in Amtrak locomotive unit 378 on March 1, 1984.

Amtrak locomotive unit 378 was placed in service in Albany, New York, on March 2, 1984, and operated from Albany to Chicago, Illinois, in train No. 49 on that date. The unit was inspected in Chicago and operated in train No. 50 from Chicago to Washington, D.C., on March 4, 1984. After an inspection in Washington, the unit was operated from Washington to the derailment site in train No. 81 on March 5, 1984. The locomotive unit had traveled approximately 2,000 miles after receiving the overhauled truck.

1/ For more detailed information, see Railroad Accident Report--"Derailment of Amtrak Train No. 81, The Silver Star, on the Seaboard System Railroad, Kittrell, North Carolina, March 5, 1984" (NTSB/RAR-85/03).

A check of the facilities and inspection procedures at Rensselaer, Chicago, and Washington and interviews with the Amtrak personnel involved in the inspection and maintenance of Amtrak locomotive unit 378 in the 5 days before the derailment disclosed no irregularities in the inspection and maintenance of locomotive units at these locations.

Amtrak's New Haven maintenance facility employees involved in assembling the traction motor/wheel/axle assembly generally knew the proper procedures and work practices involved. However, while observing assembly procedures at the facility, Safety Board investigators noted that the assemblers were not using any instruments to check the finish of the traction motor support bearing journals. The profilometer in the adjacent wheel and axle shop was used to check the finish on several support bearing journals being assembled. The support bearing finish on these axles varied from 10 to 22 microinches, which was 3 to 15 microinches above the manufacturer's recommended standard and Amtrak's adopted standard of 7 microinches.

The New Haven shop maintenance instruction library contained EMD maintenance instruction MI 1518, revision C, which was dated 1977. This maintenance instruction prescribed a motor support bearing finish of 15 microinches. A check with EMD revealed that MI 1518 had been revised (revision D) in 1981. Revision D of MI 1518 reads as follows:

Motor Support Bearing Area

The motor support bearing surface finish must be 0.18 microns (7 micro-inches) or finer. If support bearing surface is not at least 0.18 microns (7 micro-inches) grind the surface to 0.64 to 1.27 microns (25 to 50 micro-inches) and then polish to obtain a 0.18 microns (7 micro-inches) or finer surface.

Amtrak had adopted the EMD maintenance instructions on the traction motor assembly as its own maintenance standard.

Safety Board investigators contacted locomotive maintenance personnel of other railroads who disclosed that 15 microinches was the support bearing finish most prevalent in the industry. Investigators learned that there is also industry concern about the adequacy of the present traction motor support bearing design because the higher horsepower, higher speed locomotives develop pinion end bearing loads approximately three times the loading on the commutator end due to the increase in torque applied.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the General Electric Company:

In cooperation with the Association of American Railroads and the Electro-Motive Division of the General Motors Corporation, examine the design of, and the maintenance procedures for, traction motor support bearings, determine if the existing bearing arrangement and maintenance procedures are adequate for the present environment, and make any necessary adjustments in design and maintenance. (Class III, Longer-Term Action) (R-85-18)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility ". . . to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and BURSLEY, Member, concurred in this recommendation.

By: 
Jim Burnett
Chairman