

Log R-630C



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: September 16, 1991

In Reply Refer To: R-91-32

Mr. Robert A. Matthews
President
Railway Progress Institute
700 N. Fairfax St., Suite 601
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-2098

About 3:13 a.m. eastern daylight time, on August 9, 1990, northbound Norfolk Southern (NS) freight train 188 collided with southbound NS local freight train G-38 at control point DAVIS near Sugar Valley, Georgia. The conductor on train 188 and the conductor and engineer on train G-38 were fatally injured. The trainmen on both trains and the engineer on train 188 received minor injuries. Damage was estimated at \$1,268,680.¹

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of this accident was the failure of the engineer of train 188 to stop at the stop signal because he was asleep, distracted, or inattentive. Contributing to the accident were the failure of the conductor to monitor the engineer's performance and the failure of the brakeman and flagman to carry out their responsibilities to notify the engineer to stop the train.

The Safety Board realizes much remains to be done before a complete advanced train control system (ATCS) can be implemented. Nonetheless, this is another accident that could have been averted had the ATCS system been available and installed. With transponders to monitor the train's location and speed and to provide moving braking distance parameters and information about how the train was being handled, the dispatch computer would have recognized that the train was not going to stop at the signal. The dispatch computer, through the data radio link, would have ordered the locomotive's computer to stop the train, thus preventing the collision. The Safety Board urges the industry and the FRA to expedite the development and use of the ATCS. The Safety Board issued Safety Recommendation R-87-16 in May 1987, requesting FRA to promulgate Federal standards to require the installation and operation of an ATCS in order to provide positive train separation.

¹For more detailed information, read Railroad Accident Report--"Collision and Derailment of Norfolk Southern Train 188 with Norfolk Southern Train G-38 at Sugar Valley, Georgia, August 9, 1990" (NTSB/RAR-91/02).

The FRA is continuing in its position that the railroads are developing an ATCS that will meet the intent of this safety recommendation. The FRA is "monitoring" the research and development process. The Board is holding to the position that the FRA should become actively involved in the development of the system, providing funding incentives and program direction to ensure a uniform implementation of a positive train separation feature of the ATCS. The status of Safety Recommendation R-87-16 is "Open--Response Received."

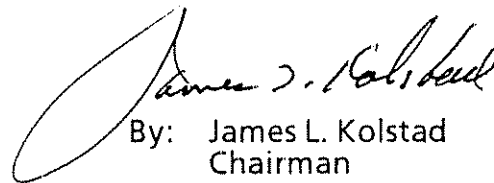
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Railway Progress Institute:

In conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration and the Association of American Railroads, expand the effort now being made to develop and install advanced train control systems for the purpose of positive train separation. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-91-32)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations R-91-23 through -26 to the Federal Railroad Administration; R-91-27 through -30 to the Norfolk Southern Corporation; and R-91-31 to the Association of American Railroads. In addition, the Safety Board reiterated Safety Recommendation R-87-16 to the Federal Railroad Administration.

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 action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation R-91-32 in your reply

KOLSTAD, Chairman, COUGHLIN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, HART and HAMMERSCHMIDT, Members, concurred in this recommendation.


By: James L. Kolstad
Chairman