

Log H-567



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: July 24, 1992
In Reply To: H-92-85

Honorable Barry E. Duval
Mayor of Newport News
2400 Washington Avenue
Newport News, Virginia 23607

About 8:21 a.m. on April 29, 1992, Amtrak train 94 was traveling northbound on CSX Transportation (CSXT) tracks at the Bell King Road grade crossing in Newport News, Virginia, when it struck the right side of an eastbound 1980 Mack dump truck loaded with sand. The male truck driver, 61, was fatally injured. Of the approximately 100 train passengers on board, 54 were injured and 6 were hospitalized. The train, comprised of a locomotive, four coaches, and one food service car; was operating from Newport News to New York, New York. All of the train units derailed. The locomotive and the truck were destroyed.

According to eyewitnesses, the truck was traveling northbound on Nettles Drive, parallel to the railroad right-of-way, when it made a right turn onto Bell King Road, and proceeded onto the crossing without stopping. Investigators determined that on the day before the accident, the truck driver had traveled over this crossing twice.

Bell King Road forms a "T" rural intersection with north-south Nettles Drive and crosses the north/south track at a 63-degree northeast angle. This intersection has a substantial right flare from northbound Nettles Drive onto eastbound Bell King Road. The Safety Board conducted sight distance tests using an Amtrak passenger train and a three-axle dump truck similar to those involved in the accident. At the highway grade crossing, investigators moved the test train north and the test truck east at measured increments to determine whether any obstructions hindered the truck driver's or locomotive engineer's view of the crossing, and to determine the limits of the truck driver's view of the approaching northbound train. Although no roadside obstructions were present near the crossing, the tests disclosed that the truck driver would not have been able to see the approaching northbound train because of the acute angle of the approach to the crossing and his restricted view from the commercial vehicle.

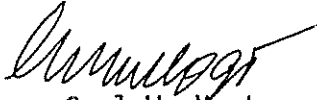
The Safety Board believes that sufficient sight distance at railroad grade crossings is essential to ensure that vehicles can travel through crossings safely. Sight distance must be sufficient to allow drivers to perceive trains and stop if necessary.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the City of Newport News:

Align Bell King Road at the highway grade crossing in Newport News so that eastbound traffic approaches the crossing perpendicular to the railroad tracks. Also, survey all other grade crossings in the city's jurisdiction to ensure that the roadway alignment provides drivers with an adequate view of approaching trains. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-92-85)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with 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 H-92-85 in your reply.

Acting Chairman COUGHLIN, and Members LAUBER, KOLSTAD, HART, and HAMMERSCHMIDT adopted this recommendation.


By: Carl W. Vogt
Chairman