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# NEWS

## Police searching for signs of sabotage in Via Rail train derailment



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Inspectors continue their investigation on the site of the VIA derailment, Monday, February 27, 2012

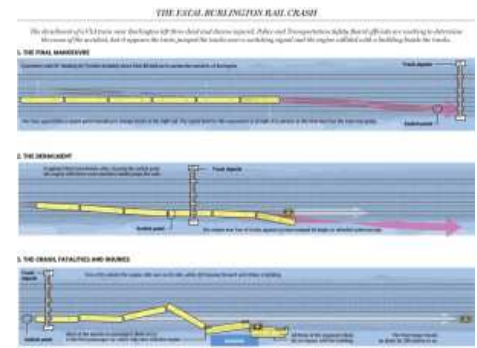
Peter J. Thompson / National Post

By **Adrian Humphreys** and **Jesse Mirsky**

VIA commuter train 92 was switching tracks to avoid a work site at the exact moment it derailed, the Transportation Safety Board announced on Monday.

The derailment on Sunday killed two locomotive engineers and a trainee, and seriously injured three passengers; 42 other passengers were taken to hospital, where eight remained on Monday afternoon.

It is not known what exactly sent the six-car Toronto-bound train careering off the tracks Sunday afternoon but the answer lies in the so-called “black box” — actually a bright orange metal case — now in the hands of the Transportation Safety Board. The



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Transportation Safety Board has started downloading information from the event recorder, Tom Griffith, a regional senior investigator with the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, said in a Monday morning press conference.

how the derailment happened

Nevertheless, investigators “will have to go a little farther” because of the damage done to the box during the crash. “We are going through the coaches to see why the injuries occurred; if there is something in there that, other than the speed of the train, caused the injuries, if seats came loose or whatever,” said Mr. Griffith.

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[Burlington Via Rail train derailment kills three, injures dozens](#)

The event recorders will tell investigators the speed, time, what controls were being activated or were not active — such as the train’s whistle or brakes — at the time of impact. It does not record audio or video from the locomotive, as is often the case for airplanes.

Meanwhile, Halton Regional Police are conducting their own investigation to determine whether the six-car train was brought down by vandalism or sabotage. “Our primary role is to determine if anything criminal has taken place here,” said Sgt. Dave Cross of Halton Regional Police.



VIA rail Engineer-in-training Patrick Robinson is seen in undated Facebook photo. Robinson was one of three VIA rail engineers killed in the train derailment in Burlington on Sunday, February 26, 2012

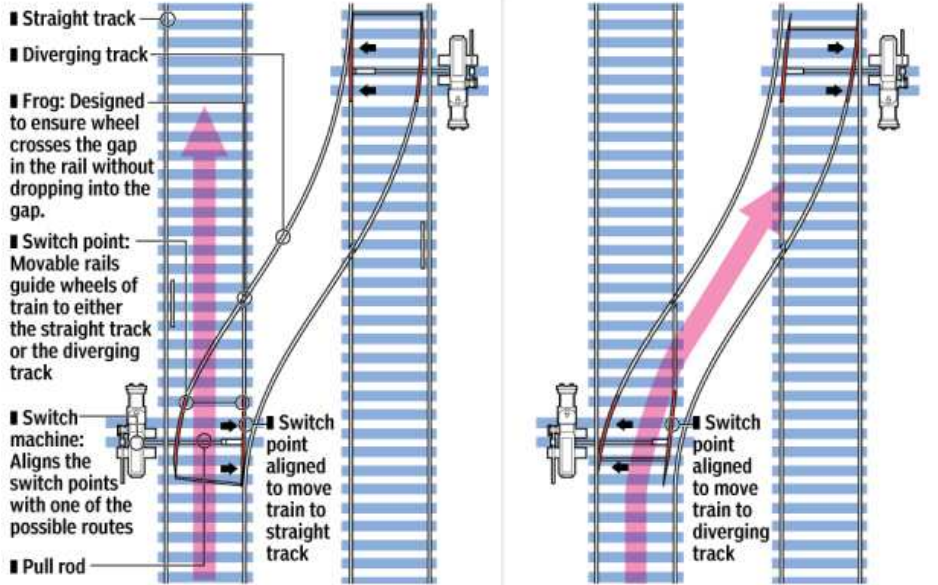
Killed are veteran railroaders Ken Simmonds, Peter Snarr and Patrick Robinson, 40. Both Mr. Simmonds, 56, and Mr. Snarr, 52, started their railroad careers with CN in the late 1970s, and had been locomotive engineers with VIA since 2007. The two men were “top notch engineers” wrote friend Tommy Rocker in an email to the Post. “There are certainly some engineers who are distractable, grandstanders and slackers but not these two men.”

Mr. Robinson was in the cab as a trainee. New to VIA, Mr. Robinson had worked on trains since 1990, including a stint with CN. It is not known whether Mr. Robinson was at the controls at the time of the incident, but he would have been under strict supervision, said Mr. Griffith.

“My understanding is that they were dedicated employees doing their job and something went horribly wrong,” Teamsters Canada Rail Conference President Rex Beatty said on Monday.

## CHANGING TRACKS

### RAILROAD SWITCH



SOURCE: NEWS REPORTS  
Click to enlarge this graphic showing how train switches work

ANDREW BARR / NATIONAL POST  
National Post Graphics

The locomotive containing the three rolled onto its side and collided with a trackside building in the seconds after the derailment. The three were pronounced dead on the scene. “They didn’t stand a chance,” Mr. Griffith said. Emergency crews were not able to extract the men’s bodies until 8 p.m., nearly five hours after the crash.

Only minutes from its destination at the time of the crash, the train was crossing over from one track to another as one was being worked on by a crew. “Think about it as a detour around that work area,” Mr. Beatty told CBC News on Monday. Trains on this stretch in Burlington are required to slow from 80 to 15 miles per hour, but it is not known whether the drivers of train 92 had complied.

Emergency crews were first alerted to a problem at 3:28 p.m. when an area resident called, indicating a train had derailed. Nine more calls poured in over the next four minutes, with passengers inside the derailed train reporting chaos, blood and people injured. One passenger was reportedly ejected from the train through a window.

When first responders arrived they found one of the passenger cars “completely on its side,” and another “on a bit of a slant,” said Halton Regional Police Chief Gary Crowell, speaking at a news conference Sunday night.

The three most seriously injured suffered a broken leg, a back injury and a heart attack. Burlington Fire had 28 firefighters at the scene on Sunday, many of whom had seen derailments along the Burlington corridor in years past. On February 18, 2008, a broken wheel on one of CN’s rail cars caused 19 freight cars to jump the tracks only meters from Sunday’s crash, causing delays and cancellations, but no injuries.



Via Rail engineer Peter Snarr in an undated Facebook photo. Snarr was one of three VIA rail engineers killed in the train derailment in Burlington on Sunday, February 26, 2012

# THREE DEAD IN DERAILMENT

*A Toronto-bound train from the Niagara area went off the tracks on Sunday.*



CLICK TO ENLARGE

Passenger injured in the crash have already begun contacting [Sutts, Strosberg LLP](#), a law office that successfully led a class-action lawsuit against Via Rail and CN after a 1999 crash.

“We’re inclined to start an action, given our experience in that area,” said Sharon Strosberg, adding that the firm was eyeing a multimillion class action suit.

On Monday, as officials in orange safety vests scoured the tracks around the fallen train cars and reporters gather 50 metres away awaiting more news, rail passengers at a nearby train station waited somewhat anxiously to board

“I’m not too freaked out, although I did think twice this morning,” said Holly Lesperance, 19, a Ryerson University business student returning from reading week. “It seems just like a freak accident. I still think it’s more dangerous to get in a car than a train.”

*National Post*  
*With files from Postmedia*



Train traffic begins Monday February 27, as inspectors continue their investigation in Burlington, Ontario where a VIA train de-railed Sunday

Peter J. Thompson / National Post



A bouquet and note commemorating the dead placed near the derailment site; February 27, 2012

Peter J. Thompson / National Post



One locomotive and five passenger cars derailed in Burlington, Ontario, Sunday. Tyler Anderson/National Post



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Discussion

Community

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**linderful** • 10 months ago

I live in the neighbourhood behind the wreck site. I am disgusted with Humanity as I see vehicles, not of this neighbourhood, having breached the police barriers, cruising the street. Their occupants peeking between the houses and jumping fences to get closer to the scene for a better look at the CARNAGE. People are parking their cars at the back of the nearby Fortino's Grocery store and jumping the fences and wading through the local creek to get closer.

BLOODY GHOULS.

Three men died. Let them be !!!!

31 | Share &gt;

**w mac** • 10 months ago

This headline may be true, but it is speculation and can only be hurtful to those who have lost a loved one. Please go back to the drawing board on this one.

15 | Share &gt;

**241A65** • 10 months ago

How terrible. My thoughts are with the families of the engine crew.

It is instructive, however, reading the list of 'Train Wrecks in Canada' above, to realize that such incidents are exceptionally rare and, when they occur, generally have small loss of life, the Hinton disaster excepted, obviously.

10 | Share &gt;

**Swizzored** • 10 months ago

I have been walking the tracks for a few years now. I see hundreds of spikes inbetween the tracks. Over the past two years I placed certain spikes in a pile to see if they were replaced. Nope. Serious maintenance programs should be in effect. I would fire the manager of operations if I new how too.

7 | Share &gt;

**magog** • 10 months ago

The black box won't tell them if the switch points were worn out and when the last time the track was inspected. The last 20 years the railways have cut way back on maintenance, inspections and quite often when they have a minor derailment they charge repair costs to maintenance rather than report the accident as they should. Maintenance cutbacks don't just include tracks either, quite often rolling stock can go back and forth between two points and never get a proper inspection.

6 | Share &gt;

**cf36** • 10 months ago

Firstly, the speeds should be expressed in mph, not kph. Secondly, for the engine to leave the track in the way depicted indicates a very high speed, probably at least 60mph. The only question to be answered is whether there was a signal malfunction, which is highly unlikely, or was it human error, which, as painful as it is to consider, is most probable.

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**Solver4752** > cf36 • 10 months ago

MPH vs KPH ?

This is besides the point. Canada switched to the International System of Units since 1976. There is no way back

9 | Share &gt;

**cf36** > Solver4752 • 10 months ago

How is this beside the point? The railway operates in mph scale, and there is a huge difference between 80 kph and 80mph. I notice that the article has since been edited to show the correct speeds. Probably because the editors at NP realize that this is a very salient point. At 80 kph there would likely have been some track damage and jarred passengers. It's unlikely that the train would have derailed. At 80 mph- much more serious.

u