

3 Killed When Amtrak Derails on Inaugural Route

An Amtrak train derailed on Monday as it took a corner on a new stretch of track in Washington state at more than twice the speed limit, sending passenger cars tumbling from a bridge and killing at least three people.

The train was on its inaugural run on a faster route from Seattle to Portland, Oregon, when 13 of its 14 cars jumped the tracks and tumbled onto a major highway near the town of DuPont.

In addition to the three fatalities, about 100 people were taken to nearby hospitals, of whom 10 had serious injuries, Washington State Patrol spokeswoman Brooke Bova told a news conference.

Seven motor vehicles were also involved in the accident, and fragments of the bridge were left scattered on the highway. Some motorists were injured but none died, authorities said.

Amtrak said there were 86 people aboard the train, 80 of them passengers.

Officials with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said late on Monday that a data recorder recovered from a rear locomotive showed the train was traveling 80 miles (130 km) per hour in a 30 mile-per-hour zone when it jumped the track at a curve leading up to the bridge.

NTSB spokeswoman Bella Dinh-Zarr told reporters it was too early to tell if the train's speed contributed to the derailment.

But the accident seems likely to intensify concerns about railroad company's safety record, which was already under

scrutiny following a series of fatal incidents.

'PEOPLE WERE SCREAMING'

Some of those on board escaped by kicking out windows, passenger Chris Karnes told news outlet KIRO 7.

"All of a sudden, we felt this rocking and creaking noise, and it felt like we were heading down a hill," Karnes said. "The next thing we know, we're being slammed into the front of our seats, windows are breaking, we stop, and there's water gushing out of the train. People were screaming."

Geoff Patrick, a spokesman for Sound Transit, which owns the track, said it had recently been upgraded to handle passenger trains from its prior use for slow-moving freight trains.

The derailment happened on the first day Amtrak trains began using the new inland route between the Washington cities of Tacoma and Olympia, part of a \$181-million project to cut travel time.

The state transportation department said the track had undergone "weeks of inspection and testing."

The rerouting takes trains along Interstate 5, enabling them to reach speeds of 79 miles per hour.

Hours after the 7:34 a.m. (1534 GMT) crash, train cars remained dangling from the overpass, with others strewn across I-5, a major West Coast route stretching from the Canadian to Mexican borders.

Cranes were brought in to remove the carriages.

"It was just a scene of chaos and piles of twisted metal," said Ted Danek, administrator for the city of Dupont who visited the site.

The derailment was Amtrak's second in Washington state this

year. On July 2, a southbound train with more than 250 people aboard derailed in the town of Steilacoom, just a few miles north of Monday's accident. No serious injuries were reported.

NO SPEED CONTROLS

Amtrak's co-chief executive, Richard Anderson, earlier said that positive train control (PTC), a system that automatically slows trains if they are going too fast, was not installed on the new stretch of track.

By law, PTC must be installed on all passenger rail systems by 2018, a deadline that has repeatedly been delayed after rail agencies said implementation was more complicated than anticipated. Sound Transit commuter line, which owns the track, reported in September that it did not yet have PTC in operation.

President Donald Trump said the crash illustrated the need for infrastructure improvements.

In May 2015, an Amtrak train derailed in Philadelphia, killing eight people and injuring more than 200. The NTSB concluded the driver became distracted by radio transmissions and lost track of where he was.

In April 2016 a train traveling from New York hit a backhoe tractor on railroad tracks in Chester, Pennsylvania, killing two maintenance workers and injuring 41.

That crash prompted criticism from the NTSB about Amtrak's safety record. Amtrak said last month it had made numerous reforms. {eoa}

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