



**NO. 94-101**

**TRAIN 1604**

**COLLISION WITH PEDESTRIAN**

**FEATHERSTON**

**17 JANUARY 1994**

### **ABSTRACT**

This report describes a collision between NZRL Train 1604 and a three-year-old pedestrian at Featherston on 17 January 1994. No specific safety issues were addressed.

# TRANSPORT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION COMMISSION

## RAIL ACCIDENT REPORT NO 94-101

**Train Type and Number:** Passenger, 1604

**Locomotive:** DX 5413

**Date and Time:** 17 January 1994, 1350 hours NZDT

**Location:** Wairarapa Line, 56.01 km, 1 km south of Featherston Station

**Type of Occurrence:** Collision with pedestrian

**Persons on Board:**  
Crew: 2  
Passengers: 52

**Injuries:**  
Crew: Nil  
Passengers: Nil  
Other#: 1 Fatal

**Information Sources:** Transport Accident Investigation  
Commission field investigation

**Investigator in Charge:** Mr A J Buckingham

# Pedestrian on track

## 1. NARRATIVE

1.1 New Zealand Rail Limited's Train 1604 was the 12:58 pm Wellington-Masterton service, consisting of locomotive DX 5413 and three passenger cars. The gross train weight, including locomotive, was approximately 185 tonnes. The train was crewed by a Locomotive Engineer and Guard, and there were 52 passengers on board. The train was running on time and was due at Featherston Station at 1352 hours.

1.2 The train was travelling at 90 km/h, normal speed for this section of line, as it approached the Abbots Creek bridge on the southern outskirts of Featherston. The Locomotive Engineer saw a child's head and shoulders appear above the left-hand abutment of the bridge, and sounded a short blast on the locomotive's air horn as a warning. The child appeared to notice the train, and disappeared from sight. As the train ran onto the bridge, another child was seen playing in the creek itself, on the right hand side of the line.

1.3 Looking ahead again as the locomotive reached the northern end of the bridge, the Locomotive Engineer saw a young girl standing beside the line about 20 m ahead. She was standing on the left-hand side, about half a metre outside the rails. The line ran along an embankment in this area, with metre-high grass growing along both sides, right up to the edge of the ballast.

1.4 The distance at which the Locomotive Engineer sighted the girl represented less than one second at the train's speed of 90 km/h. The child was struck a glancing blow by the left front of the locomotive; the Engineer applied emergency braking, and the train came to a halt with its head end 445 m past the point of collision. The

Locomotive Engineer notified Train Control, who in turn alerted the Featherston emergency services.

1.5 The Guard ran back towards the bridge and found the child lying beside the line, apparently dead. He called for assistance to a man in the yard of a nearby residence; it transpired that the man was the girl's father. The father picked the child up and took her back to the house, from where he and a friend set off by car to seek medical attention for the child. They were met by a doctor on his way to the scene. The doctor confirmed that the child had died as a result of her injuries.

1.6 The three-year-old girl had been playing in the yard while her father was loading their car in preparation for a trip the next day. During one of the short intervals when she was out of her father's direct observation, she evidently found her way onto a well-worn unofficial walkway which ran beside the back yard and led through long grass up to the railway line. The back yard was only partially fenced, and adjoined an open reserve next door. The walkway was a "short cut" to another street on the opposite side of the railway line. Children were seen frequently in this area, either crossing the track, or playing in the creek under the bridge.

1.7 As the child's usual place of residence was not near a railway, it is likely that she was unaware of the hazards of walking on or near railway lines. She may have been standing clear of the tracks instinctively, but it is most unlikely that, at her age, she would have been aware of the distance that rail vehicles extend outside the span of the rails.

## 2. FINDINGS

2.1 The train was being operated correctly.

2.2 The short sighting distance gave the Locomotive Engineer no chance of stopping the train in time to avoid the collision.

2.3 It was unlikely, because of the trackside vegetation, that the Locomotive Engineer would have been able to sight the child before the train reached the Abbots Creek bridge.

2.4 The child had gained access to the railway line by way of an unofficial walkway, while momentarily out of her father's sight.

2.5 The child was unlikely to have been aware of the hazards of walking on or near a railway line.

2.6 The walkway appeared to be a frequently-used route between two streets on opposite sides of the railway line.

23 March 1994

M F Dunphy  
Chief Commissioner