



NO. 94-107

TRAIN 842

ROLLESTON

5 MARCH 1994

ABSTRACT

A car travelling west on George Holmes Road, Rolleston on 5 March 1994 moved on to the level crossing while a train was approaching. The level crossing alarms, consisting of flashing lights and bells, were operating. The sole occupant of the car was killed in the collision.

TRANSPORT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION COMMISSION

RAIL ACCIDENT REPORT NO. 94-107

Train Type and Number: Westport-Lyttelton Express Freight 842

Locomotive: DC4542

Date and Time: 5 March 1994, 1705 hours

Location: Rolleston 31.90 km, Main South Line

Type of Occurrence: Collision with motor vehicle

Persons on Board:

Crew:	1
Passengers:	Nil

Injuries:

Crew:	Nil
Passengers:	Nil
Others#:	1 fatal

Nature of Damage: Motor vehicle destroyed, moderate damage to railway crossing alarms

Information Sources: Transport Accident Investigation Commission field investigation

Investigator in Charge: Mr W J D Guest

#Sole occupant of motor vehicle

1. NARRATIVE

1.1 Train 842 was an express freight service of New Zealand Rail Limited (NZRL) carrying coal from Westport to Lyttelton.

1.2 At 1705 hours on 5 March 1994 the train was approaching Rolleston at a speed of 55 km/h. The train was slowing, as the Locomotive Engineer had applied the brakes to reduce speed to 50 km/h at the junction of the Midland Line and the Main South Line at Rolleston.

1.3 The weather was fine and the visibility was good.

1.4 The locomotive's headlights were illuminated in accordance with the standard practice of NZRL.

1.5 Prior to reaching the junction, the train had to cross George Holmes Road. About 200 m from the crossing, the Locomotive Engineer sounded the locomotive's horn and observed that the flashing lights of the crossing alarms were working.

1.6 The Locomotive Engineer's view of the crossing was unobstructed, and he saw a car turning left from State Highway 1 into George Holmes Road. The level crossing was 14 m from the intersection.

1.7 There was no other traffic close to the motorist on the same side of the crossing.

1.8 The car was not travelling fast, but the Locomotive Engineer noticed that it was not slowing down as if to stop. He sounded the horn again and applied emergency

braking, but could not stop the train in the space available. The car moved on to the crossing and was struck.

1.9 Local residents called emergency services which responded promptly, but the motorist had suffered fatal injuries.

1.10 The motorist did not appear to have seen the flashing lights of the crossing alarms, which were clearly visible, or the train.

1.11 Tyre marks on the roadway indicated that the left side of the car was at the edge of the road, and was almost off the seal.

1.12 The motorist had a complex medical history, and the possibility that ill health affected her driving prior to the accident could not be ruled out.

1.13 Damage to the car was aggravated when it was thrown against the substantial steel pole supporting the crossing alarms and a section of timber fence. The fence was once part of the level crossing cattlestop installation that is no longer used by NZRL.

1.14 The steel pole was supported in a cast iron base which was bolted into a concrete foundation. The pole was scratched by the impact, but could be re-used by NZRL without repair. The cast iron base and the bolts were not damaged, but the concrete foundation was cracked and had to be replaced.

2. FINDINGS

2.1 The train was being operated properly prior to the accident.

2.2 The crossing alarms were working normally.

2.3 The motorist did not appear to have observed the flashing lights of the crossing alarms as she drove towards the crossing.

2.4 The motorist had a complex medical his-

tory, and ill health may have contributed to her failure to notice either the flashing lights or the train.

2.5 The steel pole of the crossing alarm was not frangible, and contributed to the damage to the car.

2.6 The redundant timber fence which was once part of the cattlestop also contributed to the damage to the car.