



Report 99-104

Train 1613

passenger safety incident

Featherston

3 April 1999

Abstract

On Saturday 3 April 1999, Train 1613, the southbound Masterton to Wellington passenger service, departed from Featherston while a scout party and an adult passenger were still loading their gear into the van. Three scouts were left on the platform and a fourth scout and the adult travelled to Upper Hutt in the unlit van. The scouts were at risk as they either alighted from, or attempted to board, the moving train during departure. The guard was unaware of the scouts' presence in the van. The incident occurred due to a failure to ensure passenger safety prior to the departure of the train. A safety issue identified was the lack of adequate procedures to ensure passenger safety prior to giving right of way. One safety recommendation was made to the operator.

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List of Abbreviations

LE	locomotive engineer
Tranz Rail	Tranz Rail Limited

Rail Incident Report 99-104

Data Summary

Train type and number:	Passenger Train 1613
Date and time:	3 April 1999 at 1631 hours
Location:	Featherston, 57 km Wairarapa Line
Type of occurrence:	train departing while passengers loading luggage
Persons on board:	crew: 2 passengers: approximately 100
Injuries:	nil
Damage:	nil
Operator:	Tranz Rail Limited (Tranz Rail)
Investigator-in-Charge:	R E Howe

1. Factual Information

1.1 Narrative

- 1.1.1 On Saturday 3 April Train 1613 was a scheduled passenger train travelling between Masterton and Wellington. The train consisted of a locomotive, two A and one AL passenger carriages and an AG van. The AG van formed part of the consist only at weekends, to cater for extra luggage and bicycles.
- 1.1.2 At 1631 hours the train made a scheduled stop at Featherston to pick up passengers. The embarking passengers included principally a bus group of 27 people who were returning from a vineyard tour, another bus group of 16 day trippers returning from Martinborough, and 4 scouts, including a venturer scout in charge, with bicycles and packs.
- 1.1.3 The bus groups embarked onto the front 2 carriages of the train (south end) where the guard was in attendance. The scouts, who were at the northern end of the platform, could not see the guard after the train had stopped, so with the assistance of an adult passenger they managed to open one of the sliding doors of the AG van and started loading their bicycles and packs into it. Figure 1 shows the layout at Featherston.

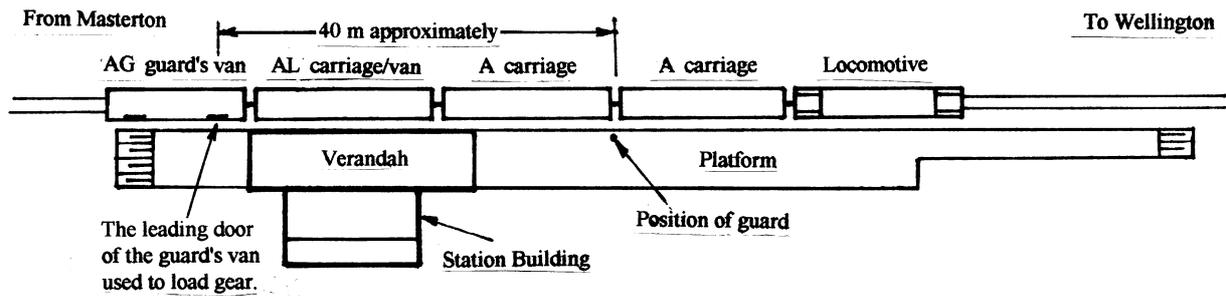


Figure 1
Featherston station – diagrammatic only
(showing the relative positions of the guard and the scouts)

- 1.1.4 At 1634 hours after the adult passenger and 2 of the scouts had loaded their gear into the van, the train started to depart leaving the adult and one scout in the AG van and the other 2 scouts and the venturer scout on the platform.
- 1.1.5 The first indication the guard had of the incident was at Upper Hutt when he went to unload luggage from the AL van and noticed the door on the adjoining AG van opening and a man and a boy disembarking and off-loading 2 bicycles.



Figure 2
North end of Featherston station
(Looking in direction of travel of Train 1613)

1.2 The scouts' account

- 1.2.1 The scouts involved in the incident were 3 ten year old youths led by a 15 year old venturer scout. They were returning home after having cycled over the Rimutaka incline track from Upper Hutt. They were not in scout uniform.
- 1.2.2 The venturer scout had notified Tranz Rail (through a free-call telephone number) of the proposed outing some 10 days prior, advising them of the 4 bikes and packs involved, and which train they wished to catch back. He stated that he was advised by Tranz Rail that it would be OK. He had previously organised about 20 such trips for scouts and had always had a guard on hand to help them load their gear.
- 1.2.3 The scouts arrived at Featherston station at 1600 hours and gathered at the north end of the platform awaiting the arrival of Train 1613. Their bicycles were leaning on the poles at the north end of the station with their packs on the ground adjacent. Figure 2 is a view of the north end of the station building, looking southwards in the direction of travel of the train and shows 8 columns supporting the veranda over the station platform. The scouts recalled "15 or so people" waiting at the south end of the platform and 2 or 3 half way down, plus a man with a bicycle and pack in the same area as themselves.
- 1.2.4 When Train 1613 arrived at Featherston at 1631 hours, it stopped with the AG van in front of the group of scouts. The scouts stated that as the guard was not in sight they decided to load their gear into the van themselves. The scouts attempted to open the leading sliding door of the van but found it very stiff to move, and on attempting to open the trailing sliding door found it was locked. They moved back to the leading door and with the assistance of the adult passenger managed to heave the sliding door open.
- 1.2.5 The adult passenger loaded his bicycle on first (he indicated he was going to Wellington) and then assisted by 2 of the scouts proceeded to load the scouts' bicycles and packs on board the van. Two sets of scouts' gear were loaded and a third scout's bicycle was in the process of being placed aboard when the train started to move off. The adult passenger and 2 scouts were in the van at the time.
- 1.2.6 When the train started to move, one of the scouts in the van jumped clear. Another scout on the platform ran alongside trying to catch the outstretched hand of the scout who had remained in the van so that he could board the train. However by this time the train had picked up too much speed and the scout gave up the chase.
- 1.2.7 In the meantime the venturer scout cycled along the platform towards the head of the train to try and gain the attention of the crew and stop the train. The adult passenger in the van also leaned out of the open door and tried to attract the crew's attention by shouting. Both attempts were unsuccessful.
- 1.2.8 When the train cleared the station, the adult passenger in the van closed the sliding door and he and the scout went to the central guard's compartment for their journey. They were unable to walk through to the passenger carriages ahead of them as the access was blocked off at the leading end of the van.
- 1.2.9 After travelling through the Rimutaka tunnel in darkness the adult passenger found and operated the light switches, but the lights did not work. The scout stated that he felt a little scared during the trip and expressed anxiety at being able to identify the correct station and get off the train at Upper Hutt.

1.2.10 Following the departure of Train 1613, one of the scouts left behind on the Featherston platform rang his parents from the local hotel and advised them of the situation. The parents made private arrangements to collect the scouts from Featherston.

1.3 The guard's account

1.3.1 The guard stated that just before the arrival of Train 1613 at Featherston he unlocked the doors to the front passenger carriage of the train to accommodate a group of 27 people that Tranz Rail Group Travel Bookings had advised he would be picking up at Featherston.

1.3.2 The guard estimated that there was a crowd of "approximately 75 people in very high spirits" at the southern end of the platform when the train arrived. With such a big group the guard elected to stay with them to ensure that they got on properly. The guard was aware that part of the party was a birthday group that had just been on a vineyard tour and he described them as being "rowdy and noisy", although they settled down once they got on board. The guard estimated that he spent 10 to 20 seconds talking to the bus driver of the tour bus during the time the party took to board the train. One of the bus party was in a push chair and they talked about the convenience of modern push chairs compared with older ones.

1.3.3 The guard had no prior notification of any scout group embarking on Train 1613 on the day, but recalled on other occasions being notified of scout groups and their requirements. He stated that the only prior notification he had had was for the birthday/vineyard tour group.

1.3.4 After all the front passengers had boarded, the guard stated that he gave right of way from the second carriage after looking down to the rear of the train and seeing it clear. He then boarded the train and started collecting all tickets from Featherston.

1.3.5 When the guard embarked between the first and second carriage he did not notice any scouts at the north end of the platform. All he noticed were a few people seeing passengers off in the first 2 carriages.

1.3.6 The guard said that on a normal weekend trip he would have attended to all the carriage requirements and been at the rear of the train prior to it stopping at Featherston. There passengers could advise him if they had anything to place in the van and sometimes they assisted him in loading it. However he said that without an assistant guard the time taken to issue tickets on this occasion did not allow him to do this.

1.3.7 The guard stated that it was normal procedure before trains departed a station to ensure that all doors were closed and to go to the rear of the train before giving right of way. On this occasion, because of the perceived problem with the boarding passengers, he elected to stay in proximity to them and check the rear of the train visually from where he was standing.

1.3.8 The guard first became aware of passengers in the AG van at Upper Hutt. He was unloading luggage from the adjacent AL van when he noticed the AG van door opening and a boy getting out as a man in the van assisted him to unload two bicycles. They were also assisted by a second man arriving at the guard's van who the guard took to be the father of the youth. The guard stated that on enquiring from the man in the van what the situation was, he was told that "we were loading our bikes on and the whistle blew". The guard obtained no further details and the train continued to Wellington.

1.3.9 When the train arrived at Wellington the guard was advised by the relief platform coordinator that the mother of one of the scouts left behind at Featherston had phoned and advised him of the incident and the concern she had for the safety of the scout group. The mother advised that she had arranged for the scouts to be picked up by car but would be laying a formal complaint.

- 1.3.10 The guard conveyed to the platform coordinator that both he and the locomotive engineer (LE) were unaware of anyone standing near the rear of the train before departing from Featherston.

1.4 The bus driver's account

- 1.4.1 The birthday/vineyard tour bus driver said he pulled up at the south end of the Featherston station for his 27 passengers to disembark and catch the train for Wellington, which was timed to depart at 1634 hours.
- 1.4.2 The bus driver considered that his passengers were a happy well behaved group and there was no unusual behaviour as they boarded the train. While they were boarding, the bus driver said that he and the guard talked for approximately 2 minutes. The bus driver had got to know the guard by sight over a period of 2 years although they were not on first name terms.
- 1.4.3 The bus driver stated that he noticed the guard looking back towards the rear end of the train before boarding the front of the second carriage and giving train right of way. The bus driver noted that there were only a few people on the platform seeing people off.
- 1.4.4 He stated that he was seated in his bus as the train was departing and noticed 2 boys running down the platform, "obviously trying to catch the hand of a mate who was hanging half way out of the guard's van door". The train, however was going too fast for them to make contact. He assumed that they were children attempting to obtain a free ride. He had not previously noticed the boys on the platform.

1.5 Featherston station

- 1.5.1 Featherston station has a total platform length of 108 m with the station building being 24 m long and with its northern wall 17 m from the north end of the platform.
- 1.5.2 Train 1613 stopped at the platform with the leading end of the van adjacent to the northern end of the station building veranda (see Figure 2). The front (southern) end of the locomotive was 72 m further down the platform. The junction of the first and second carriage was approximately 40 m from the leading door of the AG van and 12 m to the south of the station building.

1.6 Passenger handling

- 1.6.1 Tranz Rail advised that pending the reprint of the Guard's hand book, the following instruction dated 9/2/99, issued to all passenger train operating staff, was pertinent to this incident:

When a train stops at an intermediate stopping station, train staff are to leave the carriage or coach in which they are travelling after having ensured all intending passengers have alighted, then proceed to the other carriage/s or coach/es allocated to them and ensure all intending passengers have alighted before the train is signalled to depart. When all passengers have cleared the doors, the Assistants are to give the "All Clear" starting from the rear of the train and no "All Clear" signal is to be given until the Assistant to the rear of them gives the signal. Guards will give the Locomotive Engineer the "Right of Way" signal when all Assistants have given their signals and at attended stations, the signal is received from the Officer in Charge.

For Train 1613, there was only one guard dealing with passenger requirements and the Featherston station was unattended at the time.

- 1.6.2 There were no instructions relating to passengers in vans, or the handling of luggage in vans. The van sliding doors could be locked from the inside, but the leading platform-side door was unlocked during the incident.

- 1.6.3 Tranz Rail telephone listings included an 0800 number (central reservations) and a local number for general inquiries. The 0800 number was used by the venturer scout in advising Tranz Rail of their needs at Featherston for 3 April 1999. Tranz Rail advised that any enquiries on this line for local commuter travel were either redirected to the office concerned or the information was recorded and forwarded to Tranz Metro for action.
- 1.6.4 The only booking arrangements affecting Train 1613 for 3 April and passed on to the guard was for a group of 27 who were to travel from Waterloo to Featherston at 1016 hours and return at 1634 hours. Tranz Rail advised that for groups of 10 or less, staff in central reservations were aware that Tranz Metro's Wairarapa Connection weekend services had more than adequate accommodation to cater for packs and bicycles, and that this was why no action had been taken on the venturer scout's call.
- 1.6.5 The guard stated that approximately 6 months prior to the incident the staffing of the Wairarapa passenger service was reduced to one guard when the assistant guard left Tranz Rail. Since then the staff, through their union, had been corresponding with Tranz Rail regarding perceived safety issues associated with this staffing change. Some of these perceived safety issues related to problems they stated were being experienced because of:
- disruptive passengers affected by alcohol consumption
 - ensuring the safety of alighting passengers
 - dealing with passenger hooliganism
 - the lack of lighting in the AG guard's van.
- 1.6.6 The AG van lights were tested following the incident. Once the master switch in the wall panel was activated the lights operated. The master switch was remote from the operating switches although its location was known to staff who used the van.

1.7 Personnel

- 1.7.1 The guard had 46 years railway experience with the last 30 years as a guard based at Masterton. He held a current Operating Certificate for the duties concerned.

2. Analysis

- 2.1 The venturer scout's telephone call to Tranz Rail to advise numbers of scouts and bicycles showed appropriate planning on his part, and should have been all that was required to ensure the party he was responsible for was expected and catered for. Larger groups of scouts on similar previous trips were reported as having had their specific requirements forwarded to the guard concerned. However, the known standard use of an AG van on this service, and the size of the group, did not justify any specific action on this occasion.
- 2.2 The scouts were not contravening any published Tranz Rail regulation when they loaded their gear into the van. They could not see the guard, and elected to load their own gear through an unlocked door. There was nothing to indicate this was not permitted, and coupled with the prior advise to Tranz Rail the scout's actions were understandable.
- 2.3 When the train began to move with 2 scouts on and 2 scouts off there was understandable confusion amongst the 10 year olds. As a result one scout jumped from the moving van and another attempted to board under conditions which placed them both at risk.

- 2.4 Neither the guard nor the bus driver saw the scouts on the platform at or near the rear of the train just before it moved off. The only fixed view line obstructions between the guard (positioned between the first and second carriage) and the van were the 8 platform columns. The people on the platform seeing passengers off may also have obstructed view lines. However, it is unlikely that these obstructions would have been sufficient to block all view of the activity at the rear of the train.
- 2.5 At the time when the train first started to move, 2 scouts and the adult passenger were in the van loading their gear while the other 2 scouts were on the platform. Three of the scouts' bicycles and 2 of their packs had been loaded leaving one bicycle and 2 packs still to be placed on board. When loading their gear the scouts would have been traversing the width of the platform from the platform rear wall, where they had previously placed their gear, to the van door. It is possible that at the moment the guard looked back to check the rear of the train (before giving right of way) the 2 scouts still on the platform were obscured behind the north end of the platform wall picking up the remainder of their gear to load onto the van.
- 2.6 The guard's estimate of 75 people at the south end was excessive; a number of approximately 50 is more likely. His awareness of dealing with groups who had been consuming alcohol, and the fact that the bus group that he had been advised of had been on a vineyard tour, may have justified his initial concern. However, the conversation that the guard had with the bus driver about collapsible push chairs did not indicate a continued need for this cautious approach. In the event this party, plus the day trippers from Martinborough, boarded the train without incident and on time.
- 2.7 The train was reported as being at Featherston for 3 minutes. The bus driver's report, and the nature of his conversation with the guard, indicated that the guard was not particularly concerned about the behaviour of the bus group during this period.
- 2.8 If the guard had carried out the required pre-departure procedure, after actioning his concerns by remaining at the south end, the 3 minute train stop would have extended to approximately 4 minutes. This would not have been a major disruption and would have been a prudent course of action in the circumstances.
- 2.9 The guard's fears regarding passenger behaviour appear to have been allayed when he disembarked, as indicated by the platform discussion, and he could have commenced walking to the rear of his train shortly after arrival.
- 2.10 As the AG van was always added to the train make up for week-end running to especially cater for bicycles and additional luggage needs, the policy of not advising train operating staff of any requirement under 10 people was understandable, if coupled with appropriate procedures and security safeguards.
- 2.11 The only information supplied by Tranz Rail relating to instructions given to passenger train operating staff made no mention of checking vans before giving right of way. This may have been adequately covered in the Guard's hand book (which Tranz Rail said was out of print at the time). The guard acknowledged that it was normal practice to go to the rear of the train and check the van before giving right of way.

3. Findings

Findings are listed in order of development and not in order of priority.

- 3.1 The guard did not check the van prior to giving right of way to the LE at Featherston.
- 3.2 The unlocked van encouraged the public to load luggage unattended in the absence of the guard.
- 3.3 There were no procedures to ensure the operational safety of the AG van before giving right of way.
- 3.4 The venturer scout's actions in arranging and supervising the rail travel were appropriate.
- 3.5 Although prior notification of the scout party to Tranz Rail was not passed on to the train crew this did not compromise passenger safety.
- 3.6 The actions of the young scouts as the train began to move placed them at risk, but were understandable in the circumstances.
- 3.7 The guard's concern at the possible behaviour of the tour group at Featherston, and his estimate of the size of the group, correctly influenced his initial actions as the train arrived.
- 3.8 The size and behaviour of the group during the Featherston stop should have relieved the guard's concerns and permitted him to carry out the necessary check of the rear of the train within an acceptable passenger stop time which did not affect the service.

4. Safety Recommendation

- 4.1 On 12 July 1999 it was recommended to the Managing Director of Tranz Rail that he:
 - 4.1.1 Restrict passenger access to vans while the train is stationery at the platform unless under Tranz Rail staff supervision, and ensure all doors are clear of passengers and closed prior to giving right of way to the driver (037/99).
- 4.2 On 5 August 1999 the Managing Director of Tranz Rail responded as follows:
 - 4.2.1 Tranz Rail accepts the final safety recommendation 037/99 dated 12 July 1999 and will review and reinforce its current procedures for train management prior to trains departing, in support of the recommendation.

Approved for publication 6 October 1999

Hon. W P Jeffries
Chief Commissioner