

SoCal Metrolink Engineer Was Loner With Misdemeanor Record

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LOS ANGELES -- The Metrolink engineer at the controls of the passenger train that ran a red light and hit a freighter, killing at least 25 commuters, was a lifelong train enthusiast, as well as a loner with a misdemeanor criminal record, it was reported Tuesday.

Robert Martin Sanchez, 46, who lived in La Crescenta with four miniature

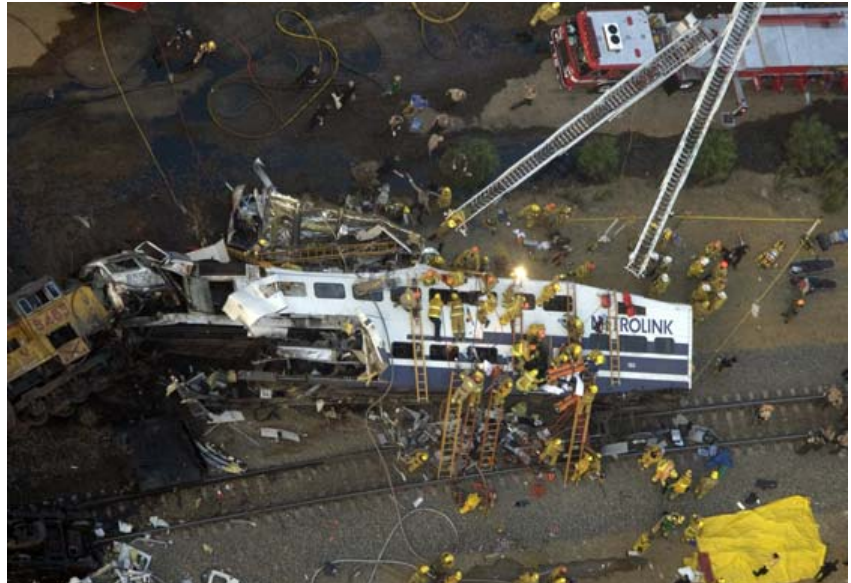
greyhounds, pleaded guilty to grand theft in connection with a 2002 arrest for stealing video game consoles from a store in San Bernardino County, according to published reports. Sanchez apparently moved to La Crescenta from Crestline about two years ago.

"I hate to use the word but he looked like a loner," Michele Thompson, who lives across the road from Sanchez's La Crescenta home, told the Los Angeles Daily News.

Other neighbors described Sanchez as reclusive. One said he once apologized to her for his unkempt dirt yard, saying he was doing some work inside the house, the newspaper reported.

Reporters from across the region and the nation went to the single-story bungalow Monday, looking for answers in the wake of Friday's 4:22 p.m. crash.

Sanchez started working for Metrolink under contract in 1996 when he was an Amtrak employee. Most recently, he was worked for Paris-based Veolia and was a contract engineer with Metrolink.





Train buffs Evan Morrison and Nick Williams, both 14, said they were text-messaging Sanchez just before the accident near Chatsworth. In a message apparently sent in the same minute the collision occurred, Sanchez tells one youth he would be meeting another passenger train: "yea ... usually at north camarillo," according to The New York Times. Investigators said they had not yet recovered Sanchez's mobile device but were making progress, seeking records directly from the phone company.

So far in the investigation, no problems have been found in any mechanical or electronic systems. National Transportation Safety Board investigations of train wrecks can sometimes take a year or longer.

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