

## Angels Flight Passenger Dies of Injuries Suffered in Cable Car Collision

- MTA Employee was among first on the scene following funicular railway accident.



Angels Walk marker, foreground, annotates Hill Street entrance to Angels Flight railway.  
PHOTO BY ED SCANNELL

By GAYLE ANDERSON, Associate Editor (Feb. 2) Investigations are underway to determine the cause of a collision on the historic Angels Flight railway, Thursday, that fatally injured an elderly man and left seven others injured, two in critical condition.

An MTA employee, Phil Ganezer, witnessed the noontime tragedy, ran to the scene and climbed onto the tracks in an attempt to help the terrified passengers.

Leon Praport, an 83-year-old New Jersey man on vacation in Los Angeles with his wife, died Thursday night at

Los Angeles County/USC Medical Center from the trauma, which included head and chest injuries and a broken pelvis. His wife, also in her 80s, remains in critical condition in the hospital's intensive care unit.

Another passenger, a 34-year-old man who was ejected from the lower car by the force of the impact, also is listed in critical condition with head and back injuries. Five more victims suffered minor injuries and were transported to area hospitals.

Early reports that the cable that moves the two cars along the track had snapped were dismissed shortly after investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board arrived on the scene and found the cable intact but tangled.

News reports are now saying the investigation is focusing on the operation of the drum mechanism that spools the cable used to move the cars up and down the tracks.

### Eyewitness Account

Ganezer, a MTA Transportation Manager, was having lunch at the Grand Central Market's new outdoor plaza directly across the street from the funicular railway when, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a sudden movement and heard a loud thud.

"The collision had occurred just as the bottom car had gotten to the place where it jogs to the side track so the impact was nearly head-on," said Ganezer. The impact caused the cars to lean at a precarious angle, almost if they were about to derail.

Instinctively, Ganezer rushed across the street to help the passengers trapped inside. He had to climb over a fence to get to the tracks, which were at least ten feet off the ground that he could see through the crossbeams and concrete ties.

"The first thing I saw was a man who had been ejected from the lower car. He had a huge gash bleeding above his left eye. He was

lying forward, suspended over the ties, with his legs over the tracks and his left arm draped over the concrete ties."

**'Don't move, it will slide'**

As people began gathering at the scene, some were issuing warnings to the terrified passengers: "Don't move or it will slide." Ganezer attempted to help a woman in the lower car and then climbed to the upper car where six frightened passengers remained inside the runaway car.

Rescue workers arriving on the scene secured the area immediately. As Ganezer prepared to exit the tracks, he looked through the ties at the ground 10 feet below.

"The concrete support showed no signs of yielding," he said, " but I was a little afraid of slipping through the ties."

**Railway Remains Closed**

Angels Flight originally opened Dec. 31, 1901, and was installed on Third and Hill streets to shuttle passengers from the Central Business District up the steep incline to posh Bunker Hill residences. After years of downtown decline, the funicular railway was dismantled in 1969 and put into storage. Angels Flight returned to service on Feb. 24, 1996, when it was reopened as a tourist attraction.

Reconstruction of the funicular, which was coordinated by the Community Redevelopment Agency, cost some \$4.1 million, of which the MTA contributed \$750,000.

Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan announced the railway will remain closed during the investigation and until its safe operation can be guaranteed.

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