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Driver cited in Bedford train-car crash caused by GPS mishap

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BEDFORD HILLS - A 32-year-old Californian whose rental car got smashed by a Metro-North train last night was issued a minor summons for causing the fiery crash that stranded railroad commuters for hours.

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Bo Bai, a computer technician from Sunnyvale who said he was merely trusting his car's global positioning system when he steered onto the tracks, was cited for obstructing a railroad crossing, officials said this afternoon.

The railroad's Harlem Division trains were back on schedule this morning after crews spent hours repairing more than 200 feet of the electrified "third" rail damaged by the crash, said Dan Brucker, Metro-North spokesman.

Bai, who has been working in Fishkill, was driving west on Green Lane around 7 p.m., and told Metropolitan Transportation Authority police the GPS system instructed him to turn right as he was crossing the tracks. He was headed for the Saw Mill River Parkway, just past the tracks.

He got stuck, tried unsuccessfully to reverse and finally abandoned the 2006 Ford Focus minutes before it was slammed by a northbound Metro-North Harlem Line train, MTA police said.

"As the car is driving over the tracks, the GPS system tells him to turn right, and he turns right onto the railroad tracks," said Brucker. "That's how it happened."

Brucker added, "He tried to stop the train by waving his arms, which apparently was not totally effective in slowing the train."

No one was injured, but about 500 passengers were stranded for more than two hours. Three trains out of Grand Central Terminal were canceled and 10 others delayed by up to 90 minutes. The damage was repaired by 2:30 a.m..

Bai, who works for a Silicon Valley computer tech company, had rented the car from U-Save Car & Truck Rental in New Windsor, N.Y. He was not familiar with the area, and was therefore relying on the GPS device's navigation instructions, officials said.

"One computer brain listening to another," Brucker said, chuckling, this morning.

Bai will be held liable for the damage to the train and track, as well as other costs and loss of revenue, Brucker said.

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