

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

---

REPORT NO. 3711

ALABAMA, TENNESSEE AND NORTHERN  
RAILROAD COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR SOUWILPA, ALA., ON

SEPTEMBER 28, 1956

---

- 2 -

## SUMMARY

---

**Date:** September 28, 1956

**Railroad:** Alabama, Tennessee and Northern

**Location:** Souwilpa, Ala.

**Kind of accident:** Rear-end collision

**Trains involved:** Freight : Freight

**Train numbers:** 22 : Extra 582 North

**Engine numbers:** S.L.S.F. Diesel- : S.L.S.F. Diesel-  
electric units 530, electric units  
581, and 622 582 and 519

**Consists:** 80 cars, caboose : 35 cars, caboose

**Speeds:** 12 m. p. h. : 25 m. p. h.

**Operation:** Timetable and train orders

**Track:** Single; 2° curve; vertical curve

**Weather:** Clear

**Time:** 4:30 a. m.

**Casualties:** 3 killed; 2 injured

**Cause:** Failure to provide protection for  
preceding train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

---

REPORT NO. 3711

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS  
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

ALABAMA, TENNESSEE AND NORTHERN RAILROAD COMPANY

---

November 23, 1956

---

Accident near Souwilpa, Ala., on September 28, 1956,  
caused by failure to provide protection for the  
preceding train.

---

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

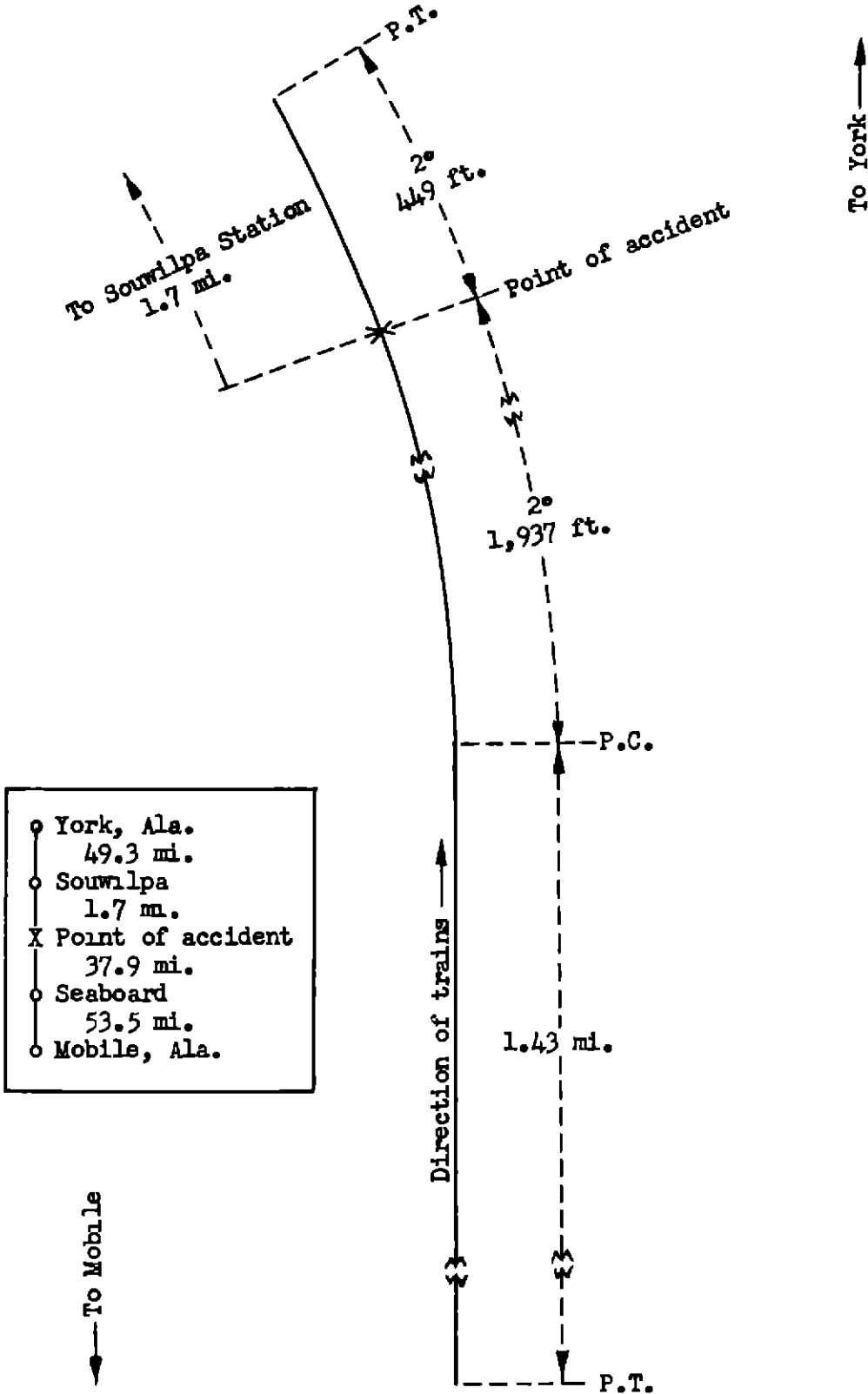
CLARKE, Commissioner:

On September 28, 1956, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Alabama, Tennessee and Northern Railroad near Souwilpa, Ala., which resulted in the death of three employees, and the injury of two employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with representatives of the Alabama Public Service Commission.

---

1

Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Clarke for consideration and disposition.



Report No. 3711  
Alabama, Tennessee and Northern Railroad  
Souwilpa, Ala.  
September 28, 1956

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the railroad extending between Mobile and York, Ala., 142.4 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 91.4 miles north of Mobile and 1.7 miles south of the station at Souwilpa. From the south there is a tangent 1.43 miles in length and a 2° curve to the left 1,937 feet to the point of accident and 449 feet northward. The grade for north-bound trains is, successively, an average of 1.49 percent descending 2,800 feet, 2.02 percent ascending 1,600 feet, a vertical curve 75 feet to the point of accident and 25 feet northward, and 0.92 percent descending 300 feet.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

35. The following signals will be used by flagman:

\* \* \*

Night signals--A white light,  
A red light,  
Torpedoes  
and fusees.

91. Unless Some Form of Block Signal Is Used:

Trains in the same direction must keep not less than five minutes apart, except in closing up at stations.

\* \* \*

99. \* \* \*

When a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection. By night, or by day when the view is obscured, lighted fusees must be thrown off at proper intervals.

\* \* \*

In the vicinity of the point of accident the maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 45 miles per hour.

### Description of Accident

No. 22, a north-bound second-class freight train, consisted of S.L.S.F. Diesel-electric units 530, 581, and 622, coupled in multiple-unit control, 115 cars, and a caboose. This train departed from Mobile at 11:50 p. m., September 27, 2 hours 50 minutes late, and stopped at Seaboard, 53.5 miles north of Mobile. After 35 cars had been set off, it departed at 2:45 a. m., 3 hours 36 minutes late. About 1 hour 45 minutes later, while it was moving at a speed of 12 miles per hour, as indicated by the tape of the speed-recording device, the rear end was struck by Extra 582 North at a point 37.9 miles north of Seaboard and 1.7 miles south of the station at Souwilpa.

Extra 582 North, a north-bound freight train, consisted of S.L.S.F. Diesel-electric units 582 and 519, coupled in multiple-unit control, 35 cars, and a caboose. This train departed from Seaboard at 3:05 a. m., and about 1 hour 25 minutes later, while moving at a speed of 25 miles per hour, it struck the rear end of No. 22.

The caboose and the rear two cars of No. 22 were derailed and stopped in various positions on or near the track. The caboose and the rear car were destroyed, and the second rear car was badly damaged. The locomotive, the first eight cars, and the north truck and one pair wheels of the south truck of the ninth car of Extra 582 North were derailed. The first Diesel-electric unit stopped with the front end about 185 feet north of the point of collision. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the track. The Diesel-electric units were badly damaged. The first three cars were destroyed, the fourth to the eighth cars, inclusive, were badly damaged, and the ninth car was slightly damaged.

The conductor and the flagman of No. 22 and the front brakeman of Extra 582 North were killed. The engineer and the fireman of Extra 582 North were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4:30 a. m.

The Diesel-electric units of the locomotive of Extra 582 North were of the road-switcher type.

- 7 -

Discussion

No. 22 departed from Mobile with 115 cars and a caboose, and upon arrival at Seaboard reduced to 4,850 tons, or 50 tons above the tonnage rating north of Seaboard for the locomotive. It departed from Seaboard at 2:45 a. m. with 80 cars, and while moving over various grades the speed at times decelerated to 7 miles per hour. As this train was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment at the front of the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The engineer had reduced the speed of the train to about 12 miles per hour to control slack action on the varying grades when the brakes became applied in emergency as a result of the collision.

In accordance with general practice Diesel-electric units 519 and 582 were operated from York to Seaboard with a caboose to return to York with the cars set off in the reduction in tonnage from No. 22. This train arrived at Seaboard at 1 a. m. and departed northward at 3:05 a. m. after picking up 35 cars, 3150 tons, or 50 tons under the locomotive's rated tonnage. It decelerated to speeds as low as 5 miles per hour at times while moving over various grades. As this train was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment at the front of the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The headlight was lighted brightly. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. While moving on a 2° curve to the left at a speed of 40 miles per hour the fireman saw a marker light of the caboose of the preceding train at a distance which he thought was about 800 feet. He called a warning, and the engineer immediately made an emergency application of the brakes. According to the tape of the speed-recording device, the speed had been reduced from 40 miles per hour to about 25 miles per hour when the collision occurred.

After the accident occurred observations were made to determine the distance at which a car placed 150 feet south of the point of accident could be seen from the control compartment of a north-bound Diesel-electric unit similar to unit 582. It was found that because of curvature of the track and vegetation adjacent to the track, the car was visible from the fireman's position in the control compartment at a maximum distance of 880 feet. From the engineer's position in the control compartment the car was visible a maximum distance of 572 feet. These observations were made during the day time.

- 8 -

The rules of this carrier provide that when a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection, throwing off lighted fuseses at proper intervals. In the instant case the conductor of Extra 582 North said that he talked with the conductor of No. 22 at Seaboard and that the conductor of No. 22 was aware that Extra 582 North would follow No. 22 from that point. The enginemen of Extra 582 North said that after leaving Seaboard they saw no fuseses or other indication that they were overtaking No. 22 until immediately before the collision occurred. They said that when they saw the cabooses of No. 22 the rear door was closed, and they saw no members of the crew of that train before the accident occurred. The engineer said that at the time the fireman called the warning he was sounding a grade-crossing whistle signal and that he prolonged the signal until just before the collision occurred. Between 5 p. m. and 5 a. m. there are no open offices between Mobile and York.

#### Cause

This accident was caused by failure to provide protection for the preceding train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-third day of November, 1956.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,  
Secretary.