

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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REPORT NO. 3754

THE ATCHISON, TOPEKA AND SANTA FE  
RAILWAY COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

AT VROMAN, COLO., ON

JUNE 11, 1957

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SUMMARY

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Date: June 11, 1957

Railroad: Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe

Location: Vroman, Colo.

Kind of accident: Collision

Equipment involved: Freight train : Motor-truck

Train number: Extra 2109 East

Locomotive number: Diesel-electric  
unit 2109

Consist: 55 cars, caboose

Speeds: 48 m. p. h. : Undetermined

Operation: Timetable; train orders; and automatic  
block-signal system

Track: Single; tangent; 0.21 percent descend-  
ing grade eastward

Private road: Tangent; crosses track at angle of 90°;  
3.64 percent ascending grade southward

Weather: Partly cloudy

Time: 6:03 a. m.

Casualties: 12 killed; 5 injured

Cause: Motor-truck occupying grade crossing  
immediately in front of approaching  
train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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REPORT NO. 3754

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

THE ATCHISON, TOPEKA AND SANTA FE RAILWAY COMPANY

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July 10, 1957

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Accident at Vroman, Colo., on June 11, 1957, caused by a  
motor-truck occupying a grade crossing immediately in  
front of an approaching train.

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

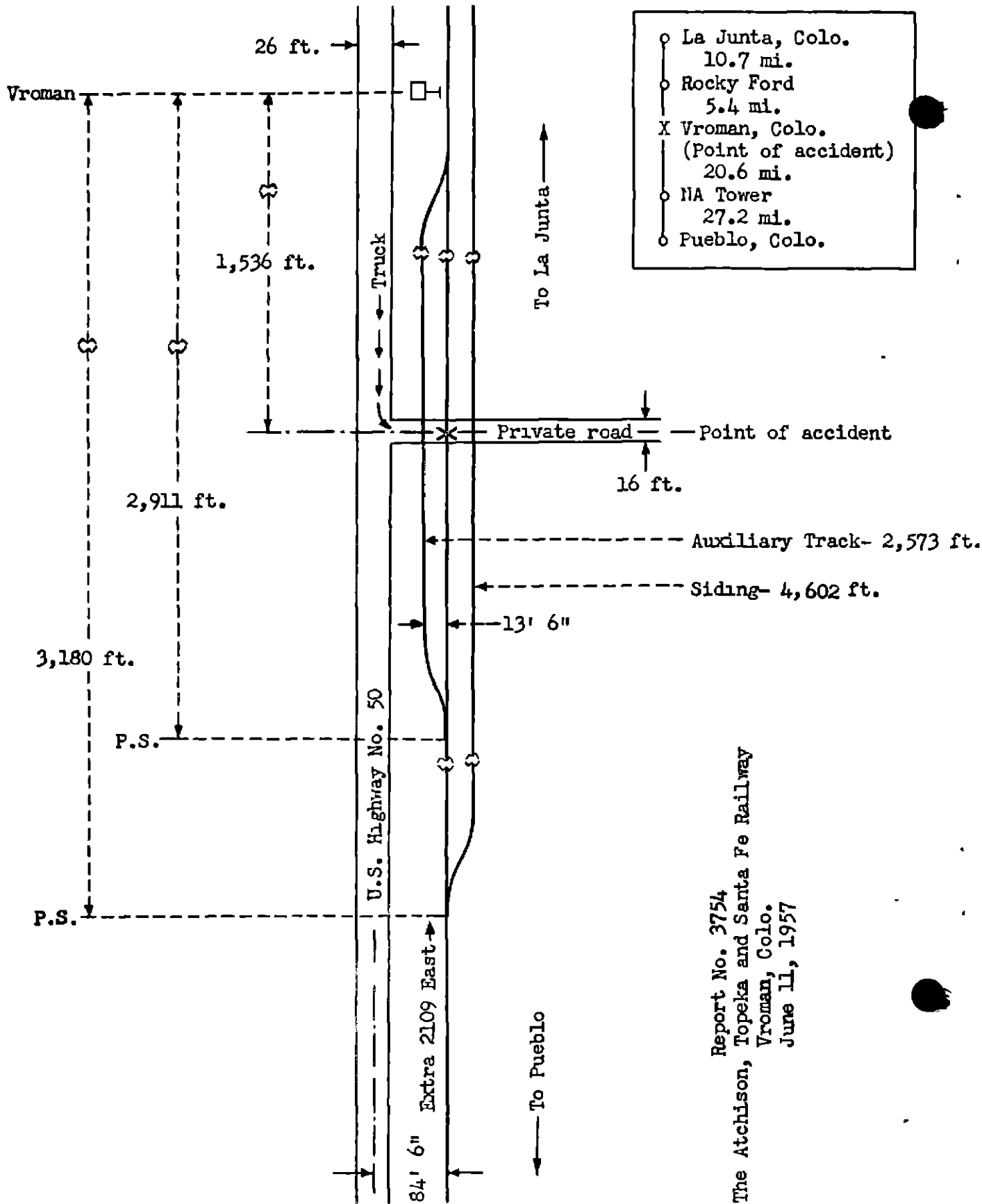
TUGGLE, Commissioner:

On June 11, 1957, there was a collision between a freight  
train on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway and a motor-  
truck at a grade crossing at Vroman, Colo., which resulted in  
the death of the driver and 11 other occupants of the motor-  
truck, and the injury of 5 occupants of the motor-truck.

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



Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Colorado Division extending between Pueblo and La Junta, Colo., 63.9 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. At Vroman, 47.8 miles east of Pueblo, a siding 4,602 feet in length parallels the main track on the south and an auxiliary track 2,573 feet in length parallels the main track on the north. The auxiliary track and the main track are spaced 13 feet 6 inches between centers. The west switch of the siding and the west switch of the auxiliary track are, respectively, 3,180 feet and 2,911 feet west of the station sign. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 1,536 feet west of the station sign, where the tracks are crossed at grade by a private road. The main track is tangent throughout a distance of 2.06 miles immediately west of the point of accident and a considerable distance eastward. The grade is 0.21 percent descending eastward at the point of accident.

At the time of the accident there were 41 stock cars stored on the auxiliary track. Twenty-three of these cars were west of the private road, and 14 were east of the private road. They extended between points 1,177 feet and 121 feet west and between points 104 feet and 743 feet east of the center-line of the road.

In the vicinity of the point of accident U. S. Highway No. 50 parallels the railroad on the north. This highway is surfaced with concrete and bituminous material to a width of 26 feet. The center-line of the highway is 84 feet 6 inches north of the center-line of the main track. The private road on which the accident occurred extends southward from U. S. Highway No. 50 and intersects the tracks at an angle of 90 degrees. Before the accident occurred this road was used to provide access to farm lands south of the tracks. It is surfaced with dirt and is approximately 16 feet in width. The crossing of the road and the auxiliary track is surfaced with earth and gravel to the level of the tops of the rails. At the crossing of the road and the main track a 16-foot plank is laid on each side of each rail. The remaining area of the crossing is surfaced with ballast. At the crossing of the road and the siding a plank is laid on each side of each rail. The remaining area of this crossing is surfaced with earth. The grade for south-bound vehicles averages 3.64 percent ascending between the south edge of Highway No. 50 and the main track.

There is no railroad-crossing sign or other warning device for vehicular traffic at the crossing, and there is no crossing-whistle sign for east-bound trains.

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 50 miles per hour.

#### Description of Accident

Extra 2109 East, an east-bound freight train, consisted of diesel-electric unit 2109, 55 cars, and a caboose. This train passed NA Tower, 20.6 miles west of Vroman, the last open office, at 5:40 a. m., and while moving at a speed of approximately 48 miles per hour, as indicated by the tape of the speed-recording device, it struck a motor-truck at a point 1,536 feet west of the station sign at Vroman, where the railroad is crossed at grade by a private road.

The vehicle involved was a 1952 Chevrolet one-ton heavy-duty pick-up model. It bore Colorado 1957 license No. 9-2065KS and was owned by Silvestre Licano of Rocky Ford, Colo. The owner, who was driving the truck at the time of the accident, held Colorado operator's license K-9-3559. The inside dimensions of the pick-up body were 4.1 feet by 9.2 feet. The body had been equipped for transporting agricultural workers by attaching a 2-inch by 12-inch board to the top of each of the metal sides. These boards extended the length of the body and were used as seats by the occupants. The body was enclosed by 3/16-inch fiber board at the sides and by a metal top. The top was 3 feet above the level of the seats. The body was open at the rear. At the time of the accident the truck was occupied by the driver and 16 other persons. The driver and two of the occupants were in the cab, and the other occupants were in the body of the truck. This vehicle moved westward on U. S. Highway No. 50 and turned toward the south onto the private road west of the station sign at Vroman. It stopped before crossing the tracks, then proceeded southward, entered the crossing, and was struck by Extra 2109 East.

Extra 2109 East stopped with the front of the locomotive approximately 2,400 feet east of the point of accident. No equipment of the train was derailed. The front of the locomotive was slightly damaged.

The truck was demolished. The body and the rear wheels and axle, which were separated from the frame, stopped in the northeast angle of the intersection. The body was 83 feet east of the crossing. The front portion of the truck stopped 16 feet south of the main track and 280 feet east of the crossing.

The five persons who were injured were riding in the body of the truck. All of the other occupants of the truck were killed.

The weather was partly cloudy and it was daylight at the time of the accident, which occurred about 6:03 a. m.

Diesel-electric unit 2109 is of the road-switcher type.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement over the crossing was 7.7 trains. At the time of this investigation the crossing was not being used by vehicles. The operator of the farm on the south side of the tracks said that before the accident occurred 12 or more vehicles passed over the crossing each day.

### Discussion

As Extra 2109 East was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment of the locomotive. The fireman, a qualified engineer, was operating the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The headlight was lighted. The enginemen said that when there were cars on the auxiliary track at Vroman it was customary to sound the grade-crossing whistle signal for the private road crossing at which the accident occurred, and they said that when the locomotive reached a point about 600 or 700 feet west of the crossing the fireman started the locomotive bell and began to sound the horn. The engineer said that when the locomotive reached a point about 200 feet west of the crossing he saw the front end of the truck crossing the auxiliary track. He said that the truck was moving very slowly and he thought at first that it would stop short of the main track. He then saw that the truck was not stopping, and he called a warning to the fireman. The fireman saw the truck at approximately the time that the engineer called to him. He immediately made an emergency application of the brakes. The collision occurred almost immediately afterward. The engineer said that the window on the right hand side of the cab of the truck was closed.

All of the occupants of the truck at the time of the accident resided in Rocky Ford, approximately 5.5 miles east of Vroman. The driver of the truck contracted for farm labor and transported the workers, if they so desired, to and from work at various farms in the vicinity. At the time of the accident he was transporting the occupants of the truck from Rocky Ford to a beet field south of the railroad at Vroman.

Two of the surviving occupants of the truck said that the driver stopped the truck after turning from U. S. Highway No. 50 onto the private road and before entering the crossing, and that he then started the truck forward. Until the accident occurred neither of these persons was aware that the train was approaching. The driver of the truck was killed in the accident, and the reason for his failure to ascertain that no train was approaching before starting the truck forward is not known. The operator of the farm at which the occupants of the truck were to work on the day of the accident said that the driver had worked at this farm from time to time during a period of about 3 years and had crossed the tracks at this point many times.

At the time the accident occurred the range of vision between a south-bound vehicle and an east-bound train approaching the crossing was materially restricted by the cars stored on the auxiliary track. It was found that from points 30 feet, 20 feet, 15 feet, 10 feet, and 5 feet north of the center-line of the main track an object in the center of the track was visible at distances of 167 feet, 199 feet, 285 feet, 1,670 feet, and over 1 mile, respectively, west of the crossing. These observations were made from the ground.

#### Cause

This accident was caused by a motor-truck occupying a grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this tenth day of July, 1957.

By the Commission, Commissioner Tuggle.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,

Secretary.