

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

LOWELLTOWN, ME.

JANUARY 7, 1936

INVESTIGATION NO. 2032

SUMMARY

Railroad: Canadian Pacific
Date: January 7, 1936
Location: Lowelltown, Me.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Mixed : Freight
Train number: 118 : Extra west
Engine number: 1070 : 3745
Consist: 9 freight cars, 1 caboose : 23 cars
and 2 passenger cars : and
: caboose
Speed: 20 m.p.h. : 10 m.p.h.
Track: 5^o9' curve and 1.18 percent grade
Weather: Light snow
Time: 10:05 a.m.
Casualties: 3 killed and 3 injured
Cause: Failure of crew of mixed train
to obey a meet order

February 24, 1936.

To the Commission:

On January 7, 1936, there was a head-end collision between a mixed freight and passenger train and a freight train on the Canadian Pacific Railway near Lowelltown, Me., which resulted in the death of 3 employees, and the injury of 1 passenger and 2 employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with the Public Utilities Commission of the State of Maine.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Moosehead Sub-division of the New Brunswick District, extending between Brownville Jct., Me., and Megantic, P.Q., a distance of 117.1 miles, this being a single-track line over which trains are operated by time table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use in the vicinity of the point of accident. The passing track at Lowelltown, 3,220 feet in length, parallels the main track on the south; the accident occurred 2,780 feet east of the east switch of this siding. Approaching the point of accident from the west, the track is tangent for a distance of 1,409 feet, followed by a 5°09' curve to the right 1,302 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve 769 feet from the western end. Approaching from the east, there is a 5°15' curve to the left 557 feet in length and then a tangent 554 feet in length, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for east-bound trains is 1.18 percent descending at the point of accident.

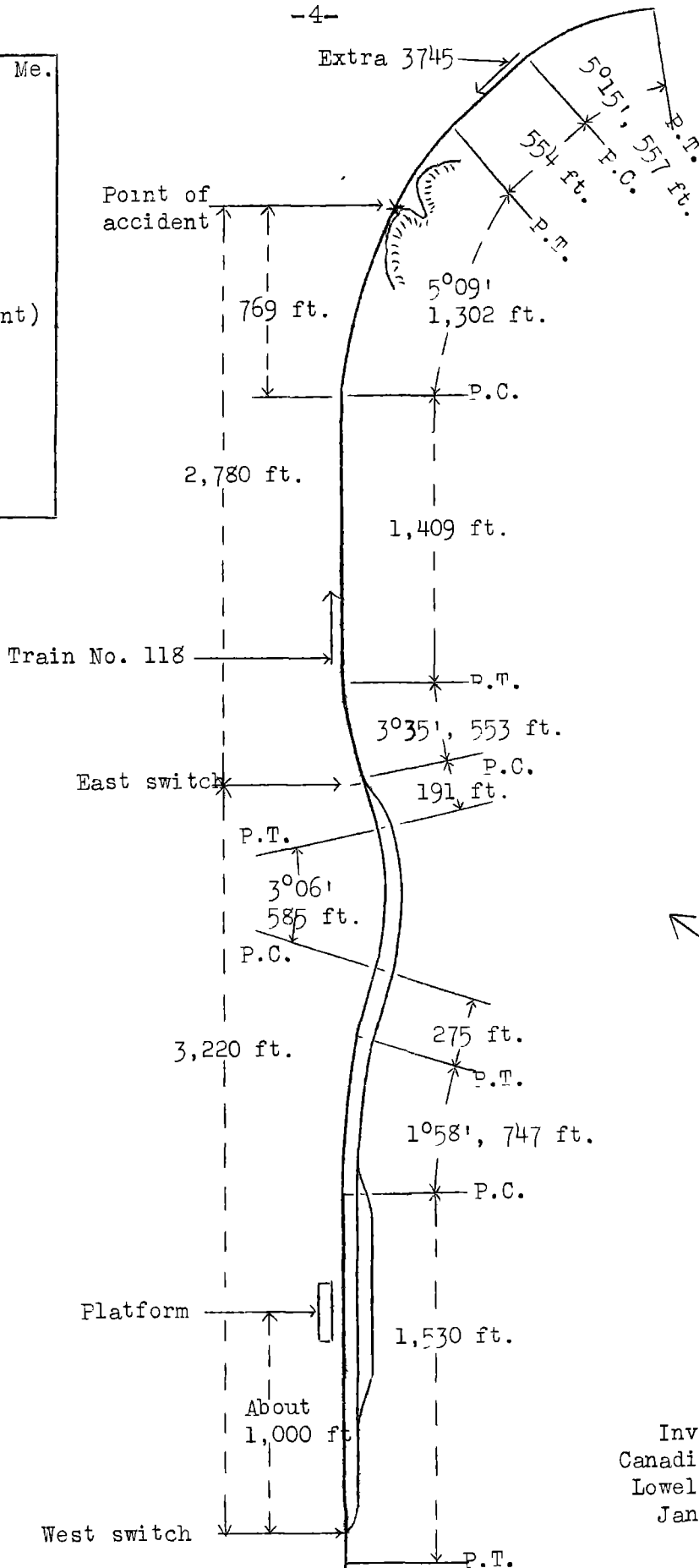
Owing to the sharp curvature and a rock embankment approximately 20 feet in height on the south side of the main track opposite the point of accident, the view of opposing trains is very materially restricted.

A light snow was falling at the time of the accident, which occurred at 10:05 a.m.

Description

Train No. 118, an east-bound second-class mixed freight and passenger train, consisted of 9 freight cars, 1 caboose, 1 combination car, and 1 pay-car, hauled by engine 1070, and was in charge of Conductor Towle and Engineman Robinson. At Megantic, its initial terminal, 19.4 miles west of Lowelltown, the crew received a copy of train order 29, Form 31, providing for a meet with Extra 3745 at Lowelltown. Train No. 118 departed from Megantic at 9 a.m., on time, according to the train sheet, and left Boundary, the last open office, 4.2 miles from

• Brownville Jct., Me.
86.3 mi.
• Holeb
11.4 mi.
* (Point of accident)
• Lowelltown, Me.
4.2 mi.
• Boundary, F.Q.
15.2 mi.
• Megantic, P.Q.



Inv. No. 2032
 Canadian Pacific Ry.,
 Lowelltown, Maine,
 Jan. 7, 1936

Lowelltown, at 9:53 a.m., 7 minutes late. At Lowelltown, a non-communicating station, where no station building is maintained, there is a platform located on the north side of the main track, approximately 1,000 feet east of the west switch of the passing track, at which this train stopped to discharge a passenger and some freight. The train then proceeded eastward on the main track, passed the east switch without stopping, and collided with Extra 3745 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 20 miles per hour.

Extra 3745, a west-bound freight train, consisted of 23 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 3745, and was in charge of Conductor Cobo and Engineman Harris. This train arrived at Holeb, the last open office, 11.4 miles east of Lowelltown, at 8:50 a.m., and at this point the crew received a copy of train order 29, previously mentioned, on form 19. The train departed from this point at 9 a.m., according to the train sheet, and was approaching Lowelltown at a speed estimated to have been between 8 and 10 miles per hour when it collided with Train No. 118.

Both engines were derailed, but remained upright and in line with the track, locked together and considerably damaged. The first car in Train No. 118 stopped on the tender of engine 1070 and this car and also the fourth car, which was derailed, were destroyed. The second and third cars also were derailed and considerably damaged. The first car in Extra 3745 was derailed and the fourteenth car buckled, both cars being destroyed, while the second, sixth and tenth cars were considerably damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman of Train No. 118 and the fireman of Extra 3745, and the injured employees were the engineman of Extra 3745 and a paymaster in the rear car of Train No. 118.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Towle, of Train No. 118, stated that at Megantic he read and signed for train order 29 and delivered a copy to Engineman Robinson, who read the order to him and then signed the conductor's copy; the order also was read and fully understood by the other members of the train crew, but the conductor could not say positively whether Engineman Robinson showed the order to the fireman. Before departure of the train from Megantic the air brakes were tested by the inspector and found to be working properly, and several stops were made en route. At each point where the train stopped, Engineman Robinson seemed alert and responded to all signals, acknowledging proceed signals, as is customary, with two blasts of the engine whistle. On arrival at Lowelltown the train was stopped at the platform, and after doing the necessary work at that point, which required only a few minutes, he gave the engineman a signal to pull down

and stop clear of the east switch, and he was sure the engineman understood the signal inasmuch as he did not respond with the usual whistle signal for a proceed signal. Conductor Towle then went into the caboose for the purpose of making out customs reports for the station at Holeb, and relied on Head Brakeman Youngblood to throw the switch to permit Extra 3745 to enter the siding. When he noticed that the train was running faster than he thought was necessary, he went outside and then discovered that the entire train had passed the east switch. He then attempted to reach the emergency valve in the east end of the passenger car, which was the next car to the rear of the caboose, but the collision occurred before he could do so. Conductor Towle further stated that the head brakeman was at the rear of the train at Lowelltown, and, having other duties to perform in the meantime, was to go forward and open the east switch after their train had stopped at that point.

Rear Brakeman Smith, of Train No. 118, stated that the conductor gave him the train order directing their train to meet Extra 3745 at Lowelltown; he read and understood it and then gave it to the head brakeman. On leaving Lowelltown, he was in the baggage car shifting freight toward the door preparatory to unloading it at the next station, and the first intimation he had that their train had passed beyond the meeting point, or of there being anything wrong, was when the conductor came through the door of the baggage car and attempted to reach the emergency valve.

Head Brakeman Youngblood, of Train No. 118, stated that he saw and read the order directing his train to meet Extra 3745. After the train stopped at Lowelltown he was on the station platform, and when the train started to pull ahead he entered the coach and fixed the fire, and then answered a question of one of the passengers and went forward to the baggage compartment of the coach and was talking with the rear brakeman, the first intimation he had of anything wrong being when the conductor came in and attempted to reach the emergency valve, at which time the collision occurred; prior to this time the train had been traveling at speed estimated by him at 20 miles per hour. Under the rules, it was his duty to open the passing-track switch for the opposing train and this he intended to do when the train reached the east switch; he was unable to account for the fact that he was not sufficiently alert to notice that the train had passed the switch.

Conductor Cobb, of Extra 3745, stated that at Holeb he had received a copy of train order 29, directing his train to meet Train No. 118 at Lowelltown. The first intimation he had of anything wrong was when he was knocked to the floor of the caboose by the impact of the collision, just prior to which time the speed of his train had been 9 or 10 miles per hour.

He looked at his watch immediately and it then was 10:05 a.m.

Head Brake man McLean, of Extra 3745, stated that when approaching the point of accident he was on the seat on the left side of the engine; he was looking ahead but due to the curvature to the left and the rock embankment on the inside of this curve, his view of the opposing train was obstructed and he did not see it until it was about 100 feet distant, at which time he called to his engineman and fireman, "Head on", and at the same time reached for the grab iron in the top of the cab. He estimated the speed of his train at 10 miles per hour but was unable to estimate the speed of Train No. 118, although he was of the opinion that the engine was not working steam, due to the descending grade in the direction in which that train was moving.

Discussion

Under the provisions of train order 29, Train No. 118 was required to meet Extra 3745 West at Lowelltown. The evidence indicates that the engineman and all members of the train crew had read and understood this order, and it was evident that Conductor Towle had it in mind when, after the station work had been completed at Lowelltown, he gave the engineman a signal to pull ahead instead of giving the usual signal to proceed. Apparently the engineman was alert when leaving Lowelltown and understood the signal he had received from the conductor, in view of the fact that he accepted the conductor's signal and started ahead without giving any response by the use of the engine whistle, instead of giving the usual two blasts in answer to a proceed signal had he intended going to the next station, but inasmuch as both the engineman and fireman died of their injuries as a result of the accident no reasons can be assigned for the failure of the train to be stopped short of the switch. This conductor, evidently for the instant, dismissed from his mind the important duty of knowing that the instructions he intended to convey by the signal he gave were thoroughly understood and would be obeyed, for he immediately went into the caboose and started preparing a report for the customs inspector at Holeb, and paid no further attention to the speed or location of his train until after the entire train had passed beyond the east switch. When he noticed that the speed of the train was faster than it should have been in order to stop for the switch, and then found that the entire train had passed the switch, it was too late for him to apply the brakes in time to avert the accident. The passing track at Lowelltown parallels the main track on the south, and had the conductor looked out of the window on the south side of the caboose directly opposite his desk he could have detected at once that his train had passed the meeting point, and as the emergency valve in the caboose was located

directly over the desk he could have applied the air brakes in time to have prevented the occurrence of the accident.

Head Brakeman Youngblood, whose duties as prescribed by the rules required him to open the switch for the opposing train, apparently dismissed from his mind entirely this important duty after he had boarded the rear or west end of the combination car, where he attended to the fire in the stove in that car, and then conversed with one of the passengers. He should have placed himself in position to proceed to the switch as soon as his train stopped for that purpose, and then would have been in position to detect the error and take the necessary action to stop the train. The rear brakeman also became engrossed in other activities and did not know his train had passed the meeting point.

There are 11 scheduled trains operated in the territory in which this accident occurred, and the average daily movement during the 30 days preceding the date of the accident was between 14 and 15 trains. At the time of the accident in this same territory in December, 1919, which resulted in the loss of 23 lives, the traffic density averaged 41 trains daily, and while the present volume of traffic represents a decrease from that which prevailed 17 years ago, yet it is believed that the carrier is justified in giving consideration to the recommendation which was made at that time, to the effect that a block system should be placed in effect on this line. A block system is now in use on that portion of the line between Barnard and Greenville, a distance of 24.9 miles, within which territory the 1919 accident occurred, and the block system is also in operation over a substantial portion of the line between Brownville Jct. and Saint John, N.B.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order.

Recommendation

As a means of preventing similar accidents in future, this carrier should give consideration to the need for the additional protection which would be afforded by the installation of a block-signal system.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.