

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2778
THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT POWERSVILLE, GA., ON
FEBRUARY 29, 1944

SUMMARY

Railroad: Central of Georgia

Date: February 29, 1944

Location: Powersville, Ga.

Kind of accident: Side collision

Equipment involved: Freight train : Track motor-car
and trailer

Train number: 46 :

Engine number: 617 :

Consist: 48 cars, caboose : Motor-car MD-44
and trailer

Estimated speed: 45 m. p. h. : 2 m. p. h.

Operation: Centralized-traffic-control system

Track: Single; 1°10' curve; 0.57 percent
ascending grade eastward

Weather: Cloudy

Time: 11:22 a. m.

Casualties: 1 killed; 2 injured

Cause: Failure of Central of Georgia Railway
Company to provide adequate means of
safeguarding the operation of motor-
cars

Recommendation: That the Central of Georgia Railway
Company operate all movements not
protected by signal indications in
centralized-traffic-control territory
by an absolute block system

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2778

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

THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY COMPANY

April 17, 1944.

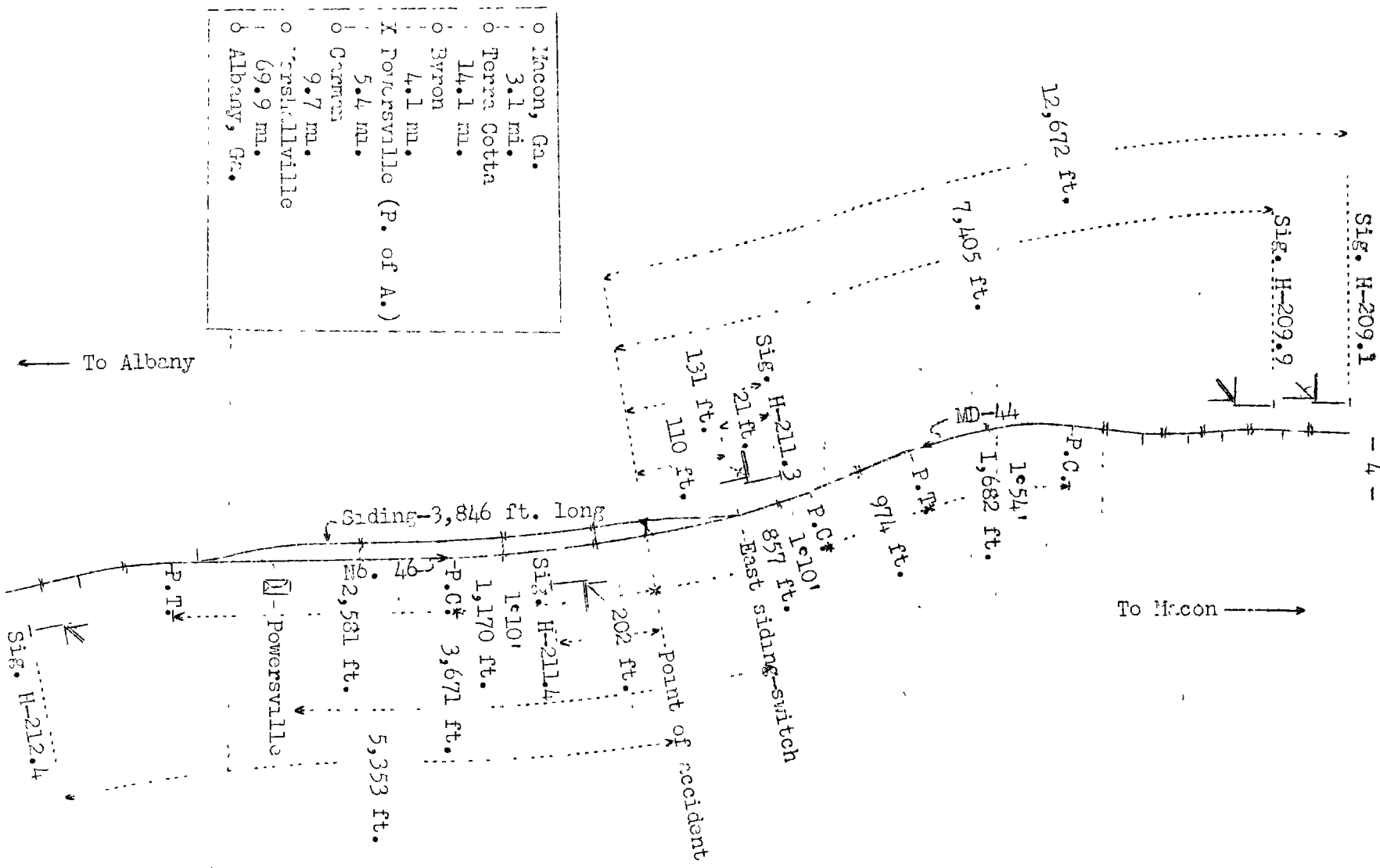
Accident at Powersville, Ga., on February 29, 1944, caused
by failure of the Central of Georgia Railway Company
to provide adequate means of safeguarding the opera-
tion of motor-cars.

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On February 29, 1944, there was a side collision be-
tween a freight train and a track motor-car on the Central
of Georgia Railway at Powersville, Ga., which resulted in
the death of one employee and the injury of two employees.

¹Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Com-
merce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the
Commission to Chairman Patterson for consideration and dis-
position.



Inv-2778
 Central of Georgia Railway
 Powersville, Ga.
 February 29, 1944

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Macon Division designated as the Albany District and extending between Albany and Macon, Ga., 106.3 miles. Between Carman and Terra Cotta, a distance of 23.6 miles, this was a single-track line over which trains were operated by a centralized-traffic-control system. At Powersville, 5.4 miles east of Carman, a siding 3,846 feet in length paralleled the main track on the north. The siding switches were hand-operated. The east switch of this siding was 3,671 feet east of the station. The accident occurred at the fouling point of the turnout, 110 feet west of the east siding-switch. The motor-car was entering the siding and the freight train was moving on main track. From the west there was a tangent 2,581 feet in length, which was followed by a 1°10' curve to the left 1,170 feet to the point of accident and 657 feet beyond. From the east there were, in succession, a 1°54' curve to the left 1,682 feet in length, a tangent 974 feet and the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for east-bound trains was 0.57 percent ascending.

Home signals H-212.4 and H-211.4, governing east-bound movements, were, respectively, 5,353 feet and 202 feet west of the point of accident. Home signal H-209.1, intermediate signal H-209.9 and home signal H-211.3, governing west-bound movements, were, respectively, 12,672 feet, 7,405 feet and 131 feet east of the point of accident. These signals were of the one-arm, three-position, upper-quadrant, semaphore type, and were continuously lighted. The home signals were remotely controlled from the station at Byron, 4.1 miles east of Powersville. Approach locking was provided and the circuits of the controlled signals were so arranged that when signals H-209.1, H-209.9 and H-211.3 displayed proceed, signals H-212.4 and H-211.4 would display stop, and when signals H-212.4 and H-211.4 displayed proceed, signals H-209.1 and H-211.3 would display stop and signal H-209.9 would display stop-and-proceed. The control machine was provided with visual and audible indicators, and the controlling circuits were arranged to indicate the movement of trains or engines within the centralized-traffic-control territory. There was a telephone 163 feet east of the west siding-switch at Byron for communication with the operator at that station.

Instructions issued December 5, 1927, and prescribing rules governing the operation of track motor-cars read in part as follows:

ALL OPERATORS.
TERRA COTTA. BYRON.

In the handling of motor cars and work trains you will be governed by the following instructions.

MOTOR CARS.

"To insure safe operation of motor cars in territory between Carman and Terra Cotta will be necessary for men operating motor cars to confer with operator controlling the territory in which they wish to move and the motor cars given signals in direction they wish to move, at such times that will not interfere with movement of trains.

When giving the block to motor cars arrange to give the party in charge of the car written information as to the length of time he may occupy the block and after expiration of this time it will be necessary for the party in charge of motor car to call the operator and get further authority to occupy the block.

After motor cars are given authority to occupy the block until a specified time no train should be given the block until expiration of such time unless they are given instructions to proceed under full control expecting find motor car occupying main track. Operator should confer with dispatcher as to length of time to authorize motor cars occupy the block."

* * *

GENERAL.

"Dispatchers and operators handling trains between Carman and Terra Cotta should understand when it is necessary to put out message instructions for moves of trains other than authorized by signal indication, these messages should be addressed to conductor and engineer of train and to the operator controlling the territory affected, and should be put out to both the train crew and the operator at the same time.

Operators will put their copy of this message on the lever affected and leave it there until the move has been completed, this to avoid them overlooking a move which has been made by message and not by signal authority, also handle messages in this manner as to the time you have authorized motor cars occupy the block.

Operators must keep a permanent book record entering therein such moves as they authorize covering the operation of motor cars, * * * each item to be numbered in book beginning with number 1 after midnight and should be checked off as it is completed, * * *.

* * *

These instructions will be checked at various times to see that they are complied with.

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains was 50 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 46, an east-bound second-class freight train, consisting of engine 617, 48 cars and a caboose, passed Marshallville, 15.1 miles west of Powersville and the last open office, at 10:53 a. m., 6 hours 9 minutes late, passed signal H-212.4, which displayed proceed, passed signal H-211.4, which displayed stop, and while moving at an estimated speed of 45 miles per hour it struck track motor-car MD-44 at a point 202 feet east of signal H-211.4.

Track motor-car MD-44 and a trailer, coupled, in the order named, departed west-bound from a point 178 feet east of the west siding-switch at Byron about 11:15 a. m., passed signal H-209.9, which displayed proceed, passed signal H-211.3, which displayed stop, and when it was entering the east siding-switch at Powersville and moving at an estimated speed of 2 miles per hour the trailer was struck by No. 46 at the fouling point of the turnout.

Motor-car MD-44 and the trailer were demolished. Engine 617 was slightly damaged.

From a west-bound motor-car moving in the vicinity of the point of accident, the view of an east-bound engine was restricted to a distance of about 1,000 feet, because of vegetation on the inside of the curve.

It was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:22 a. m.

The employees killed and injured were members of a track force.

Motor-car MD-44 and the trailer were insulated to prevent snunting of the track circuits.

Discussion

Trains in this centralized-traffic-control territory were operated by signal indications only. However, as the track motor-car and trailer involved were insulated and would not shunt the track circuits, the movement of these cars was not protected by the automatic features of the centralized-traffic-control system. Rules governing operation of track motor-cars in this territory provided that written authority, specifying limits of territory and time, would be obtained from the operator before a motor-car was permitted to be operated on the main track. Before authority was granted, the operator was required to protect the movement of the motor-car by displaying stop signals for movements in the opposing direction. In addition, the operator was required to make a record of authority given, and to place a copy of the record on the panel of the centralized-traffic-control machine as a reminder that authority had been granted.

A track force, consisting of a foreman and seven men, was engaged temporarily in repair work in the vicinity of the west siding-switch at Byron, about 4 miles east of Powersville. About 11:10 a. m. the foreman communicated by telephone with the operator at Byron to obtain authority for motor-car MD-44 and trailer to proceed to Powersville. The operator placed the levers of the control machine in position for signals H-212.4 and H-211.4 to display stop, and for signals H-209.1 and H-211.3 to display proceed, and gave the foreman oral authority for the motor-car and trailer to proceed, but no limits of territory or time were given and no record was made of the authority granted. Several minutes later, after motor-car MD-44 had departed from Byron, No. 46 entered the approach-indicator circuit at Carman, and the operator at Byron changed the position of the levers for signals H-209.1 and H-211.3 to display stop and signals H-212.4 and H-211.4 to display proceed. He said he operated the levers to change the indications to permit No. 46 to proceed because he thought sufficient time had elapsed for the motor-car and trailer to be into clear at Powersville. This resulted in both movements being authorized simultaneously to occupy the main track between the east siding-switch at Powersville and the west siding-switch at Byron. The track motor-car and trailer were insulated to prevent shunting of the track circuits and, as a result, the signals displayed proceed indications for No. 46 while the motor-car and trailer were occupying the main track in this territory. There were 8 men on the motor-car, and the motor-car and trailer carried tools and equipment for track maintenance. When the motor-car was a short distance east of the east siding-switch at Powersville the foreman saw simultaneously

No. 46 approaching about 1,000 feet distant and signal H-211.3 displaying stop. He immediately called a warning to the men on the motor-car and instructed one man to line the switch for the motor-car and trailer to enter the siding. An attempt was being made to move the motor-car and trailer into clear on the siding when it was struck by No. 46. The foreman did not think his gang could have lifted the motor-car and trailer off the track after he saw No. 46.

As No. 46 was approaching Powersville the speed was about 45 miles per hour. The fireman was in the tender shoveling coal forward, and the front brakeman was tending the fire. The engineer was maintaining a lookout ahead, and the first he knew of anything being wrong was when he observed the indication of signal H-211.4 change from proceed to stop, as a result of the opening of the east siding-switch. He immediately made a full-service brake-pipe reduction, but the speed of No. 46 had not been materially reduced when the collision occurred.

The investigation disclosed that it had been a long-standing practice for operators to authorize the movement of motor-cars orally, but no record of such authorization was made by either the operators at stations or the operators of motor-cars. In this case the movement of the track motor-car was made on the basis of merely a telephone conversation between the operator and the foreman, and the required written authorization and records were not made. Instead of obtaining definite information that the motor-car was into clear at Powersville, the operator acted upon his belief that sufficient time had elapsed to permit the motor-car to get into clear, and he authorized No. 46 to enter the block when it was still occupied by the motor-car. This resulted in total failure to provide the intended protection of the centralized-traffic-control system for No. 46, and the intended protection of the rules for the motor-car involved. But even if the rules for the operation of motor-cars had been rigidly enforced and obeyed the protection afforded would not be equivalent to the protection provided for the operation of trains in this territory. In centralized-traffic-control territory, in case a motor-car or a train cannot for any reason receive the protection normally given to train movements, they should be operated under absolute block protection.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by the failure of the Central of Georgia Railway Company to provide adequate means of safeguarding the operation of motor-cars.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Central of Georgia Railway Company operate all movements not protected by signal indications in centralized-traffic-control territory by an absolute block system.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this seventeenth day of April, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.