

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
CENTRAL RAILROAD OF NEW JERSEY

WEISSPORT, PA.

JANUARY 11, 1938.

INVESTIGATION NO. 2243

SUMMARY

Inv-2243

Railroad: Central Railroad of New Jersey
Date: January 11, 1938.
Location: Weissport, Pa.
Kind of accident: Derailment
Train involved: Work train
Train number: Work extra 679
Engine number: 679
Consist: Derrick and 1 car
Speed: 8-10 m.p.h.
Track: Tangent; 0.65 percent ascending west-bound.
Weather: Cloudy
Time: 8:15 a.m.
Casualties: 1 killed
Cause: Failure to observe that movement was being made on wrong track.

February 3, 1938.

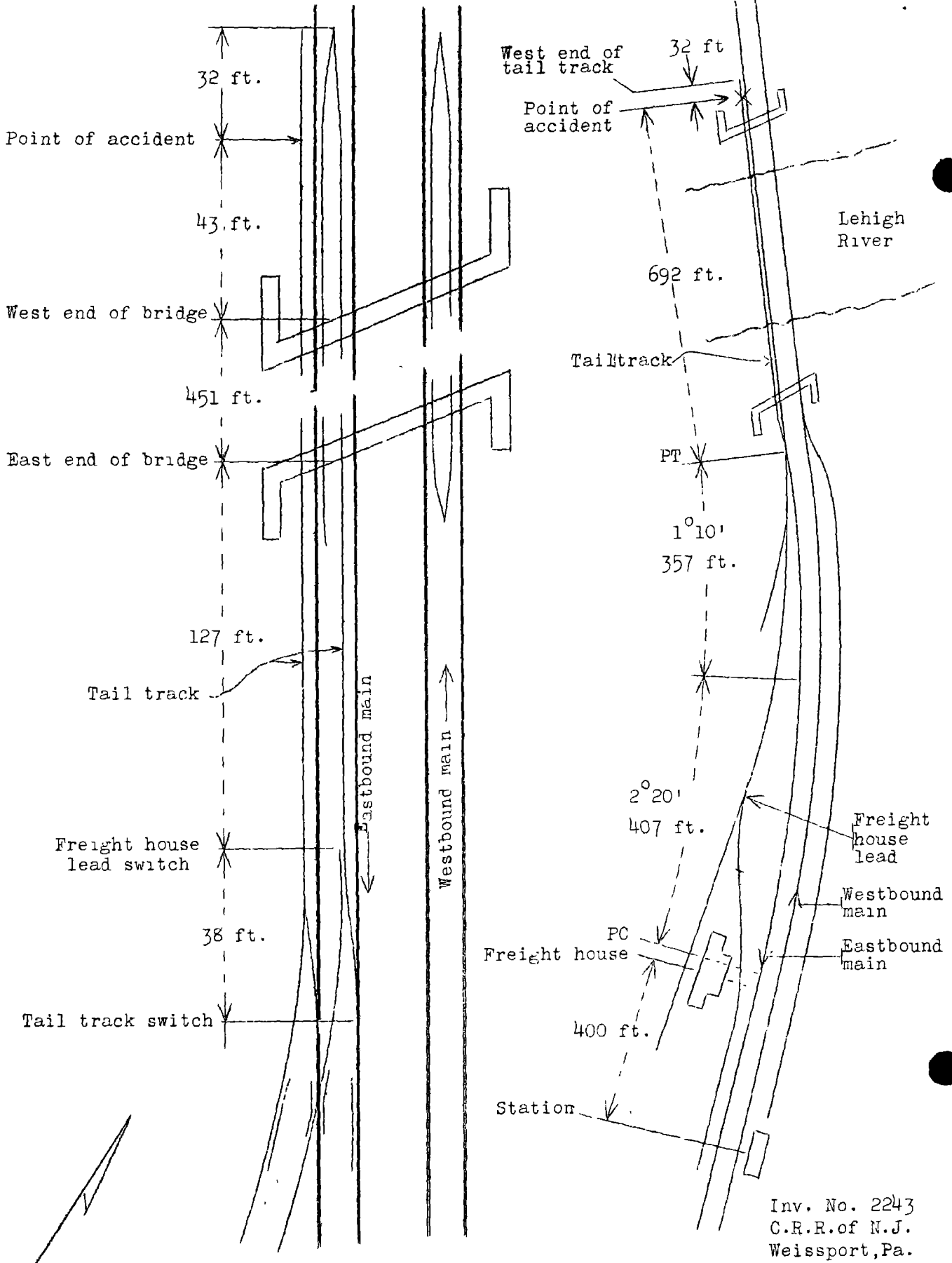
To the Commission:

On January 11, 1938, there was a derailment of a work train on the Central Railroad of New Jersey at Weissport, Pa., which resulted in the death of one employee. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Lehigh and Susquehanna Division which extends between Phillipsburg, N. J., and Scranton, Pa., a distance of 118.86 miles; it is a double-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, trains orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred near the west end of a tail track, at a point 1,770 feet west of the station at Weissport where several auxiliary tracks are located west of the station. West of the entrance to these auxiliary tracks a two track bridge 451 feet long spans the Lehigh River. A freight house is located south of the main tracks, about 400 feet west of the station but on a lower level. In order to avoid the use of a facing-point switch at the connection of the eastward main track with the freight-house lead, movements between these tracks are made through a switch-back, known as the tail track. The tail track leads off the eastward main track through a trailing-point switch and extends westward a distance of 692 feet; due to the width of the bridge the eastward main track and the tail track overlap, each rail of the tail track being located 11 inches south of the corresponding rail of the eastward main. The north rail of the tail track serves as an inner guard rail for the north rail of the eastward main track over the bridge. An auxiliary rail laid 11 inches north of the south rail and parallel thereto, serves as an inner guard rail on the bridge for the south rail of the eastward main track; this auxiliary rail and the north rail of the tail track come to a point in the center of the eastward main track about 75 feet west of the west end of the bridge. The gauge of the tail track is standard to a point about 35 feet west of the bridge but from that point westward the north rail curves southward until it joins the frog point in the center of the track. The derailment occurred at a point approximately 43 feet west of the west end of the bridge.

The tail track is laid with 100-pound rails, 33 feet in length, and is single-spiked and fully tie-plated. The track is ballasted with cinders and is well maintained. The track is located on a fill about 30 feet in height at each end of the bridge.



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At a point 38 feet west of the entrance switch of the tail-track there is a facing-point switch for east-bound movements which connects the tail track with the freight-house lead. This lead is directed toward the southeast on a 5.25 percent descending grade; team and house tracks diverge from it near the freight house.

There was a light snow falling at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8:15 a.m.

Description

Work Extra 679 arrived at Weissport from the east with five cars and a wrecking derrick, hauled by engine 679, and was in charge of Conductor Romig and Enginemen Warncke. After setting out four cars at this point, this train departed with one car and the derrick on the westward main track and arrived at Lehigh-ton, 0.75 mile west of Weissport, at 7:45 a.m., according to the train sheet. After crossing over to the eastward main track, three cars of bridge steel were coupled to the rear of the derrick and at 7:58 a.m., according to the train sheet, this train departed on the eastward main track with the engine in backward motion shoving the cars. Upon arrival at Weissport the train moved from the eastward main track to the tail track where the three cars of steel were detached, and the engine with one car and the derrick, moved westward to the end of tail track where it became derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 8 and 10 miles per hour.

The engine was derailed to the left and stopped on its left side about parallel with the track and approximately 15 feet down the embankment. The tender remained coupled to the engine and was also overturned on the embankment. The forward truck of the leading car was derailed. The employee killed was the fireman.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Romig stated that the brakes were tested at Bethlehem engine terminal, the initial station, located 29.66 miles east of Weissport, and his train, which was a work or service train, arrived at the latter point at 7:27 a.m. After four cars were set off, the train departed on the westward track with one idler car and the wrecking derrick. On arrival at Lehigh-ton, 0.75 mile west of Weissport, a flagman was sent westward to flag with instructions to hold all east-bound trains until recalled. After crossing over to the eastward main track and picking up three cars of bridge steel, which were placed to the rear of the derrick, the train departed from Lehigh-ton on the eastward main, with the engine in backward motion shoving the train, and on arrival at Weissport it pulled into the tail track and stopped with the rear end just west of the switch leading to the freight house.

At this point he learned that no work was to be done on the bridge iron that day, and the wreckmaster instructed him to cut off the three rear cars, take the derrick and idler car back to Lehighton, and then return to Weissport and spot the three rear cars on the team track. Conductor Romig stated that the three rear cars were cut off on the tail track and he then took up a position on the right side of the pilot of the engine and gave the engineman a signal to proceed westward, the rear brakeman being left behind to set up hand brakes on the three detached cars. His first intimation of the derailment was when he heard a thumping sound which caused him to realize that the engine had been proceeding on the tail track instead of the eastward main. He estimated the speed at the time of derailment, which occurred at 8:15 a.m., as about 10 miles per hour. He did not have sufficient time to open the angle cock on the pilot as it was located on the left side of the pilot, but he gave stop signals and jumped. In explanation as to why he overlooked the fact that the train was proceeding on the wrong track, Conductor Romig stated that the head brakeman, who had been flagging at Lehighton, was called in when the train arrived at Weissport on the eastward movement but a whistle signal was given to him to resume flagging before the last westward movement was begun. The conductor was somewhat doubtful whether the flagman heard the last signal and for that reason he took up his position on the pilot of the engine and was looking westward, concentrating on making the movement against east-bound trains, and thereby momentarily overlooked the fact that his train was on the tail track instead of the eastward main. He stated that he was familiar with the track arrangement at Weissport. He had never heard of any complaint concerning the arrangement of the tail track; neither had he ever had any trouble operating on it before the time of this accident.

Engineman Warncke stated that a terminal air-brake test was made and all brakes were working. He corroborated the statement of the conductor concerning all movements made and stated that he called in the flagman at the time of arriving at Weissport from the west. A short time later, when informed by the conductor of the intended movement back to Lehighton, he whistled a signal for the flagman to resume flagging and then the conductor boarded the right sill step of the engine pilot and gave a signal to proceed; at that time the fireman was on the left side of the cab. They had gone a distance of 300 or 350 feet and were moving at a speed of about 8 miles per hour when the derailment occurred. Engineman Warncke was somewhat concerned as to whether flag protection was being afforded; this concern, in addition to the change of plans at Weissport, distracted his attention from the fact that the train was proceeding on the tail track instead of the eastward main. He said he was familiar with the track layout at this point.

Brakeman Close corroborated the statements of the conductor and engineman concerning events up to the arrival at Lehighton. He went west of the station at Lehighton to flag and returned to the station about 8:30 or 8:35 a.m., after having heard the whistle signal calling him in. He knew nothing about the accident until informed of it by the conductor.

Flagman Harvey corroborated the statements of the other members of the crew concerning events up to the arrival at Weissport from the west. The conductor lined up the switch leading from the eastward main to the tail track and the one from the tail track to the freight-house lead. The cut of three cars was pulled in on the tail track just clear of the switch leading to the freight-house lead. At this time they were informed that there would be no work performed at this point, and the conductor told him that the idler and derrick would be taken back to Lehighton and that the three cars of steel would be left at Weissport. The flagman then set the hand brakes on these three cars and lined up the switch to the freight-house lead for a movement to the eastward track, and he did not notice that the engine and remainder of the train had departed on the tail track until he looked up and saw that the engine was derailed at the west end of the tail track.

Wreckmaster Longenbach, who accompanied the derrick, made a statement in agreement with those of the members of the crew with respect to events leading up to the arrival at Weissport from the west. He said he instructed the conductor to set off the three cars of steel and take the derrick and idler to Lehighton. His reason for making this move was because the derrick was difficult to handle on the heavy grade down to the team track. After setting off the derrick and idler at Lehighton the crew was to return with the engine and spot the three cars on the team track.

Track Supervisor Rementer, who was in the Weissport station at the time of the accident, immediately made an inspection of the track to determine the cause of the accident, and stated that the engine had run off the end of the tail track. The marks on the ties clearly indicated that the first flange marks were made by the left drivers of the engine at a point 26 feet from the west end of the left, or south, rail of the tail track; this was a short distance beyond the point where the gauge ceased to be standard; the drivers had shoved the rail to the left and then had dropped to the ties. There were other wheel marks made on the right side at the extreme end where the guard rail joins the north rail of the tail track; the guard rail had been shoved ahead. Occupation of the tail track had the same effect on the automatic signals as did occupation of the eastward main track.

The statement of Section Foreman Smith developed nothing additional of importance except that he said the track conditions in the vicinity of the point of accident were good. During the 12 years he has had charge of this section, there has never been any other accident involving the tail track.

Master Mechanic Young stated that there was nothing about the engine that would have caused or contributed to the accident.

General Car Foreman Gibson and General Air Brake Instructor Sandhas found nothing about the equipment involved that would have caused or contributed to the accident.

Observations of the Commission's inspectors

The Commission's inspectors observed that the tail track was well maintained. There was no marker to indicate the location of the end of this track. It appeared that the tail track had been installed in order to eliminate a facing-point switch for eastward movements on the eastward main track. The lead track to the house tracks and the team track curves sharply to the right and the grade is 5.25 percent descending. The tail track appeared to be long enough for the purpose intended, that is, switching cars to and from the team and house tracks.

Discussion

The evidence indicates that upon arrival at Weissport from the west, the train was on the eastward main track with the engine headed west. It headed into the tail track and had just started to move back toward the freight-house lead track in order to spot the three rear cars on the team track when it was learned that the bridge hands would not work that day. The wreckmaster then instructed the conductor to cut off the three rear cars, take the derrick and idler to Lehigh, and return with the engine to spot the three cars on the team track. The wreckmaster did not want the derrick handled on the heavy grade leading to the team track. The engine, pulling the idler and derrick, proceeded westward on the tail track and became derailed at the west end thereof. According to the conductor and the engineman, they overlooked the fact that the train was moving on the tail track instead of the eastward main track for the reason that their attention was diverted due to their concern as to whether they had flag protection for the westward movement to Lehigh. The flagman had been called in when the train arrived at the tail track switch and when the westward movement became necessary a whistle signal was given him to resume flagging but they were not certain that he had heard the latter signal. The conductor was on the right side of the engine pilot during this last movement. The

engineman was in his proper position in the cab while the fireman was on the left side of the cab. The flagman was left with the three cars to apply hand brakes. All of the employees involved were experienced men and were familiar with the track layout at Weissport. The tail track is of sufficient length for the purpose of switching cars to and from the team and house tracks. This is the only accident that has occurred wherein this tail track was involved.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by failure to observe that a movement was being made on the wrong track.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director