

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE CENTRAL VERMONT RAILWAY
NEAR FITCHVILLE JUNCTION, CONN., ON JULY 6, 1932

August 17, 1932.

To the Commission:

On July 6, 1932, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Central Vermont Railway near Fitchville Junction, Conn., which resulted in the death of 3 employees, and the injury of 2 employees and 1 mail clerk. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Connecticut Public Utilities Commission.

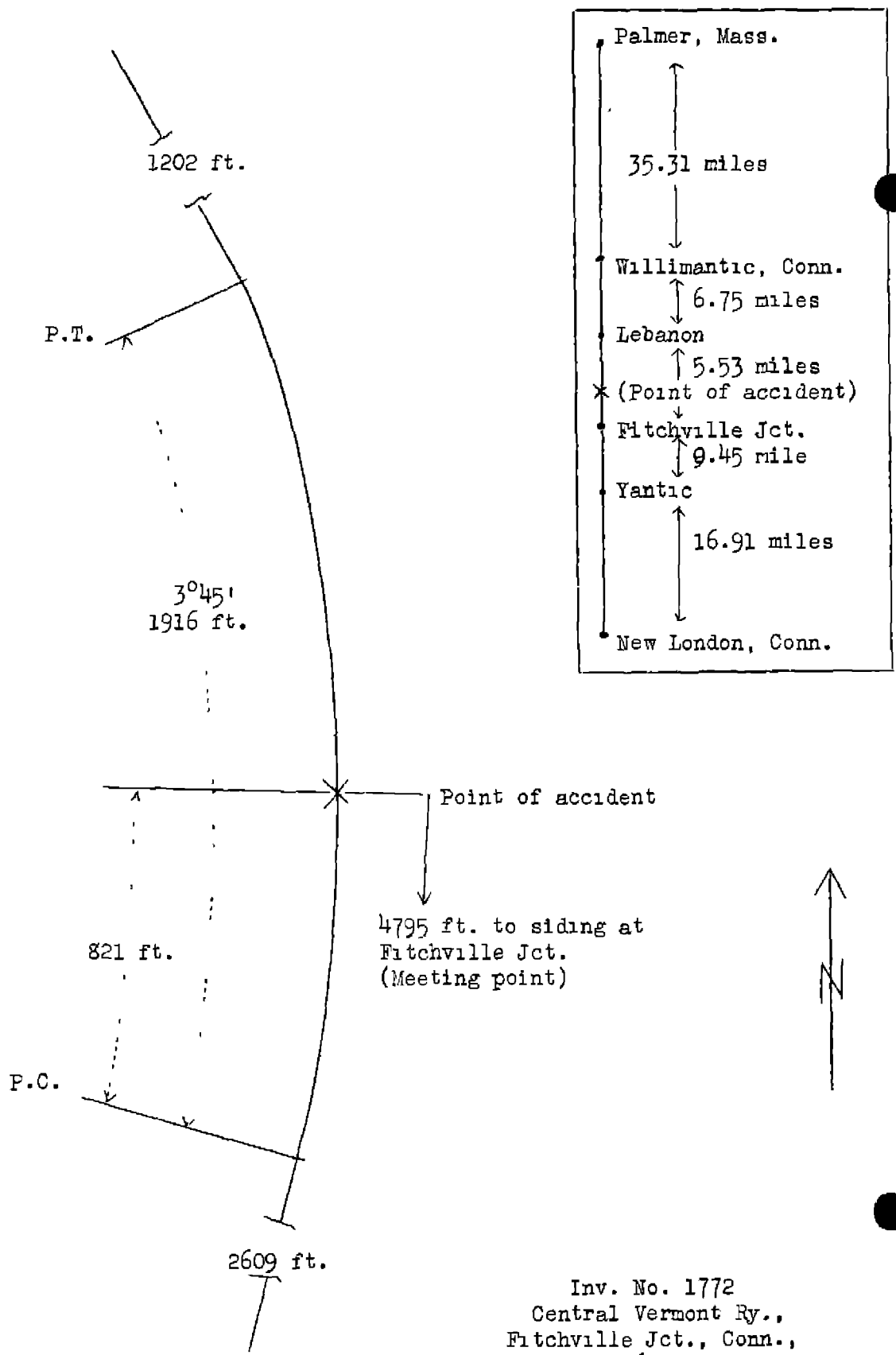
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Southern Division extending between Palmer, Mass., and New London, Conn., a distance of 64.95 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred about 0.91 mile north of the siding at Fitchville Junction, this siding is a stub-end siding 948.3 feet in length and parallels the main track on the west, the switch being a facing-point switch for northbound trains. Approaching the point of accident from the south, the track is tangent for a distance of 2,609 feet, followed by a compound curve to the left 1,916 feet in length, with a maximum curvature of $3^{\circ} 45'$, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 821 feet from its southern end. Approaching from the north, the track is tangent for a distance of 1,202 feet, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is generally ascending for northbound trains, but at the point of accident it is practically level. Owing to trees on the inside of the curve, neither crew could see the opposing train until within about 525 feet of each other.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4.16 p. m.

Description

Southbound freight train extra 468 consisted of 24 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 468, and was in charge of Conductor Farr and Engineman McNamara. At Willimantic, 12.28 miles north of Fitchville Junction the crew received a clearance card Form 350-A, together with a copy of train order No. 24, Form 19, reading as follows:



Inv. No. 1772
Central Vermont Ry.,
Fitchville Jct., Conn.,
July 6, 1932

NO. 1 ENG 144 MEET EXTRA 468 SOUTH AT
FITCHVILLE JCT. NO. 1 TAKE SIDING.

This order was made complete at 3.44 p.m. Extra 468 departed from Willimantic at 3.53 p.m., according to the train sheet, passed Lebanon, the last open office, 5.53 miles north of Fitchville Junction, at 4.09 p.m., and was approaching Fitchville Junction when it collided with train No. 1 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 25 miles per hour.

Northbound passenger train No. 1 consisted of gas-electric motor car 144, and was in charge of Conductor Kierce and Engineman Pearson. This train arrived at Yantic, 0.45 mile south of Fitchville Junction, at 4.11 p.m. Train order No. 24, previously quoted, had been put out to train No. 1 on Form 31 at Yantic and the train-order board was displayed, but the train departed from Yantic at 4.12 p.m., according to the train sheet, two minutes late, without having received a copy of the meet order, passed Fitchville Junction, at which point there is no telegraph office, and collided with extra 468 while traveling at an undetermined rate of speed.

The force of the impact drove motor car 144 backward a distance of 590 feet, this car being practically destroyed. The front end of engine 468 was somewhat damaged. The employees killed were the conductor and engineman of train No. 1 and a bridgeman who was deadheading, while the employees injured were a brakeman and a crane operator who also were deadheading.

Summary of evidence.

Engineman McNamara, of extra 468, stated that approaching Fitchville Junction he made an air-brake application and then released, the speed of the train being reduced to about 25 miles per hour, and after traveling at this speed a distance of about 30 car-lengths he saw train No. 1 rounding the curve, about 300 feet away, and at once applied the air brakes in emergency and shouted a warning of danger, just before the collision occurred. Other members of the crew were unaware of anything wrong until the engineman shouted to them and applied the brakes in emergency.

Train Dispatcher Emory stated that train order No. 24 was put out to train No. 1 at Yantic and to extra 468 at Willimantic at 3.43 p.m., it being first repeated by Station Agent Gibbs at Yantic at 3.44 p.m. The order then was made complete and delivered to extra 468 at Willimantic, that train departing from there at 3.53 p.m., 17 minutes prior to the time at which train No. 1 is scheduled to reach Yantic. Train Dispatcher Emory realized that the order was put out in violation of rule 215, which requires in part that where a train carrying passengers is concerned, "complete" must not be given to an order advancing an opposing inferior train until the signature of the conductor

of the superior train has been received, and his reason for issuing the order in violation of the rules was his assumption that it was safe to place the order at Yantic for train No. 1 because that train is scheduled to stop at that point, and would have station work to perform.

Station Agent Gibbs, on duty at Yantic, stated that when the dispatcher telephoned for the purpose of issuing the meet order, he placed the train-order signal in the stop position and notified the train dispatcher accordingly, then he received the order and immediately repeated it to the dispatcher, at 3.44 p.m. On arrival of train No. 1 he went to handle the mail and express, delivered what mail he had, and received a mail pouch which he carried over to a truck, and when he turned around he saw that train No. 1 was departing, having passed the train-order signal in the stop position. Station Agent Gibbs sent Mail Carrier Lynch running after train No. 1, and also made an attempt to have the train overtaken at a crossing by means of an automobile, in an endeavor to avert the accident; then he tried to arrange by telephone to have the train flagged at another crossing, but all to no avail. Neither the conductor nor the engineman got off the train while it was at the station.

Section Foreman Shea stated that he was in the office at Yantic at the time Station Agent Gibbs received the order over the telephone from the dispatcher and saw the station agent operate the chain controlling the train-order signal; he was positive that the signal was in the stop position at the time train No. 1 arrived and departed from Yantic. A Mr. Bottomley, who was at the station at the time, saw Agent Gibbs look up at the signal when he found that the train was departing, and Mr. Bottomley said the signal was then in the horizontal position, also that the agent had not been inside the station after the train had arrived.

Conclusions

This accident was primarily due to a violation of the operating rules by the train dispatcher in completing a meet order to an inferior train before he had obtained the signature of the conductor of the superior train, and to disregard of a train-order signal in stop position by Conductor Kierce and Engineman Pearson.

Dispatcher Emory offered no good reason for his failure to obey the rule requiring that under the conditions which existed in this case, "complete" must not be given to the inferior train until the signature of the conductor of the superior train has been received. The requirements of the rule were plain and had the dispatcher obeyed the rule an accident of the kind here involved could not have occurred.

Station Agent Gibbs said he placed the train-order signal in stop position as soon as he was told by the dispatcher to take an order for train No. 1, and there was corroborative evidence to the effect that the signal was in the stop position when train No. 1 arrived and departed from the station. The agent said that neither the conductor nor the engineman got off the train while it was at the station, and it is evident that neither of them noticed the position of the signal. Both men were killed in the accident, and under these circumstances it is impossible to assign any reason for their failure.

All the employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.