

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2739
THE CHICAGO & NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT COBDEN, MINN., ON
NOVEMBER 10, 1943

SUMMARY

Railroad: Chicago & North Western
Date: November 10, 1943
Location: Cobden, Minn.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Passenger : Passenger
Train numbers: First 504 : 503
Engine numbers: 1612 : 1577
Consist: 6 cars : 8 cars
Estimated speed: 2 m. p. h. : 15 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable, train orders and
manual-block system
Track: Single; tangent; 0.18 percent
ascending grade westward
Weather: Cloudy
Time: About 2:50 a. m.
Casualties: 29 injured
Cause: Failure to obey meet order
Recommendation: That the Chicago & North Western
Railway Company establish an
adequate block system on the line
on which this accident occurred

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2739

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

THE CHICAGO & NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY

December 6, 1943.

Accident at Cobden, Minn., on November 10, 1943, caused
by failure to obey a meet order.

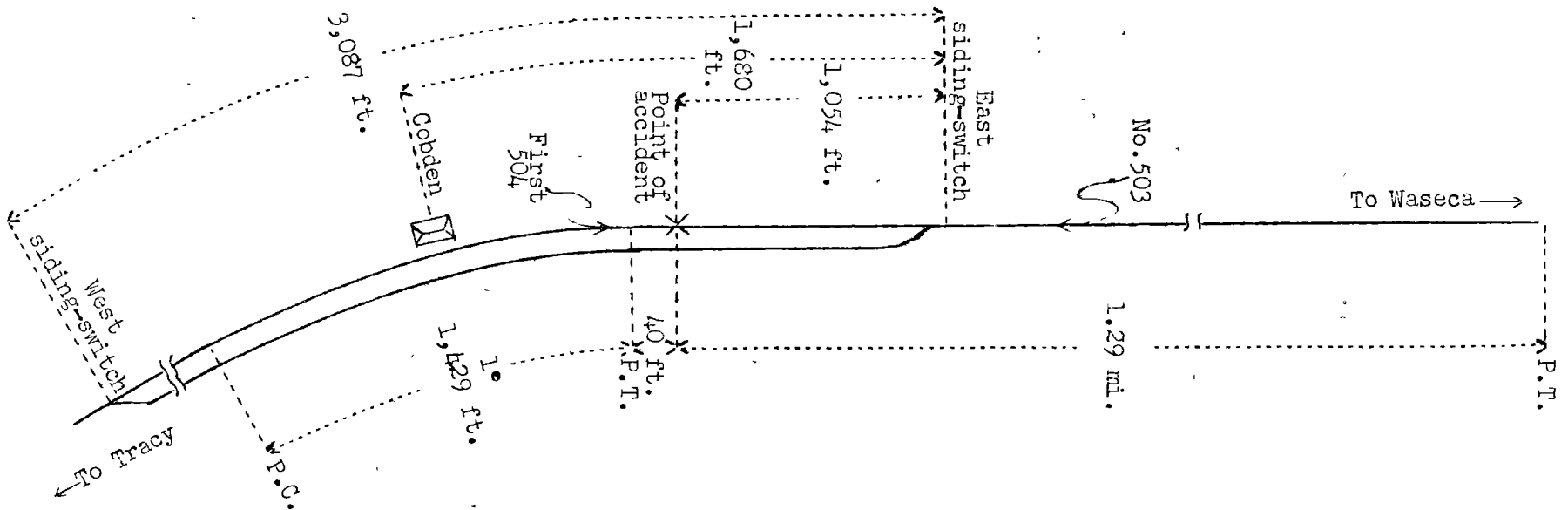
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On November 10, 1943, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Chicago & North Western Railway at Cobden, Minn., which resulted in the injury of 25 passengers and 4 train-service employees.

¹Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Patterson for consideration and disposition.

○	Waseca, Minn.
○	29.1 mi.
○	Mankato
○	40.2 mi.
○	Sleepy Eye
○	6.2 mi.
✕	Cobden (P. of A.)
○	15.6 mi.
○	Sanborn
○	24.9 mi.
○	Tracy, Minn.



Inv. No. 2739
 Chicago & North Western Railway
 Cobden, Minn.
 November 10, 1943

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Dakota Division designated as Subdivision 1 and extending between Waseca and Tracy, Minn., 116 miles. This was a single-track line over which trains were operated by timetable and train orders, and a manual-block system in effect between 7:30 a. m. and 5:30 p. m. At Cobden a siding 3,087 feet in length paralleled the main track on the south. The east switch of this siding was 1,630 feet east of the station. The accident occurred on the main track 1,054 feet west of the east siding-switch. From the east there was a tangent 1.29 miles to the point of accident. From the west there was a 1° curve to the right 1,429 feet, and a tangent 40 feet to this point. The grade for west-bound trains was 0.18 percent ascending.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

14. Engine Whistle Signals.

Note:- The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "___" for longer sounds. * * *

SOUND

INDICATION

* * *

(n) ___ ___ o

Approaching meeting or waiting points. See Rule S-90.

* * *

17. The headlight will be displayed to the front of every train by night. It must be concealed or extinguished when a train turns out to meet another and has stopped clear of main track. * * *

It must be dimmed * * * approaching * * * meeting points or while standing on main track at meeting points * * *

* * *

S-71. A train is superior to another train by right, class or direction.

Right is conferred by train order; class and direction by time-table.

Right is superior to class or direction.

Direction is superior as between trains of the same class.

S-72. * * *

Trains in the direction specified by the time-table are superior to trains of the same class in the opposite direction.

S-88. At meeting points between trains of the same class, the inferior train must clear the main track before the leaving time of the superior train.

* * *

S-90. * * *

The engineman of each train will give signal 14(n) at least one mile before reaching a meeting or waiting point. Should the engineman fail to give signal 14(n) as herein prescribed, the conductor must take immediate action to stop the train.

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS.

* * *

S-A.

Fixing Meeting Points for Opposing Trains.

(1.) No 1 meet No 2 at B.
* * *

* * *

Trains receiving these orders will run with respect to each other to the designated points and there meet in the manner prescribed by the rules.

S-C.

Giving Right Over an Opposing Train.

(1.) No 1 has right over No 2 G to X.

If the second-named train reaches the point last named before the other arrives, it may proceed, keeping clear of the opposing train as many minutes as such train was before required to clear it under the rules. * * *

* * *

Time-table special rules read in part as follows:

EASTWARD trains are superior to WESTWARD trains of the same class.

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains was 60 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

First 504, an east-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 1612, one baggage-mail car, two baggage cars and three coaches, in the order named. The second car was of steel-underframe construction, and the remainder were of all-steel construction. At Sanborn, 15.6 miles west of Cobden and the last open office, the crew received copies of train order No. 203 reading as follows:

First 504 meet No 503 at
Cobden

First 504 departed from Sanborn at 2:20 a. m., 8 minutes late, and stopped at the station at Cobden about 2:46 a. m. About 4 minutes later, while this train was moving at an estimated speed of 2 miles per hour, it was struck by No. 503.

No. 503, a west-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 1577, three baggage cars, one baggage-mail car, one baggage car and three coaches, in the order named. The cars were of steel construction. At Mankato, 46.4 miles east of Cobden, the crew received copies of train order No. 224 reading as follows:

No 503 has right over Second 504
Mankato to Tracy

No. 503 departed from Mankato at 12:45 a. m., 58 minutes late. At Sleepy Eye, 6.2 miles east of Cobden and the last open office, the crew received copies of train order No. 203. This train departed from Sleepy Eye at 2:37 a. m., 1 hour 32 minutes late, passed the east siding-switch at Cobden, where it was required to enter the siding to meet First 504, and while moving at an estimated speed of 15 miles per hour it collided with First 504.

The air brakes of each train had been tested and functioned properly.

The force of impact moved First 504 backward about 25 feet. The engine-truck wheels of engine 1577 were derailed. The front end of each engine was considerably damaged.

It was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2:50 a. m.

The brakeman and the baggageman of First 504, and the fireman and the brakeman of No. 503 were injured.

During the 31-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 6.4 trains.

Discussion

The rules governing operation on this line provide that at meeting points between trains of the same class the train in the inferior direction must enter the siding. The engineer of each train must sound the meeting-point whistle signal not less than one mile in advance of the meeting point. If an engineer fails to sound the proper signal, the conductor must take immediate action to stop the train.

The crews of both trains held copies of train order No. 203, which established Cobden as the meeting point between First 504, an east-bound first-class train, and No. 503, a west-bound first-class train. No. 503 was inferior by direction and was required to enter the siding at the east switch. The crew of No. 503 held copies of train order No. 224, which gave No. 503 right over Second 504, an east-bound first-class train.

First 504 stopped at the station at Cobden at 2:46 a. m. About 4 minutes later, after station work had been performed, this train was moving at an estimated speed of 2 miles per hour when it collided with No. 503 about 1,050 feet west of the east siding-switch. The engineer of First 504 said that soon after his train departed from the station he saw the reflection of the headlight of the approaching train, and he dimmed the headlight of his engine. Soon afterward he observed that No. 503 had passed the east siding-switch, and the accident occurred almost immediately.

About 25 minutes before the accident occurred the members of the crew of No. 503 received copies of train order No. 203, and they understood that their train was required to enter the siding at the east switch. As No. 503 was approaching Cobden the speed was about 50 miles per hour. There was no condition of the engine that distracted the attention of the engineers or obscured their vision, and they were maintaining a lookout ahead. The engineer said that when the engine was about 1 mile east of the east siding-switch he sounded the meeting-point whistle signal, and made an 8 or 10-pound brake-pipe reduction.

When the engine was about 1,500 feet east of the east siding-switch the speed was about 15 miles per hour, and he observed a headlight become extinguished in the vicinity of the east siding-switch. Then he became confused and momentarily thought that train order No. 224 gave his train right over First 504, and that First 504 was into clear on the siding. Soon after his engine passed the east siding-switch he observed that First 504 was on the main track and he immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position, but this action was not taken in time to prevent the accident. The fireman said that the headlight of the engine of First 504 was lighted when it first became visible to him about 1 mile east of Cobden and it continued to be displayed until the accident occurred. He thought his engineer was taking action to stop the train at the east siding-switch. When he observed that the engine was passing the switch he called a warning to the engineer. The conductor was engaged in collecting tickets, and the brakeman was proceeding toward the front end of the train to be in position to open the east siding-switch for his train to enter the siding. They thought the engineer was controlling the speed of the train to stop at the switch and were not aware of anything being wrong until the accident occurred.

The carrier's book of operating rules contains manual-block rules which provide for blocking of opposing movements, but these rules were in effect in the territory involved only during the daytime, between 7:30 a. m. and 5:30 p. m. At the time this accident occurred trains were being operated by timetable and train orders only. If an adequate block system had been in use in this territory, these trains would not have been permitted to occupy the same block simultaneously, and this accident would not have occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Chicago & North Western Railway Company establish an adequate block system on the line on which this accident occurred.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this sixth day of December, 1943.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.