

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3624
CHICAGO, BURLINGTON & QUINCY RAILROAD COMPANY
IN RE ACCIDENT
AT BIRDSELL, NEBR., ON
APRIL 18, 1955

SUMMARY

Date: April 18, 1955

Railroad Chicago, Burlington & Quincy

Location: Birdsell, Nebr.

Kind of accident: Side collision

Equipment involved: Track motor-car : Freight train
13945

Train number: Extra 122D West

Engine number: Diesel-electric
units 122D,
122C, 122B, and
122A

Consist: : 46 cars, caboose

Estimated speeds: 2 m. p. h. 25 m. p. h.

Operation: Signal indications

Track: Single, tangent; 0.40 percent ascend-
ing grade westward

Weather: Clear

Time: 9:41 a. m.

Casualties: 1 killed; 1 injured

Cause: Failure to provide adequate protection
for movement of track motor-car

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 5624

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

CHICAGO, BURLINGTON & QUINCY RAILROAD COMPANY

May 17, 1955

127-11

Accident at Birdsell, Nebr., on April 18, 1955, caused by
failure to provide adequate protection for the move-
ment of a track motor-car.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

CLARKE, Commissioner

On April 18, 1955, there was a side collision between
a track motor-car and a freight train on the Chicago,
Burlington & Quincy Railroad at Birdsell, Nebr., which
resulted in the death of one maintenance-of-way employee,
and the injury of one maintenance-of-way employee.

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

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Alliance and Sterling Divisions extending between Seneca and Alliance, Nebr., 107.89 miles, a single-track line, over which trains are operated by signal indications. At Birdsoll, 101.54 miles west of Seneca, a siding 1.16 miles in length parallels the main track on the south. The accident occurred on the turnout at the east end of the siding at Birdsoll. From the east there are, in succession, a 1°01' curve to the right 2,036 feet in length, a tangent 2,024 feet, a 2°02' curve to the left 2,242 feet, and a tangent 142 feet to the east siding-switch and a considerable distance westward. The grade is 0.40 percent ascending westward at the switch.

Between points approximately 1,750 feet and 850 feet east of the switch the track is laid in a shallow cut. The south wall of the cut and a low hillside south of the track restrict the range of vision between the point of accident and a locomotive approaching from the east to a distance of about 1,450 feet.

A semi-automatic signal governing west-bound movements on the main track is located 98 feet east of the switch. This signal, which is of the searchlight type, forms part of a traffic-control system which extends between Seneca and Alliance.

Track occupancy indicators for the information of the operators of track motor-cars are not provided in the vicinity of the point of accident.

This carrier's 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.
* * *	
(1) — — o —	Approaching public crossings at grade * * *
	Where view is obscured or passing around curves whistle must be sounded * * *

* * *

Rules and instructions governing Maintenance of Way and Structures read in part as follows:

57. Foremen in going to and from their work, and all persons using hand or motor cars, must exercise care to avoid accident. In places where the view of the track is obscured they must protect themselves with proper signals when necessary.

73. Employes operating motor or track cars must, when practicable, obtain lineup on movement of trains before fouling a main track. Additional lineups must be obtained during the day when communication is available and conditions require.

The receipt of a lineup does not relieve operator of motor or track car of the responsibility of protecting cars as prescribed by the rules.

* * *

The maximum authorized speeds are 15 miles per hour for track motor-cars and 50 miles per hour for freight trains.

Description of Accident

About 9:20 a. m. track motor-car 13945, occupied by a section foreman and two sectionmen, departed west-bound from a point about 4 miles east of the east siding-switch at Birdsell. It was stopped at the east siding-switch at Birdsell, placed on the rails of the siding, and then started westward. It was struck by Extra 122D West several seconds after it began to move. The accident occurred 71 feet west of the point-of-switch.

Extra 122D West, a west-bound freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 122D, 122C, 122B, and 122A, coupled in multiple-unit control, 46 cars, and a caboosc. This train departed from Seneca at 7:05 a. m., departed from Antioch, 8.62 miles east of Birdsell, at 9:30 a. m., and while moving at a speed of about 25 miles per hour it struck track motor-car 13945.

The track motor-car stopped on the south side of the tracks at a point 63 feet west of the point of accident. It was badly damaged. Extra 122D West stopped with the front of the locomotive 525 feet west of the point of accident. The front end of the locomotive was slightly damaged.

One of the sectionmen was killed, and the other sectionman was injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 9:41 a. m.

Track motor-car 13945 is of the belt-drive type and is powered by a one-cylinder eight-horsepower engine. It weighs 1,045 pounds, has seating capacity for eight persons, and is insulated to prevent the shunting of track circuits.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 8.4 trains.

Discussion

On the day of the accident the section force at Alliance reported for duty at 7:30 a. m. The foreman obtained a lineup of train movements which had been issued by the train dispatcher at 7:06 a. m. which read in part as follows:

Nos. 41, 42, and 43 gone
No. 75 leaving Seneca 7:05 a. m. light train
No. 80 Alliance 8:15 a. m.
* * *

Nos. 75 and 80 are freight trains designated by those numbers but operated as extra trains within traffic-control system territory. On the day of the accident No. 75 was operated as Extra 122D West. The section force departed from Alliance about 7:35 a. m., patrolled the track to the east end of the section, about 5 miles east of the east siding-switch at Birdsell, and arrived at the latter point about 8:15 a. m. These employees then returned to a point about 1 mile west of the east end of the section, set their track motor-car off the track, and waited until No. 80, operating as an extra east, had passed. They then replaced the track motor-car on the track and proceeded to a point 1.29 miles east of the east siding-switch at Birdsell. Several minutes later, after minor repairs to the track had been made, they proceeded westward. The foreman said that his view to the east from this point was unobstructed throughout a distance of over 2 miles and that Extra 122D West was not in sight at the time the repairs to the track were completed. After the track motor-car departed from this point, the occupants' view to the east was restricted by curvature of the track. As the car approached

Birdsell the foreman observed that the route had been lined for the movement of Extra 122D West and the signal east of the east siding-switch indicated Proceed. He stopped at the switch, and after he and the sectionmen had set the car over onto the rails of the siding he started the car in forward motion. As he was starting the car he saw Extra 122D West approaching. He thought the locomotive was in the vicinity of the west end of the cut when he first saw it. He attempted to increase the speed of the car, but he was unable to move it far enough to clear the main track before the locomotive of Extra 122D West passed. He did not hear the pneumatic horn of Extra 122D West before he saw the train, and he was not certain whether the horn was sounded between the time he saw the train and the time the collision occurred.

As Extra 122D West was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was 45 miles per hour, as indicated by the speed-indicating device. The engineer and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment of the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The headlight was lighted brightly. The brakes of the train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The employees on the locomotive said that the pneumatic horn was sounded for a rail-highway grade crossing approximately 1.50 miles east of the east siding-switch at Birdsell and again at a point a short distance west of the crossing. They said that when the front of the train reached a point about 1,450 feet east of the east siding-switch they observed the section force at the switch setting the track motor-car over from the main track to the siding. When they saw the car the engineer immediately made an emergency application of the brakes and sounded a series of warning blasts on the pneumatic horn. These employees said that the car was moving westward when it was struck, and the engineer said that the speed of the train had been reduced to 25 miles per hour when he looked at the speed-indicating device immediately before the collision occurred.

The rules of this carrier provide that the operator of a track motor-car must, when practicable, obtain a line-up of train movements before operating his track motor-car on a main track and that he must obtain additional line-ups when conditions require and communication is available. In the instant case the section foreman was provided with a portable telephone with which he could have communicated with the train dispatcher from any point en route. At the time of the accident he held a copy of a line-up which was issued 2 hours 35

minutes before the accident occurred and which indicated the location of Extra 122D West at the time the line-up was issued. Extra 122D West met No. 80 at Antioch, the first siding east of Birdsell. The foreman said he expected Extra 122D West to meet No. 80 east of Antioch, and after he met No. 80 between Birdsell and Antioch he did not look at his watch nor consider it necessary to secure an additional line-up before proceeding to Birdsell ahead of Extra 122D West.

During the past 10 years the Commission has investigated 57 collisions, including the present case, in which track motor-cars were involved. These accidents resulted in the death of 92 persons and the injury of 169 persons. In the reports covering the investigations of these accidents, the Commission repeatedly has recommended that the carriers take measures to provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars on their lines. On the line on which the accident here under investigation occurred, communication and signal facilities are available which, if properly utilized, would provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars.

Cause

This accident was caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of a track motor-car.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this seventeenth day of May, 1955.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. MCCOY,
Secretary.