

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE, ST. PAUL & PACIFIC RAILROAD AT ATKINS, IOWA, ON AUGUST 30, 1932

November 22, 1932.

To the Commission:

On August 30, 1932, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Chicago, Milwaukee, St Paul & Pacific Railroad at Atkins, Iowa, which resulted in the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

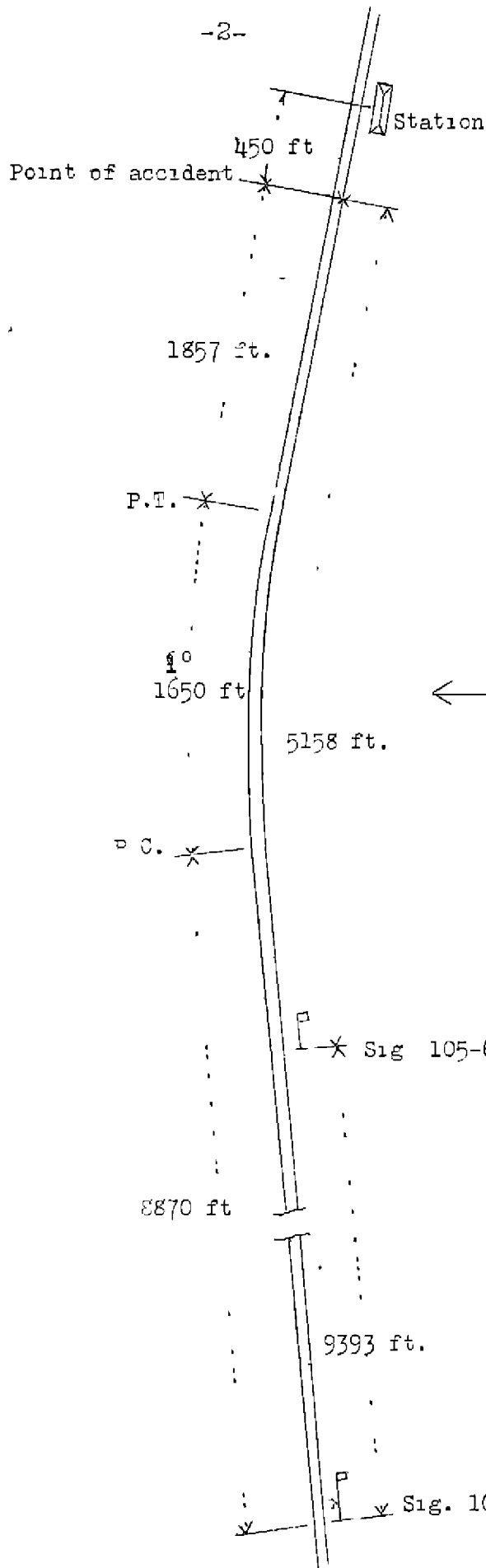
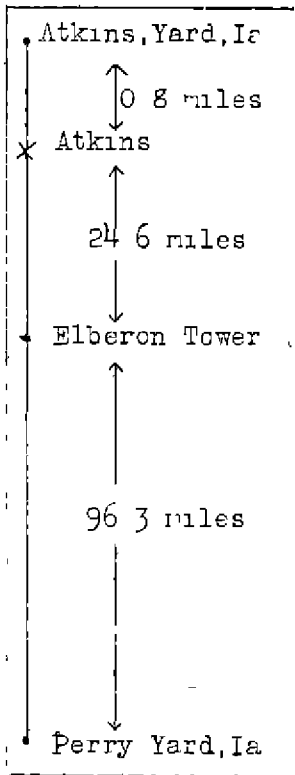
This accident occurred on that part of the First District of the Iowa Division extending between Atkins Yard and Perry Yard, Iowa, a distance of 121.7 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred within yard limits, at a point about 450 feet west of the station at Atkins, approaching this point from the west, the track is tangent for a distance of 8,870 feet, followed by a 1° curve to the right 1,650 feet in length, and then tangent track to the point of accident, a distance of 1,857 feet, and for some distance beyond that point. There is quite a pronounced sag about 1 mile west of the point of accident, followed by an ascending grade of 0.66 per cent for about 2,000 feet, and then level track nearly to the point of accident. A caboose at the point of accident could be seen a distance of about 2,300 feet.

The signals involved are signals 107-4 and 105-6, located 14,551 and 5,158 feet, respectively, west of the point of accident. These signals are of the three-position, upper-quadrant semaphore type, night indications are white, green, and red, for proceed, caution, and stop, respectively.

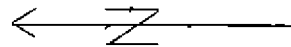
The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1.43 a.m.

Description

Eastbound second-class freight train No. 70 consisted of 65 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 8332, and was in charge of Conductor Reel and Engineman Hunt. This train departed from Elberon Tower, the last open office, 24.6 miles west of Atkins, at 12.50 a.m., according to the train sheet, one hour and four minutes late, and was pulling into Atkins Yard at a speed of between 10 and 12 miles per hour when its rear end was struck by train No. 8.



Inv. No. 1784
 Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific R.R.
 Atkins, Iowa
 August 30, 1932



Eastbound passenger train No. 8 consisted of 1 mail and express car, 1 baggage car, 1 coach, and 5 Pullman sleeping cars, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 6407, and was in charge of Conductor Coakley and Engineman Kiley. This train passed Elberon Tower at 1.14 a.m., on time, passed signals 107-4 and 105-6, which apparently were displaying caution and stop indications, respectively, and collided with train No. 70 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 20 and 50 miles per hour.

The caboose and the rear car of train No. 70 were demolished and three other cars in the same train were derailed. Engine 6407, its tender, and the forward truck of the leading car of train No. 8 were also derailed, the engine stopped on its right side to the south of the track with its front end 209 feet east of the point of collision, the tender remained upright and was directly behind the engine. The employees injured were the conductor of the freight train and the fireman of the passenger train.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Hunt, of train No. 70, stated that before leaving Elberon Tower the head brakeman informed him that train No. 8 was on time but he did not discuss the matter with the conductor and did not have orders to run ahead of that train. He said his train left that point at 12.48 a.m., which he thought would give him sufficient time to reach Atkins Yard, 0.8 mile beyond Atkins, and get into clear by 1.38 a.m., five minutes before the scheduled arriving time of train No. 8 at Atkins station. No stops were made en route but the train appeared to pull hard and it was not until 1.36 a.m. that speed was reduced to 4 or 5 miles per hour to permit the head brakeman to open the switch leading into Atkins Yard. The train did not stop and it was entering the yard, traveling at a speed of about 12 miles per hour when the brakes went into emergency and as soon as the train stopped he noted the time to be 1.43 a.m. He had observed the reflection of fusees behind his train and also the reflection of the headlight of train No. 8, but had not whistled for flag protection as he did not think it was necessary when he could see what the flagman was doing. He also said it is the practice to depend on the flagman to provide proper protection, and not to depend on the signals for that purpose. Signals 107-4 and 105-6 were at proceed when he passed them, but the light in signal 105-6 appeared to be rather dim. Head Brakeman Chapman said that before getting off the engine he had seen a burning fusee at the rear of his train.

Flagman Taylor, of train No. 70, stated that signal 105-6 was displaying a stop indication, with the light burning brightly and when the caboose was just west of a highway crossing, located approximately 2,500 feet west of the point of accident, he lighted a fusee, placed it in the dust board of the caboose, and then threw off a burning fusee just east of the crossing,

about 1.36 a.m., and then lighted a third fusee. The train was traveling at a speed of about 20 miles per hour, but by the time the rear end had reached a point about 30 car-lengths east of the crossing speed had been reduced to 4 or 5 miles per hour, and when the caboose was just west of the house-track switch, about 450 feet west of the point of accident, the conductor threw off another fusee, at which time train No. 8 was approaching and apparently had not stopped at the automatic signal. Flagman Taylor threw off the last fusee he had lighted, it being found under the rear of train No. 8 after the accident, and he said that both he and the conductor lighted additional fusees and waved them violently but their signals were not acknowledged by the engineman of the approaching train. When the engine of that train was about 75 feet away they both jumped off, still holding their burning fusees. All the fusees used were 5-minute fusees. The flagman said it was possible for him to have dropped off and placed torpedoes on the track when his train reduced speed preparatory to entering the yard, but he did not interpret the rules as requiring him to do so, and he did not think that such action would have prevented the accident in view of the precautions already taken, and he considered that he had fully complied with the rules in providing protection for his train. Flagman Taylor further stated that train No. 8 quite frequently overtakes train No. 70 while it is heading into Atkins Yard, and in each instance, except when the train stops, flagging is done in the same manner as was done on the night of the accident.

Engineman Kiley, of train No. 8, observed signal 107-4 displaying a caution indication and reduced speed accordingly, but signal 105-6 appeared to be in proceed position and he then released the brakes and passed that signal at a speed of 45 or 50 miles per hour. He whistled for the highway crossing and did not see any fusees burning in that vicinity, but when the train rounded the curve he saw a fusee ahead, acknowledged it, and immediately made a 20-pound brake-pipe reduction, figuring that he had plenty of space in which to stop, and that if there was a train ahead it would be quite a distance from the fusee. There were other fusees burning beyond the first one, which prevented him from seeing the train ahead, but when his own train neared the first fusee his headlight shone on the cupola of the caboose and about the same time he saw a fusee being waved violently by some one on the ground, he immediately applied the brakes in emergency, without having released the previous application, and the collision occurred a few seconds later, at which time the speed of his train was about 20 miles per hour. He said that the fireman, who was riding on his seatbox, called the indication of signal 107-4 but did not call the indication of signal 105-6, as it was not customary to do so when signals are clear. Engineman Kiley further stated that the light in signal 105-6 appeared to be rather dim and under such conditions the reflection on the clear glass above would make the signal look as if it were clear, he did not notice the position

of the semaphore arm when passing the signal. After the accident he went back to look at the signal and found it to be in stop position, with the light burning. Engineman Kiley held no orders pertaining to train No. 70 and had never overtaken that train at Atkins under similar conditions, and was of the opinion that if the crew of that train had taken more precaution to protect their train the accident would not have occurred, although he admitted that had he applied the brakes in emergency as soon as the first fusee came into view it is possible the train would have stopped before it passed this fusee. The rules require a train to be stopped and a fusee extinguished, but under the circumstances Engineman Kiley did not think he had violated the rules.

Conductor Coakley, of train No. 8 did not notice any reduction in speed until he felt an emergency application of the brakes, which he judged was about three car-lengths from the point of accident, and he estimated the speed of his train at 45 miles per hour at the time of the accident, which occurred at 1.45 a.m. He heard no whistle signals sounded approaching the point of accident and did not see any burning fusees, although upon looking back after the accident he saw the reflection of a light under the train. He had no information that train No. 70 was preceding his own train to Atkins but usually it is so operated each Monday night.

Brakeman Hunter, of train No. 8, stated that the only time he felt an application of the brakes was just before the collision occurred, the train traveling a distance of only three or four car-lengths after this application was made. Flagman Deischer felt no application of the brakes prior to the accident. Immediately afterwards he went back to flag but did not see any burning fusees on his way.

Signal Supervisor Fohey stated that at about 5 a.m., on the day of the accident, and while train No. 8 was still occupying the main track, he inspected signals 107-4 and 105-6, he found the former in caution position and the latter in stop position. He also tested these signals and found them to be in proper working order and requiring no repairs.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Kiley, of train No. 8, properly to obey signal indications.

Engineman Kiley said his first warning of danger was when his train rounded the curve west of the point of accident, at which time he saw burning fusees some distance ahead. Under the rules, a train is required to stop and extinguish a burning fusee, and then proceed with caution prepared to stop, Engineman Kiley, however thought that the train ahead would be some distance beyond the first fusee and therefore made a service application of the brakes and did not try to stop before passing

the fusee. It was not until he had nearly reached this fusee that he saw the caboose, his view of the train ahead having been obscured by other fusees. As to the automatic signals, Engineman Kiley said signal 107-4 was displaying a caution indication and that he reduced speed, but that signal 105-6 appeared to be displaying a proceed indication and therefore he released the brakes and allowed the train to pass this signal at a speed of 45 or 50 miles per hour, not applying the brakes again until he saw the fusees. No member of the train crew noticed any brake application prior to the emergency application just before the accident occurred, and it is believed that signal 105-6 was operating properly and was displaying a stop indication at the time train No. 8 passed it, as Engineman Hunt, of train No. 70, said this signal was at proceed when his engine passed it, Flagman Taylor of that train said it was in stop position when the caboose passed it, Engineman Kiley found it in stop position when he examined it after the accident, and Signal Supervisor Fohey also found it in stop position when he inspected and tested it about three hours after the accident, without any repairs having been made. The only explanation which Engineman Kiley offered for his failure properly to observe the stop indication of signal 105-6 was that the light appeared to be dim, and the white light which he thought he saw might have been the reflection of his locomotive headlight shining upon the white or clear signal roundel.

The rules provide that an inferior train must be clear at the time a first-class train in the same direction is due to leave the next station in the rear where time is shown. The next station in the rear of train No. 70 was Newnall and train No. 8 was due to pass that station at 1.36 a.m. As the accident did not occur until between 1.42 and 1.45 a.m., it is apparent that train No. 70 did not comply with this provision of the rules.

The rules further provide that when a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection, by night, or by day when the view is obscured, lighted fusees must be thrown off at proper intervals. Flagman Taylor followed what appears to have been the usual practice at this point by flagging with fusees from the rear platform of the caboose, and under the application of this rule it seems that it was not necessary for him to provide any other protection as long as his train was in motion. During the course of the investigation, however, some criticism was directed towards Flagman Taylor in that he failed to "insure full protection" by not dropping off the caboose, when his train reduced speed prior to entering the yard, and placing torpedoes on the rails, but whether or not this would have influenced Engineman Kiley to take more effective action toward stopping his train is a matter of conjecture.

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Engineman Kiley was 73 years of age and had been employed as an engineman on this railroad for more than 50 years.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.