

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

1891

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING
AN ACCIDENT ON THE CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE, ST. PAUL &
PACIFIC RAILROAD AT WEGDAHL, MINN., ON FEBRUARY 19, 1934.

May 8, 1934.

To the Commission:

On February 19, 1934, there was a side collision between two passenger trains on the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad at Wegdahl, Minn., which resulted in the injury of 10 passengers and 4 employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Hastings & Dakota Division which extends between Minneapolis and Montevideo, Minn., a distance of 133.1 miles. This is a double-track line from Montevideo east to Wegdahl, a distance of 5.2 miles, trains running with the current of traffic keeping to the left, and from Wegdahl east to Tower E-122, a distance of 6.1 miles, it is a single-track line; trains in both territories are operated by time table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The switch at the east end of the double track is located at a point 700 feet west of the station at Wegdahl and the accident occurred at the fouling point of this switch. Approaching this point from either direction the track is tangent for a distance of several thousand feet. The accident occurred at about the center of a vertical curve 600 feet in length, the grade approaching this point being slightly descending for west-bound trains and slightly ascending for east-bound trains.

The switch stand is located on the north side of the track; the normal position of the switch is for the east-bound track, in which position a red indication is displayed. When the switch is lined for the west-bound track a white indication is displayed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2:05 a.m.

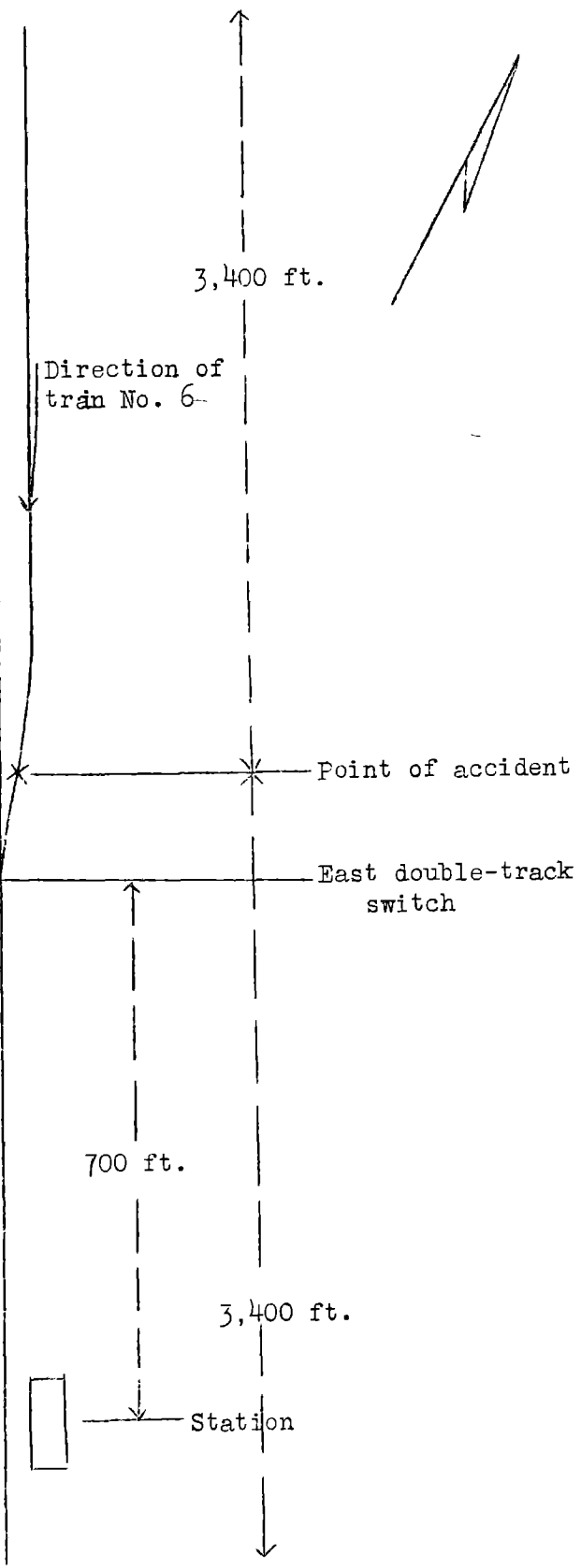
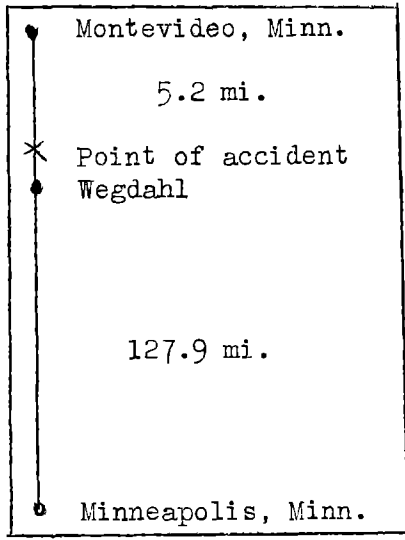
Description

West-bound passenger Train No. 5 consisted of 1 postal car, 1 express car, 2 baggage cars, 1 coach and 1 sleeping car, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 8402, and was in charge of Conductor Benson and Engineman Schaffer. At Bird Island, 40 miles east of Wegdahl, the crew received copy of train order 1, form 19,

Direction of train No. 5

Direction of train No. 6

3,400 ft.



Inv. No. 1891
Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul
& Pacific
Wegdahl, Minn.
Feb. 19, 1934.

directing them to meet Train No. 6 on the double track west of Wegdahl, together with a clearance card stating that the block was clear; the double track west of Wegdahl is the scheduled meeting point for Trains Nos. 5 and 6. Train No. 5 left Bird Island at 12:43 a.m., on time, departed from the station at Wegdahl at 2:03 a.m., 1 minute late, stopped to line the switch at the end of double track, and was proceeding over the switch to the west-bound track at a speed estimated to have been from 2 to 5 miles per hour when the fifth car was struck by Train No. 6.

East-bound passenger Train No. 6 consisted of 2 baggage cars, 1 postal car, 1 express car, 1 baggage car, 1 coach and 1 sleeping car, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 6420, and was in charge of Conductor Smith and Engineman Foss. At Montevideo the crew received copy of train order 1, form 31, previously mentioned, together with a clearance card stating that the block was clear except for Train No. 5. This train departed from Montevideo at 1:55 a.m., on time, and was leaving the end of double track at Wegdahl when it collided with the side of Train No. 5 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been from 4 to 10 miles per hour.

Engine 6420, of Train No. 6, scraped the side of the fifth car in Train No. 5 and struck the front end of the sixth or rear car, breaking it from the train; the front truck of this car was derailed. Engine 6420 broke away from its train and the engine truck was derailed. The employees injured were the conductor, brakeman, flagman and sleeping car porter of Train No. 5.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Schaffer, of Train No. 5, stated that after making the station stop the head brakeman came up and boarded the engine steps. He then proceeded to the double-track switch and it was lined by the brakeman, who remained at the switch. Engineman Schaffer stated that he proceeded slowly and after passing the switch two or three car lengths he saw the brakeman give a two-car-length signal but due to the smoke and steam trailing along the train he was unable to see the switch light. He had made a light application of the air brakes and just as he released the brakes he received a communicating signal to proceed, at which time the engine of Train No. 6 was passing him at a speed of about 10 or 15 miles per hour. His own train was moving very slowly, between 2 and 5 miles per hour, at the time of the accident. Engineman Schaffer stated that he had seen Train No. 6 when it was about 1 mile distant; as it approached he did not hear it working steam but did not pay any attention to it as he was giving his attention to his own train, which he thought was clear when



Train No. 6 passed or he would have made an attempt to stop it. He further stated that it was the practice for trains to pull into clear before the switch is closed, which statement was confirmed by his fireman.

Head Brakeman Buckley, of Train No. 5, stated that after lining the switch he gave the engineman a proceed signal and then walked back with the intention of getting on the express car, but on account of the steam blowing down he did not think it was safe to do so and he waited until the train pulled by. He then restored the switch to normal and ran to overtake his train and just as he boarded the rear end it was struck by Train No. 6. He was unable to say how far the train had traveled from the switch when it was struck. Brakeman Buckley stated that after his train entered the west-bound track he did not give the engineman any signals nor did he give him a signal from the rear of the train by means of the train communicating signal. Brakeman Buckley was of the opinion that it was not necessary to wait until a train is into clear before lining the switch, except as provided by the rules governing automatic block-signal territory. He admitted, however, that it was not a safe practice, and stated that his reason for not waiting until his train was into clear before lining the switch was to save delay to his train.

Conductor Benson, of Train No. 5, was in the coach as the train entered the west-bound track and was preparing to go to the rear of the train to exchange signals with the crew of Train No. 6; he did not hear a whistle signal sounded by means of the train communicating signal from the rear of the train. He stated that it was the practice for the head brakeman to board the baggage car after lining the switch and that he personally had always restored the switch, stating that he would throw the switch before the train was into clear and that the instructions requiring that the switch will not be lined back before the train is into clear apply to automatic block-signal territory.

Flagman Humphrey, of Train No. 5, stated that he was on the rear platform of the last car and gave the engineman a proceed signal, but no signal was sounded by means of the train communicating signal. He stated that it is the practice for the flagman to throw the switch behind the train and that when a train is moving he throws the switch as quickly as he can and gets on the train.

Engineman Foss, of Train No. 6, received the train order at Montevideo establishing a meet with Train No. 5 on the double track west of Wegdahl. He was operating his train at a speed of 35 or 40 miles per hour and when about 3/4 mile

from the double-track switch he made the usual 6 or 7 pound brake-pipe reduction and just before passing the engine of Train No. 5 at a speed of about 10 miles per hour he increased the brake-pipe reduction to 10 pounds. Due to steam blowing down over the track in front of him from Train No. 5 he could see only about three or four cars in that train and could not see the markers on its rear end, but he saw the red indication displayed by the switch lamp, indicating that the route was lined for his train, and he said it also indicated that Train No. 5 was into clear. His speed had been reduced to about 4 miles per hour and he could have stopped easily in time to have averted the accident had he seen that the train was not into clear, but he was governed entirely by the red indication displayed by the switch lamp, saying it was his understanding that a train would pull into clear before the switch would be closed and that he had always followed that practice. He did not see a signal given by any member of the crew of Train No. 5. The statements of Fireman Fredrickson practically corroborated those of the engineman. From his position on the left side of the engine he was unable to see whether or not Train No. 5 was into clear, but he thought Engineman Foss could have stopped his train in time if they were not into clear.

Conductor Smith, of Train No. 6, stated that approaching Wegdahl he noticed an application of the air brakes and as soon as he saw the headlight of Train No. 5 he went to the rear of the second car from the rear and opened the trap door in order to register with the crew of that train, but when his car had reached a point opposite the engine the train stopped with a jar. The speed of his train was 4 or 5 miles per hour at the time of the accident. Head Brakeman Cadwell and Flagman Rohl, of Train No. 6, estimated the speed of their train at the time of the accident to have been about 10 miles per hour.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Foss, of Train No. 6, to stop at a meeting point and ascertain that the track was clear, as required by the rules.

Rule 90 of the rules and regulations of the operating department provides in part as follows: "Trains must stop at schedule meeting points, if the train to be met is of the same class unless the switch is right and the track clear". Engineman Foss said he was unable to see the rear end of Train No. 5, due to steam blowing down over the train, but that he did see the switch lamp showing red, indicating that the switch was lined for the movement of his train, and he assumed that Train No. 5 had pulled into clear on the west-bound track, stating that the rules require a train to pull into clear before the

switch can be closed. Such a requirement, however, is in effect only in automatic block-signal territory, and while in this particular case the switch light indicated that the route was properly lined, this was not automatic block signal territory and Engineman Foss should have been governed by that part of rule 90 quoted above. This rule specifically states that trains must stop unless the switch is right and the track is clear, and in view of the fact that Engineman Foss did not know that the track was clear, due to his obscured vision, he should have stopped his train clear of the fouling point.

In the general instructions contained in the time table, rule 512-A of the automatic block signal rules is amplified in part as follows: "When trains take siding, in automatic block-signal territory, the main line switch must not be restored to normal position until rear end of train has passed the fouling point." It is clear that this provision does not apply in manual block-signal territory, and apparently this also was the understanding of some of the members of the crew of Train No. 5, the conductor and brakemen stating that it had not been the practice to wait until the train was clear before closing the switch, except in automatic block-signal territory. On the other hand, however, there appeared to be some question whether other employees involved in this investigation clearly understood the difference in the practices in handling switches prescribed by the rules in automatic block signal territory as compared with territory not equipped with automatic block signals. This condition should receive the prompt attention of responsible operating officers.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON

Director.