INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT ON THE CHICAGO, ROCK ISLAND & PACIFIC RAILWAY AT PACIFIC JUNCTION, OKLA., ON JUNE 11, 1934.

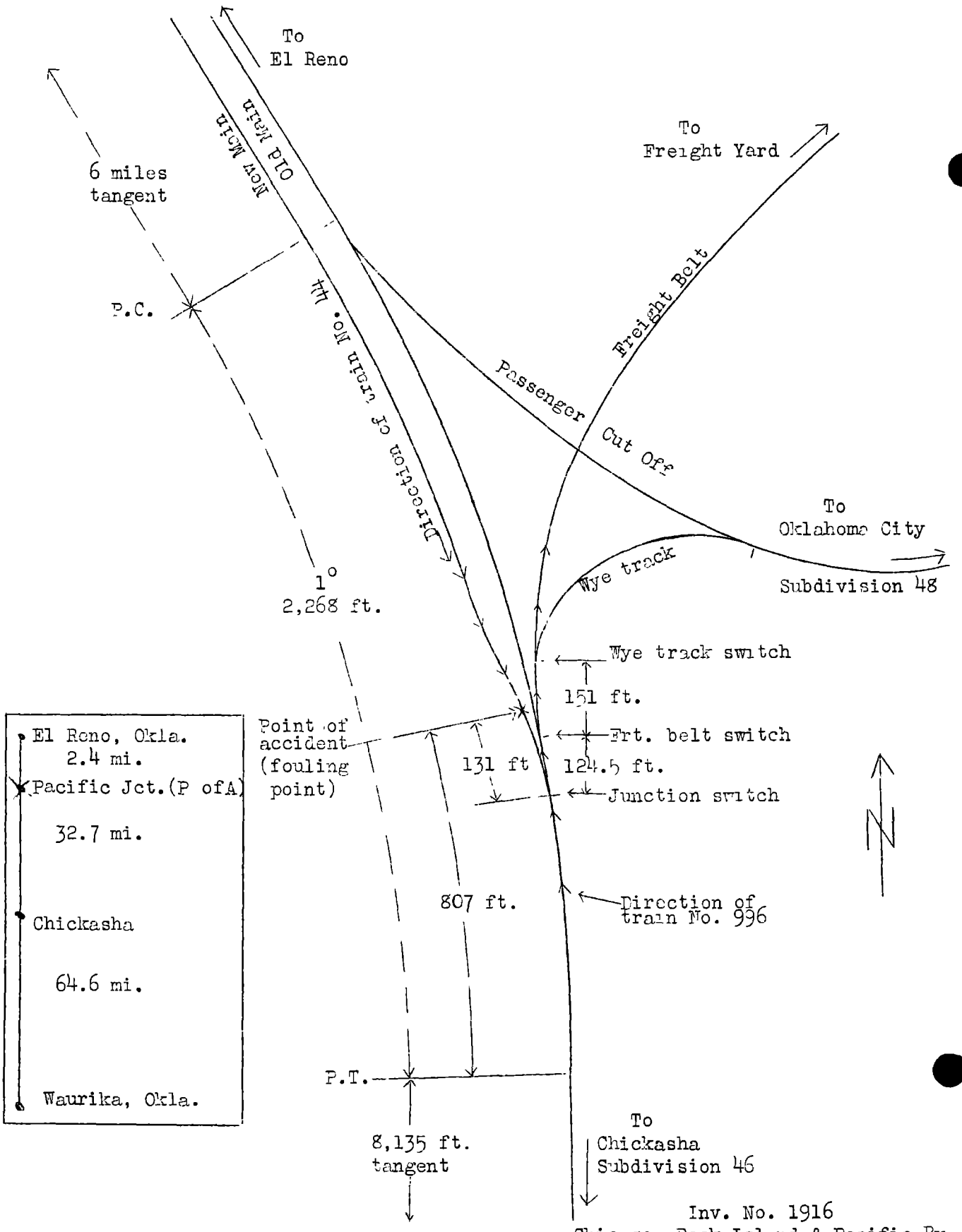
August 10, 1934.

To the Commission:

On June 11, 1934, there was a side collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway at Pacific Junction, Okla., which resulted in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on Sub-Division 46 of the Second District, Oklahoma Division, which extends between El Reno and Maurika, Okla., a distance of 99.7 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. In the vicinity of the point of accident the general direction of this sub-division is north and south, but time-table directions are east and west and these latter directions are used in this report. There is a wye at Pacific Junction, the passenger cut-off forming the east leg, a wye track the west leg, and two tracks designated as the new main and the old main forming the north leg. The latter two tracks converge into the single-track main line a short distance west of the wye track, and the accident occurred within yard limits at the fouling point of these tracks 131 feet east of the junction switch. At a point 124.5 feet east of the main track or junction switch another track, known as the freight belt track, leads off the old main, while 151 feet farther east the wye track leads off the freight belt track to the right and connects with Sub-Division 48. Approaching the point of accident from the west the track is tangent for a distance of 8,135 feet, followed by a 1° curve to the left 2,288 feet in length, and the accident occurred on this curve at a point 307 feet from its western end. Approaching from the east the track is tangent for a distance of 6 miles, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The track is slightly descending in both directions toward the junction switch, but is level at the point of accident.



Inv. No. 1916
Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Ry
Pacific Junction, Oklahoma
June 11, 1934

The switches involved are the junction switch, the freight belt switch and the wye track switch. The switch stands, of the Ramapo type, are equipped with lamps mounted approximately 8 feet above the head-block ties; the junction switch lamp displays a red indication when the switch is lined for a movement to the old main from the west and the other two switch lamps display green indications when the track is lined to the freight belt. All three switch stands are located on the engineman's side of an east-bound train moving toward the freight belt, while a clear view of the switch lights can ordinarily be had for a distance of approximately 1,460 feet from the leading car of a train backing westward on the new main track, but during such a movement the engineman's view of them is materially restricted on account of the curvature and his position behind the train.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:20 p.m.

Description

East-bound second-class freight Train No. 996 consisted of 68 freight cars, 1 passenger car, and a caboose, hauled by engine 2706, and was in charge of Conductor Pressley and Engineman Gateka. This train departed from Chickasha, 32.7 miles west of Pacific Junction, at 6:55 p.m., 40 minutes late, stopped at Pacific Junction about 11:20 p.m., 2 hours and 20 minutes late, then proceeded to pull into the freight belt track at a speed of about 10 miles per hour and it was while this movement was being made that the train was sideswiped by Train No. 44.

East-bound passenger Train No. 44 consisted of 1 combination passenger coach, of wooden construction, and 1 baggage car, of steel underframe construction, in the order named, being shoved by gas-electric motor 9000, and was in charge of Conductor Fox and Engineman Curry. This train left El Reno passenger station, 3,936 feet east of Pacific Junction, at 11:25 p.m., 10 minutes late, and was moving westward on the new main track, preparatory to heading eastward around the wye track and thence to its destination on Sub-Division 48, when it struck Train No. 996 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 6 and 10 miles per hour.

The left leading corner of the coach in the passenger train struck the forty-third car in the freight train, derailing the forward end of the coach to the right and crushing in its corner. The forty-third car was damaged but was not derailed; the forty-fourth car was derailed and badly damaged; none of the other equipment was derailed or damaged. The employee killed was the brakeman of Train No. 44.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Fox, of Train No. 44, stated that he had operated trains in and out of El Reno for a number of years and since May 20 had worked with Train No. 44 over the territory in which the accident occurred. The brakes were tested both from the engine and by use of the tail hose and they functioned properly. While leaving El Reno he rode on the steps at the head end of the leading car in order to get a better view and be in position to immediately pass signals to the engineman, but upon reaching a point about a train length from the main line switch at Pacific Junction he changed positions with the brakeman, who had been handling the tail hose, so that the brakeman could get off at the junction switch and throw it for the reverse movement as soon as the train passed. The brakeman had just gotten down on the steps when he shouted that there were cars on the main track and the conductor immediately applied the brakes in emergency by opening the tail hose valve, but it was then too late to stop. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident at not more than 8 miles per hour. Prior to the accident he did not see the cars nor the marker light on the caboose of Train No.996, but he had seen a flicker of two green switch lights while approaching the junction and thought this was due to the high wind which was blowing at the time; it did not occur to him that this interference was caused by cars passing between the switch lamps and his own train. Since the scheduled time of Train No. 44 was changed on May 20 he had not previously encountered a train entering the yard through the freight belt track; however, under the rules he knew that a freight train was authorized to pull into or out of the yard at any time, and that first-class trains are required to approach the junction at restricted speed prepared to stop short of an obstruction. He said that the night was very dark and the visibility poor, and he had given the engineman a slow signal while approaching the junction and the train was moving at a lower rate of speed than usual which he thought was with proper caution, but he admitted that he failed to definitely ascertain that the main track was not clear.

Engineman Curry, of Train No. 44, stated that the brakes were tested before departing from Shawnee, the initial terminal, and again after picking up a car at another station; he experienced no difficulty in making station stops en route. Another test of the brakes was made by means of the tail hose after a car was set out at El Reno, and about 15 minutes later the train started the back-up movement during which the accident occurred. The train

was moving at a speed of about 15 miles per hour when he received a slow signal from the leading car and he made a light application of the brakes, reducing the speed to about 10 or 12 miles per hour. After traveling a distance of about two car lengths, with the motor shut off and the brake valve in lap position, the lantern at the forward end was raised, the brakes were applied almost simultaneously and the train came to a sudden stop. He did not see any switch lights in advance of his train prior to the accident, but thought this was due to having become temporarily lost on account of the extreme darkness and it did not occur to him that their absence might be due to freight cars passing between him and the lights. He understood that in the absence of switch lights where they are usually displayed he was required to stop the train, but said that it is customary for the conductor to control back-up movements with the tail hose.

Engineman Gateka, of Train No. 996, stated that his train arrived at Pacific Junction about 11:20 p.m., and after the brakeman opened the switch the train started into the freight belt track at a low rate of speed; when the engine reached a point approximately 50 car lengths from the switch the brakes were applied and the train stopped. He did not see Train No. 44 approaching and did not learn that a collision had occurred until some time later. The statements of Fireman Tomlins corroborated those of Engineman Gateka as to the movement of their train prior to the accident. The three switch lights involved were burning when his engine passed them; he had never before approached Pacific Junction at the time Train No. 44 was making the back-up movement. Head Brakeman Williams stated that after he opened the switch for his train to enter the yard he looked ahead but saw no train approaching from the east. On his way back after the accident he observed that all three switch lights were burning.

Conductor Pressley, of Train No. 996, stated that his train was making the same movement and in the same manner that it makes every night from Pacific Junction to El Reno yard, under yard-limit rules. The train was traveling at a speed of 10 or 12 miles per hour when it suddenly stopped; upon going forward to locate the trouble he discovered that Train No. 44 had collided with the side of his train. It was his understanding that first-class trains in either direction are required to approach Pacific Junction expecting to find any other train, regardless of class, using the wye or a portion of the wye.

The Commission's inspectors made observations on the night of June 13 under similar weather conditions from the rear platform of a coach similar to the coach of Train No. 44 and while Train No. 996, with the same general makeup, was entering the freight belt track. The test train moved slowly westward on the new main track and the switch lights were plainly visible for a distance of 1,460 feet with nothing to obstruct the view before the freight train arrived; while this train was passing the lights they could not be seen either between the cars or over tops of tank cars, but they could be seen when low side gondola or flat cars were passing them.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Fox, of Train No. 44, properly to control the speed of his train during a back-up movement.

Under special instructions contained in the time table first-class trains approaching Pacific Junction in each direction are required to move at restricted speed expecting to find engines or trains turning on wye. The rules define restricted speed as proceeding prepared to stop short of a train, obstruction or anything that may require the speed of the train to be reduced. The rules further provide that a signal improperly displayed, or the absence of a signal at a place where a signal is usually shown, must be regarded as the most restrictive indication that can be given by that signal.

According to the statements of Conductor Fox it was so dark that visibility was materially restricted and he did not see the cars of Train No. 996 until his train collided with them, although he had previously given the engineman a slow signal and the speed had been reduced to some extent. His first intimation that the track was occupied was when the brakeman shouted a warning very shortly before the collision occurred and he immediately applied the brakes in emergency with the tail hose valve, but it was then too late to prevent the accident. He said that while his train was approaching the point of accident he saw two green switch lights which appeared to be flickering; he thought this was caused by wind getting under the bottoms of the lamps and it did not occur to him that the intermittent display of these lights might be caused by passing cars. Tests conducted subsequent to the accident revealed that these switch lights could not be seen from

a train approaching from the east while a train was entering the freight belt track except when a low car passed them, and if Conductor Fox had seen these lights only at invervals he should have realized that something was wrong and should have either brought his train to a stop or under such control that he could definitely ascertain what caused this unusual condition before it was too late to avert the accident.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.