

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3347
CHICAGO, ROCK ISLAND AND PACIFIC
RAILROAD COMPANY
IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR WEST UNION, IOWA, ON
JULY 29, 1950

SUMMARY

Date: July 29, 1950

Railroad: Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific

Location: West Union, Iowa

Kind of accident: Head-end collision

Equipment involved: Freight train : Track motor-car
RI-249

Train number: 811

Engine number: 1777

Consist: 7 cars, caboose

Estimated speeds: 15 m. p. h. : Unknown

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; 7°24' curve; 0.53 percent
descending grade westward

Weather: Clear

Time: 7:25 p. m.

Casualties: 1 killed

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

Recommendation: That the Chicago, Rock Island and
Pacific Railroad Company provide
adequate protection for movement
of track motor-cars on its line

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3347

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

CHICAGO, ROCK ISLAND AND PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

September 28, 1950

Accident near West Union, Iowa, on July 29, 1950, caused
by failure to provide adequate protection for the
movement of a track motor-car.

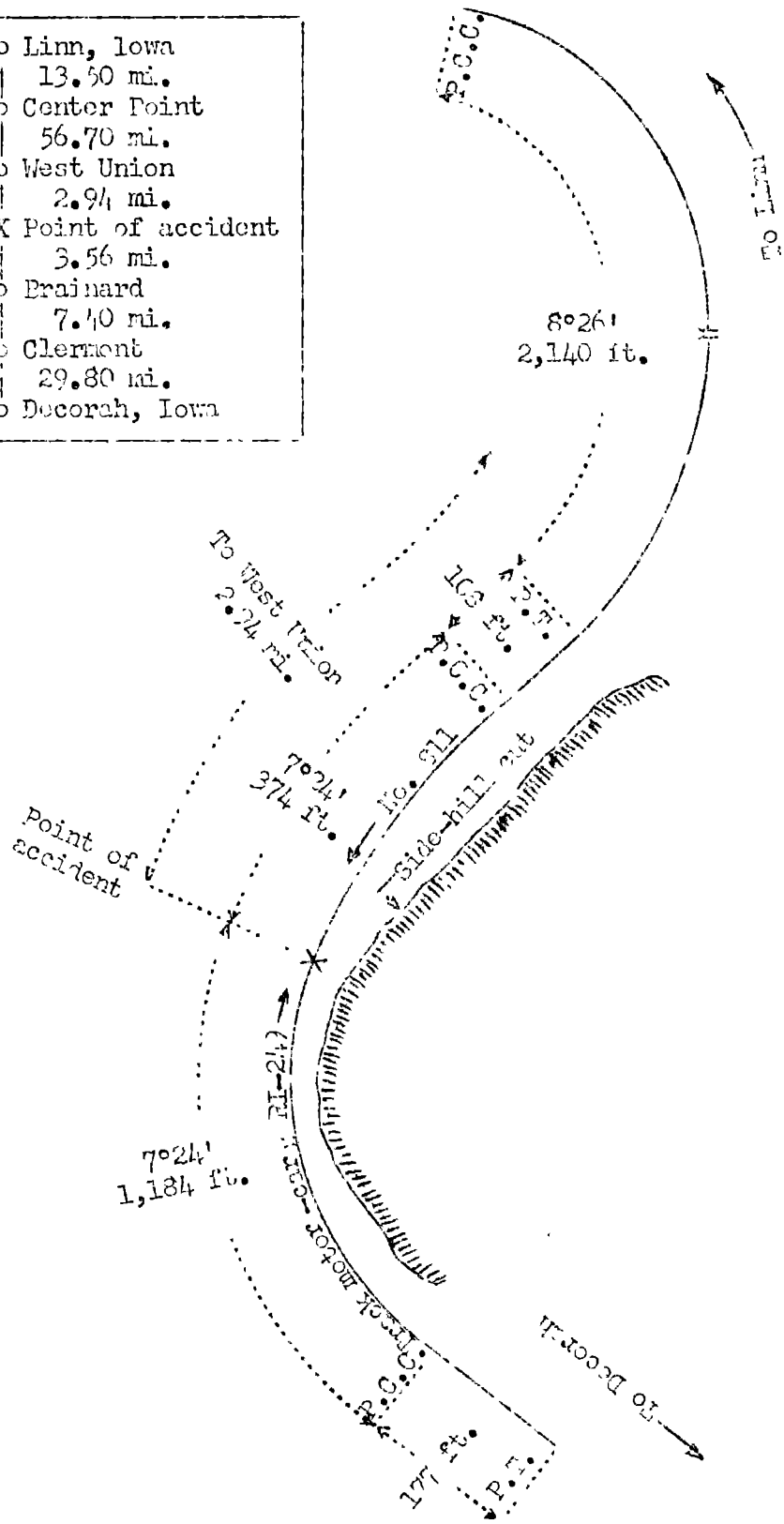
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On July 29, 1950, there was a head-end collision
between a freight train and a track motor-car on the
Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad near West Union,
Iowa, which resulted in the death of one maintenance-of-
way official.

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

- o Linn, Iowa
- | 13.50 mi.
- o Center Point
- | 56.70 mi.
- o West Union
- | 2.9 1/4 mi.
- X Point of accident
- | 3.56 mi.
- o Brainard
- | 7.40 mi.
- o Clermont
- | 29.80 mi.
- o Decorah, Iowa



Report No. 2317
 Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad
 West Union, Iowa
 July 27, 1950

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Cedar Rapids Division extending between Linn and Decorah, Iowa, 113.9 miles, a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track 73.14 miles west of Linn and 2.94 miles west of the station at West Union. From the east there are, in succession, a compound curve to the right, having a maximum curvature of 8°26', 2,140 feet in length, a tangent 108 feet, and a compound curve to the left, having a maximum curvature of 7°24', 374 feet to the point of accident and 1,184 feet westward. At the point of accident the specified curvature is 7°24'. From the west there is a tangent 177 feet and then the curve on which the accident occurred. At the point of accident the grade is 0.53 percent descending westward. In the vicinity of the point of accident the track is laid on a side-hill cut, the south wall of which rises to a maximum height of 30 feet.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

14. Engine Horn or Whistle Signals.--

* * *

NOTE.--The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "—" for longer sounds. * * *

Sound.	Indication.
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* * *

(1) — — o ———

Approaching public crossings at grade. * * * This signal must * * * be frequently sounded to warn trackmen and other employes when view is restricted by weather, obscure curves, * * *

* * *

This carrier's rules and instructions for maintenance-of-way and structures read in part as follows:

GENERAL MOTOR CAR RULES

126. Protection of Movements. Employees going to and coming from their work must exercise care to avoid accident. Information regarding train movements should be obtained from the dispatcher when practicable, but such information will under no circumstances relieve the person in charge of the car from fully protecting car and train movements at all times.

* * * on curves, and at other obscure and dangerous places, where trains cannot be seen sufficiently in advance to remove cars from track, special precaution must be taken to avoid accident. The operator of a car must protect himself with proper signals, when necessary. In case of doubt remove car from the track and know that it is safe to proceed before again attempting to operate car.

Employees must expect cars or trains to operate in either direction, on any track, at any time. * * *

The maximum authorized speed for the train involved was 30 miles per hour. The maximum authorized speed for the track motor-car was 20 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 811, a west-bound second-class freight train, consisted of engine 1777, seven cars and a caboosc. This train departed from Center Point, the last open office, 56.7 miles east of West Union, at 1:03 p. m., 5 hours 18 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 15 miles per hour it collided with track motor-car RI-249.

About 6 p. m. track motor-car RI-249, operated by a roadmaster, departed eastward from Clermont, 13.9 miles west of West Union. About 7:25 p. m., this motor-car, while moving at an unknown speed, collided with No. 811.

No. 811 stopped with the front end of the engine approximately 140 feet west of the point of accident. None of the equipment of this train was derailed or damaged. The track motor-car was derailed to the south and stopped against the front end of the engine of No. 811. It was somewhat damaged.

The roadmaster, who was the sole occupant of the motor-car, was killed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7:25 p. m.

Track motor-car RI-249 was of the four-wheel type, and was equipped with four-wheel brakes. It weighed 520 pounds, and was powered by a single-cylinder, 5-8 horsepower gasoline motor.

During the 10-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 2.8 trains.

Discussion

The investigation disclosed that track motor-car RI-249, operated by a roadmaster, arrived at Clermont about 5:30 p. m. The roadmaster requested the agent-operator at Clermont to obtain from the dispatcher information concerning the location of No. 811. The dispatcher informed the agent-operator that No. 811 had departed from Center Point at 1:03 p. m., and the agent-operator so informed the roadmaster. The dispatcher was not aware at that time the information was to be used for the operation of a track motor-car. The roadmaster informed the agent-operator at Clermont that he would obtain further information concerning the location of No. 811 when he arrived at Brainard, 7.4 miles east of Clermont. However, he did not communicate with the dispatcher after he departed from Clermont.

As No. 811 approached the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 16 miles per hour. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from their respective positions in the cab of the engine, and the conductor and two brakemen were in the caboose. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. No train order restricting the movement of No. 811 with respect to track motor-cars had been issued. The members of the crew of this train had not been informed that a track motor-car was occupying the main track. The engineer sounded the rail-highway grade-crossing engine-whistle signal when the engine was about 2,200 feet east of the point where the accident occurred. Because of track curvature and vegetation on the wall of the cut south of the track, the view of the point where the accident occurred from the left side of the cab of a west-bound engine was restricted to a distance of about 330 feet. The view from the right side of the cab was obstructed by the boiler. The fireman first saw the track motor-car when it came into view on the curve and called a warning to the engineer, who

immediately initiated an emergency application of the brakes. The speed of the train was reduced to about 15 miles per hour when the collision occurred. The fireman said the speed of the track motor-car was not reduced before the collision occurred.

The rules of this carrier provide that an operator of a track motor-car will be given a line-up of train movements if he requests it. However, under no circumstances does the information contained in a line-up relieve the track motor-car operator of responsibility for collision. Track motor-car operators are required to provide the same degree of protection when they have a line-up as when they do not have it. A line-up does not confer authority for a track motor-car to occupy the main track. Train crews are not informed when a track motor-car is occupying the main track. Since January 1, 1944, the Commission has investigated thirty collisions, including the present case, which were caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars. These accidents resulted in the death of 60 persons and the injury of 101 persons.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of a track motor-car.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company provide adequate protection for movement of track motor-cars on its line.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-eighth day of September, 1950.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.