

Inv-2137

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
CHICAGO, SPRINGFIELD & ST. LOUIS RAILWAY

SPRINGFIELD, ILL.

JANUARY 11, 1937

INVESTIGATION NO. 2137

SUMMARY

INV-2137

Railroad: Chicago, Springfield & St. Louis
Date: January 11, 1937
Location: Springfield, Ill.
Kind of accident: Collision with motor truck at highway
grade crossing
Train involved: Passenger
Train number: 8
Consist: Gasoline motor car 151
Speed: 25 m.p.h.; motor truck 10-30 m.p.h.
Track: 2° curve to right; highway tangent
Weather: Cloudy
Time: 5:23 p.m.
Casualties: 1 killed, 2 injured
Cause: Motor truck starting over crossing
at grade directly in front of
approaching train.

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March 16, 1937

To the Commission:

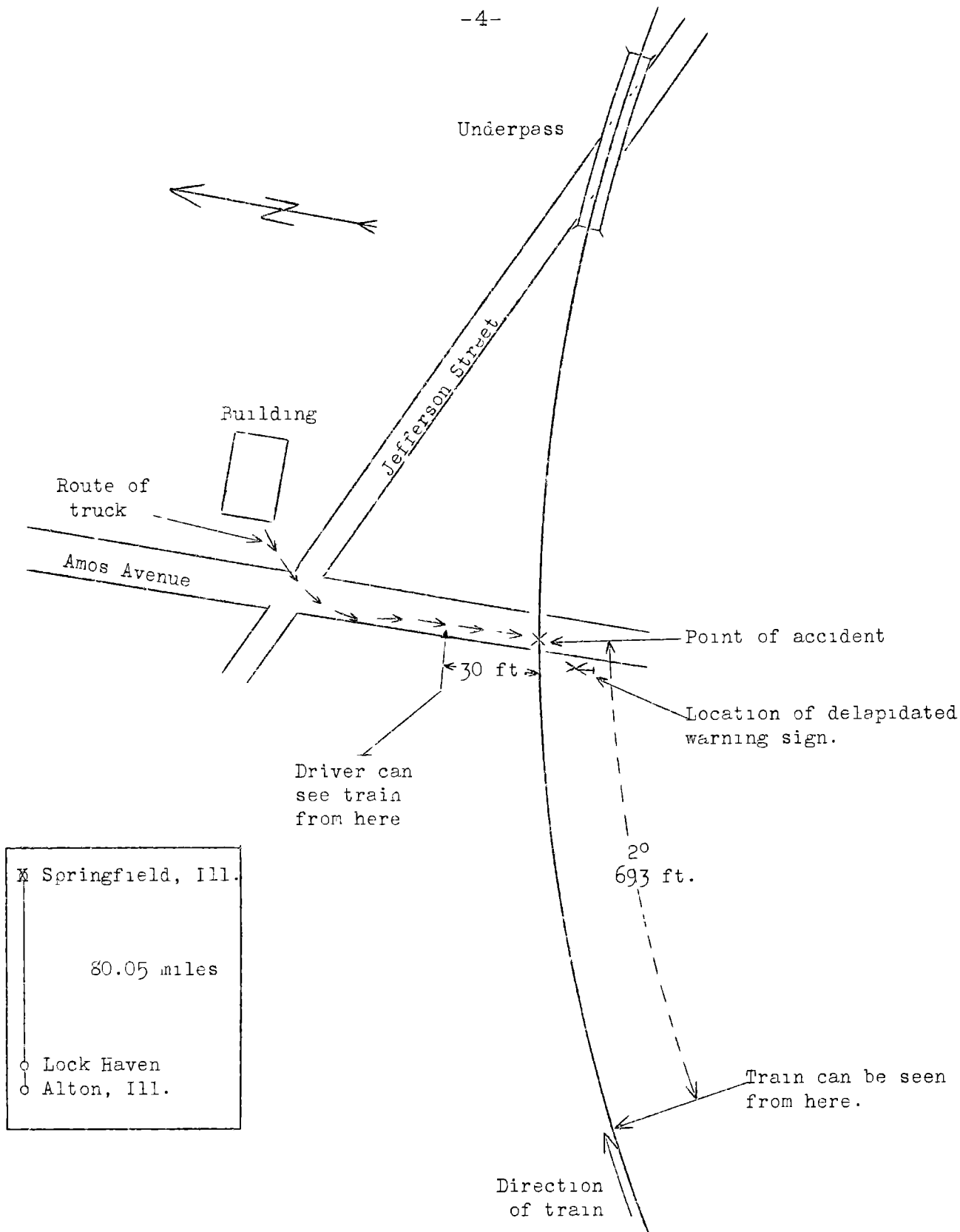
On January 11, 1937, there was a collision between a passenger train and a motor truck at a highway grade crossing on the Chicago, Springfield & St. Louis Railway at Springfield, Ill., which resulted in the death of a passenger on the truck, and the injury of the truck driver and a second passenger who was riding with him.

Location and method of operation

This railway extends between Springfield and Lock Haven, Ill., a distance of 80.05 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block signal system being in use. Timetable directions are north and south, while the corresponding compass directions in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident are east and west; timetable directions are used throughout this report. The point of accident was where the track crosses a public highway known as Amos Avenue; approaching this point on the railway from the south, the track is laid on a 2° curve to the right 3,661 feet in length, the accident occurring on the curve at a point 2,249 feet from its receiving end. The grade is undulating, and is 0.62 percent descending for north-bound trains approaching the point of accident.

Amos Avenue, which crosses the track at an angle of about 85° is 24 feet in width at the crossing and is surfaced with a mixture of crushed stone and tar, the same material being used on the crossing except for 10-inch planks on each side of the rails. Approaching the crossing from the direction of Jefferson Street, which crosses Amos Avenue 166 feet west of the track, the grade is 4.5 percent ascending for a distance of 50 feet and then is 6 percent ascending for a distance of 85 feet to the edge of the crossing, which is level and well maintained.

The view of the crossing to be had by the engineman of a north-bound passenger motor car similar to the one involved in this accident is restricted by the curvature of the track to a distance of 693 feet, while such a north-bound train can be seen a distance of 726 feet by the driver of an east-bound vehicle from a point on the highway 85 feet west of the west rail. After the driver has reached a point 30 feet from the track he can see the train clearly for a distance of 693



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feet south of the crossing and this view continues until he reaches the crossing.

A crossing-warning sign of the cross-bar type is located in the southeast angle of the intersection at a point 18 feet from the center of the track, on the edge of the highway. At the time of the accident one of the cross bars was missing and the words "RAIL ROAD" which appeared on the remaining bar were scarcely visible; in fact, it is doubtful whether one not familiar with the conditions would know that this was intended as a warning sign.

The weather was cloudy, and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred at 5:23 p.m.

Description

Train No. 8, an east-bound passenger train, consisted of gasoline motor car 151, in charge of Conductor Simpson and Engineman Hornbuckle. This car was of steel construction, and contained separate compartments for baggage, mail, and passengers, with the engineman's position in the left front corner of the car. Train No. 8 passed Hurd, 3.49 miles from Springfield, at 5:19 p.m., according to the engineman, on time, and collided with the motor truck at Amos Avenue while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 25 miles per hour.

The motor truck involved was a Ford V-8 truck, 1937 model, driven by the Owner, William Sommers, of Springfield, who was accompanied by two passengers riding with him in the driver's cab. The truck had been driven away from a tavern located in the northwest angle of the intersection of Jefferson Street and Amos Avenue, crossed Jefferson Street, proceeded eastward along Amos Avenue, and was about to pass over the crossing when the right front fender collided with the left front corner of the motor car while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 10 and 30 miles per hour.

The passenger motor car was not derailed, and stopped with its front end 170 feet north of the center line of the crossing; it sustained only minor damage. The motor truck stopped about 30 feet from the crossing and 21 feet from the center of the track, while the motor was torn from the chassis and demolished.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Hornbuckle said he started the automatic bell ringer just before using the horn for the purpose of sounding the crossing warning signal, at a point about 400 feet from the crossing, and that he then repeated the signal, starting the last blast just before the accident occurred. He saw the headlights of the truck just before it reached the crossing, traveling at a speed which he thought must have been about 30 miles per hour, although it was difficult to judge its speed under existing conditions, and said that the truck and the train reached the crossing together; he applied the brakes simultaneously with the occurrence of the collision. Engineman Hornbuckle further stated that the headlight on his train was burning and that the brakes had been tested before departing on the trip and had operated properly in making 14 station stops en route, but when the collision occurred the brake pipes at the front of the car were broken, resulting in destroying all of his braking power; he estimated the speed of his train to have been about 25 miles per hour at the time of the collision. It was the opinion of Engineman Hornbuckle that the driver of the motor truck could have avoided the accident had he paid attention to where he was going.

Conductor Simpson, who was riding in the rear seat on the right side of the passenger compartment, said he heard a long blast on the whistle and felt a jar, and then something struck and broke the windows in the passenger compartment. On getting out of the car he went back to the crossing, and he stated that none of the occupants of the truck appeared to be under the influence of liquor.

Driver Sommers said he had delivered a load of coal and while so engaged had taken an order for a load to be delivered on the following day, after which he was asked by the last customer to take him to the tavern, which was done. At this point another man, named Fifer, was met and they had one drink of beer, remaining at the tavern about 10 or 15 minutes. The three men then left the tavern and got into the cab of the truck, with Sommers on the left side, Fifer in the middle, and the third man, who was killed in the accident, on the right side. According to Driver Sommers, he started from the tavern in low gear, stopped for Jefferson Street, started again in low gear, shifted to second after crossing Jefferson Street, and continued in that gear until the time of the accident, at which time the speed of the truck was about 10 miles per hour. Driver Sommers did not see or hear the approaching

train until he was right up to the track, and said he was not very familiar with the crossing, which he seldom used; he did, however, know there was a track in that vicinity. It also appeared from the statements of Driver Sommers that the truck was equipped with a radio, but that it would not operate when the motor was running, and that the occupants of the driver's cab were not engaged in conversation; the truck's headlights were burning, and the driver said it was his practice to keep the ventilators open all the time and the windows partly open. He did not know whether the headlight of the gasoline motor car was burning. Driver Sommers stated that it was not his practice to stop at railroad grade crossings, but to reduce speed and shift into second gear, and when employing drivers he would not give them instructions about railroad crossings other than to tell them to watch themselves and to be careful.

Joseph Fifer, who had boarded the truck at the tavern, corroborated the statements of Driver Sommers to the effect that the truck was being operated in second gear at a speed of about 10 miles per hour, saying that the truck was still being broken in. Mr. Fifer, who was familiar with conditions in the vicinity of the crossing, said he did not hear the whistle or bell of the approaching train, neither did he see the train until an instant before the accident occurred. It further appeared from Mr. Fifer's statements that Driver Sommers had had only one drink of beer in the tavern and did not appear in any way to be under the influence of liquor.

The motor truck involved in this accident had been purchased about 30 days previously and had been driven between 1,200 and 1,300 miles. It was a light truck, having a chassis with a factory rating of $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons, on a wheel base of 131 inches; and was equipped with an enclosed cab and a hydraulic-hoist, 8-foot, steel dump body; the brakes were operated by air. At the time of the accident this truck was empty. The driver of this truck said he had been operating motor vehicles about 13 years and had had no prior accidents; he did not have a chauffeur's license, but had had such a license in 1936. This driver also said that he did not carry any personal liability insurance as a driver, or any insurance on the truck.

A 24-hour check of traffic over the crossing involved in this accident showed that on the railway there were 7 trains, while on the highway there were 29 busses, 205 trucks, and 415 automobiles, the average for traffic on the highway being 27.04 vehicles per hour; the period of heaviest traffic was between 4 and 5 p.m., when 86 motor vehicles passed over the crossing.

Discussion

The engineman of the train involved in this accident said that the headlight was burning and the bell ringing, and that he had sounded two crossing warning signals on the horn with which the gasoline motor car was equipped, the last blast of the second of these signals having been started just before the accident occurred. Notwithstanding these warnings, however, it appeared that as the truck approached the crossing neither the driver nor the other surviving occupant of the driver's cab heard or saw the train approaching from the driver's right until the truck had practically reached the crossing. The driver knew there was a track in the vicinity, and the train could have been seen a distance of several hundred feet; had the driver been exercising proper care there is no reason why he should not have been able to see the train in ample time to stop.

There is nothing in the vicinity of the point of accident to indicate the existence of a railway crossing other than a dilapidated sign in the southeast angle of the intersection; apparently this sign at one time had been a standard cross-bar sign, but one of the bars was missing and the words on the other bar were scarcely visible. Under such circumstances the driver of a motor vehicle not familiar with the crossing would have no warning of the fact that he was approaching a railway track, and even when paying close attention to the highway ahead of him he could easily find himself in a very dangerous situation. Driver Sommers did not advance the lack of an adequate warning sign at this point as a cause or a contributing cause of the accident, but nevertheless it should be pointed out that there is no justification for failure to maintain in serviceable condition such warnings as may be provided for the purpose, and the least that responsible authorities can do is to see to it that on each side of the track, on the driver's side of the highway, there is erected a suitable warning sign for the protection of traffic moving over the highway, and then take the necessary steps to insure that such signs are properly maintained at all times.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the action of the driver of a motor vehicle in starting over a railroad crossing at grade at the time that an approaching train started to pass over the crossing.

Recommendation

It is recommended that immediate steps be taken to erect suitable crossing warning signs on each side of the track and to maintain them in proper condition to serve the purpose for which intended.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.