

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3509
CHICAGO, SAINT PAUL, MINNEAPOLIS AND OMAHA
RAILWAY COMPANY
IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR SHELDON, IOWA, ON
FEBRUARY 21, 1953

SUMMARY

Date: February 21, 1953

Railroad: Chicago, Saint Paul, Minneapolis
and Omaha

Location: Sheldon, Iowa

Kind of accident: Head-end collision

Trains involved: Snow plow : Passenger

Train numbers: Extra 425 East : 203

Engine numbers: 425 : Diesel-electric
units 5019B and
5009A

Consists: Snow plow, caboose : 8 cars

Estimated speeds: 25 m. p. h. : 40 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; tangent; 0.50 percent
ascending grade eastward

Weather: Clear

Time: 9:59 p. m.

Casualties: 1 killed; 35 injured

Cause: Train occupying main track on time of
an opposing superior train without
protection

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3509

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

CHICAGO, SAINT PAUL, MINNEAPOLIS AND OMAHA RAILWAY COMPANY

April 13, 1953

Accident near Sheldon, Iowa, on February 21, 1953, caused by
a train occupying the main track on the time of an
opposing superior train without protection.

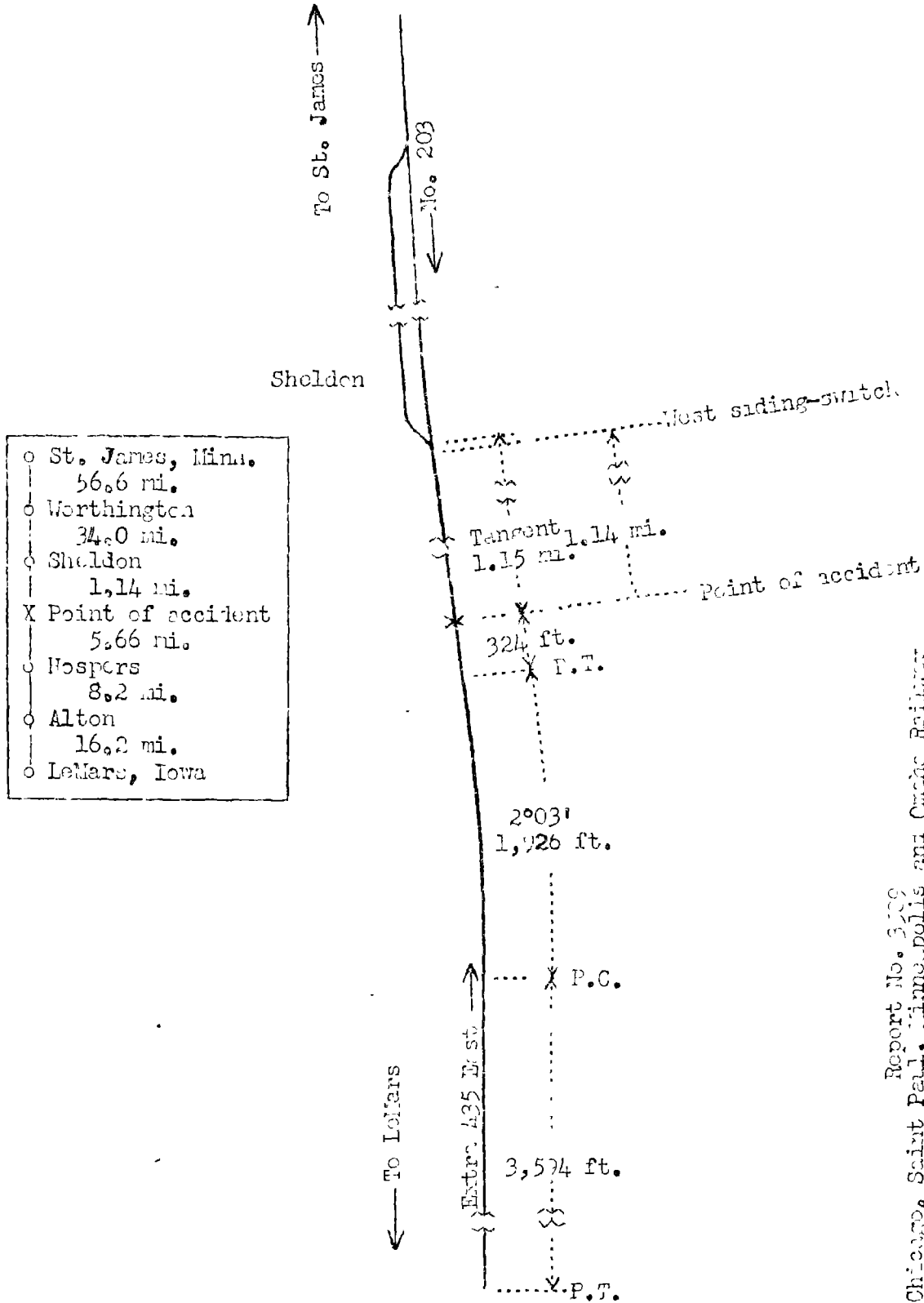
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On February 21, 1953, there was a head-end collision between a snow plow and a passenger train on the Chicago, Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway near Sheldon, Iowa, which resulted in the death of 1 train-service employee, and the injury of 17 passengers, 1 Pullman Company employee, 4 railway mail clerks, 4 dining-car employees, and 9 train-service employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Iowa State Commerce Commission.

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



Report No. 3209
 Chicago, Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway
 Sheldon, Iowa
 February 21, 1953

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Western Division extending between LeMars, Iowa, and St. James, Minn., 120.8 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 at a point 31.2 miles east of LeMars and 1.14 miles west of the west siding-switch at Sheldon, Iowa. From the west there are, in succession, a tangent 3,594 feet in length, a 2°05' curve to the left 1,926 feet, and a tangent 324 feet to the point of accident and 1.15 miles eastward. The grade is 0.50 percent ascending eastward at the point of accident.

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

75. Extra trains are inferior to regular trains.

S-07. An inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains and failing to clear the main track by the time required by rule must be protected as prescribed by Rule 99.

Extra trains must clear the time of opposing regular trains not less than five minutes unless otherwise provided * * *

99. When a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection * * *

* * *

The front of the train must be protected in the same way when necessary by a trainman, engineman or fireman.

* * *

210. * * *

Enginemen must show train orders to firemen and when practicable to forward trainmen. Conductors must show train orders when practicable to trainmen. Firemen and trainmen must insist on seeing, and are required to read train orders and Clearance Form A at first opportunity, and if necessary remind enginemen and conductors of their contents.

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS

E.

Time Orders.

- (1) No 1 run 50 mins late A to G.
* * *

This makes the schedule time of the train named, between the stations designated, as much later as stated in the order, and any other train receiving the order is required to run with respect to this later time as before required to run with respect to the regular schedule time. The time in the order should be such as can be easily added to the schedule time.

* * *

FREIGHT BRAKEMEN.

1005. Read all train orders received by the conductor or engineman. Keep them in mind and assist in their observance. Call attention of conductor or engineman immediately to any apparent failure to observe train orders or to clear the time of superior trains or to comply with Rules and instructions.

ENGINEMEN AND FIREMEN.

1048. The fireman must read all train orders received by the engineman, and keep them in mind and assist in their observance, also call attention of engineman immediately to any apparent failure to observe train orders or to clear the time of superior trains or to comply with Rules and instructions.

The maximum authorized speeds are 59 miles per hour for passenger trains and 49 miles per hour for freight trains.

Description of Accident

Extra 425 East, an east-bound train, consisted of a snow plow, engine 425, and a caboose, in the order named. At Alton, 16.2 miles east of LeMars, the crew received copies of train order No. 204 reading as follows:

No 203 run Four 4 Hours and Forty Five
45 Mins late Worthington to LeMars

Worthington is located 66.2 miles east of LeMars. No. 203 is due to leave Sheldon, 16 miles east of Alton, at 4:43 p. m. and to leave Hospers, 8.2 miles east of Alton, at 4:53 p. m. There is a siding at each of these stations. Extra 425 East departed from Alton at 9:25 p. m., the time it was required to clear the main track at Sheldon if it proceeded to that station to meet No. 203, operated through the siding at Hospers for the purpose of clearing the track of snow, re-entered the main track at the east siding-switch, and while moving at an estimated speed of 25 miles per hour it collided with No. 203 at a point 1.14 miles west of the west siding-switch at Sheldon.

No. 203, a west-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 5019B and 5009A, coupled in multiple-unit control, one baggage-mail car, one baggage-passenger car, three coaches, one dining car, one sleeping car, and one coach, in the order named. The first, second, third, and sixth cars were of conventional all-steel construction. The other cars were of lightweight steel construction and were equipped with tightlock couplers. At Worthington the crew received copies of train order No. 264. This train departed from Worthington at 9:12 p. m., 5 hours 9 minutes late, departed from Sheldon at 9:55 p. m., 5 hours 12 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 40 miles per hour it collided with Extra 425 East.

The snow plow was demolished. The engine and caboose of Extra 425 East were moved westward 1,077 feet by the force of the impact. The engine was badly damaged, and the caboose was slightly damaged. Both Diesel-electric units and the front truck of the first car of No. 203 were derailed. The first Diesel-electric unit stopped with the front end 190 feet west of the point of accident and 38 feet south of the track, and the rear end 17 feet south of the track. The second unit became separated from the first unit. It stopped with the front end against the rear end of the first unit and the rear end on the track structure. The first car stopped approximately in line with the track. Both Diesel-electric units were badly damaged. The fourth car was considerably damaged. The other cars, with the exception of the rear two cars, were somewhat damaged.

The engineer of No. 203 was killed. The fireman, the conductor, the train baggageman, the front brakeman, and the flagman of No. 203, and the engineer, the conductor, the front brakeman, and the flagman of Extra 425 East were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 9:59 p. m.

The snow plow involved consisted of a wedge-type plowing device attached to one end of a steel gondola car. The car was ballasted with 82,100 pounds of rock. The maximum height of the plowing device was 11 feet 6 inches, and the maximum width was 10 feet 10 inches.

Discussion

The crews of both trains held copies of train order No. 264, which provided that No. 203 would run 4 hours 45 minutes late from Worthington to LeMars. Under the rules, unless flag protection was provided as prescribed by rule No. 20, Extra 425 East was required to clear the main track at Hospers not later than 9:33 p. m. or at Sheldon not later than 9:25 p. m., if it proceeded to either of these stations to meet No. 203.

When the accident occurred the crew of Extra 425 East was returning to St. James after having made a west-bound trip from St. James to Alton. On the west-bound trip the train arrived at Alton at 7:45 p. m. About 8:35 p. m. the operator delivered copies of four train orders to the crew. These train orders included order No. 264 and an order which required Extra 425 East to enter the siding at Sheldon to meet a west-bound extra train. The entire crew was in the office either at the time the orders were delivered or immediately after they were delivered. The engineer, the fireman, and the conductor read the orders, but the front brakeman and the flagman did not. The fireman said that after reading the orders he left the office and returned to the engine. He did not hear the other members of the crew mention No. 203. The engineer said that when he read order No. 264 he calculated that No. 203 would be 4 hours 45 minutes late at Sheldon at 10:20 p. m. He said that other members of the crew agreed with him as to the time at Sheldon, but he was not certain which members of the crew were present when the orders were discussed. The conductor said that he did not take part in a discussion of order No. 264, but he, too, made an error of 1 hour in calculating the time at which his train was required to clear the main track for No. 203. The front brakeman and the flagman said that before they left the office another member of the crew informed them that their train was to enter the siding at Sheldon to meet a west-bound extra train and that No. 203 would not leave Sheldon earlier than 10:28 p. m. They could not remember which member of the crew gave them this information.

After a west-bound train passed Alton, at 9:21 p. m., Extra 425 East departed. No snow had fallen since the snow plow had operated west-bound through this territory about 1 hour 30 minutes earlier. As Extra 425 East was moving on the curve immediately west of the point of accident the speed was about 25 miles per hour. The headlight of the engine was lighted brightly. The enginemen were in their respective positions in the cab of the engine. The members of the train crew were in the caboose. The front brakeman, who was riding on the left side of the caboose, observed the headlight of No. 203 at a distance of about 1 mile. He told the other employees in the caboose that an opposing train was in sight. The conductor replied that the opposing train was the west-bound extra train which their train was to meet at Sheldon. None of these employees took action to stop the train. The fireman, who was not regularly employed in this capacity by the carrier, was not aware that the train was on the time of No. 203. He did not see No. 203 before the accident occurred. Because of curvature of the track, the engineer could not see the headlight of No. 203 until his train was closely approaching the point where the accident occurred. When he observed the headlight, he immediately made an emergency application of the brakes. The collision occurred before the speed of the train had been materially reduced.

As No. 203 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 40 miles per hour. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment at the front of the locomotive. The members of the train crew were in various locations in the cars of the train. The headlight and the oscillating signal light were lighted brightly. The members of the crew had read and understood train order No. 264. The fireman said that because of the snow plow in front of the engine of Extra 425 East, he did not see the headlight of that train until the train entered the tangent on which the accident occurred. When he saw the headlight he called a warning to the engineer. The engineer immediately made an emergency application of the brakes. The collision occurred before the speed of the train had been materially reduced.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by a train occupying the main track on the time of an opposing superior train without protection.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this thirteenth day of April, 1938.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

GEORGE W. LAIRD,
Acting Secretary.