

1933

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE CLEVELAND, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO & ST. LOUIS
RAILWAY AT LAWRENCEVILLE, ILL. ON SEPTEMBER 18, 1934.

November 14, 1934.

To the Commission:

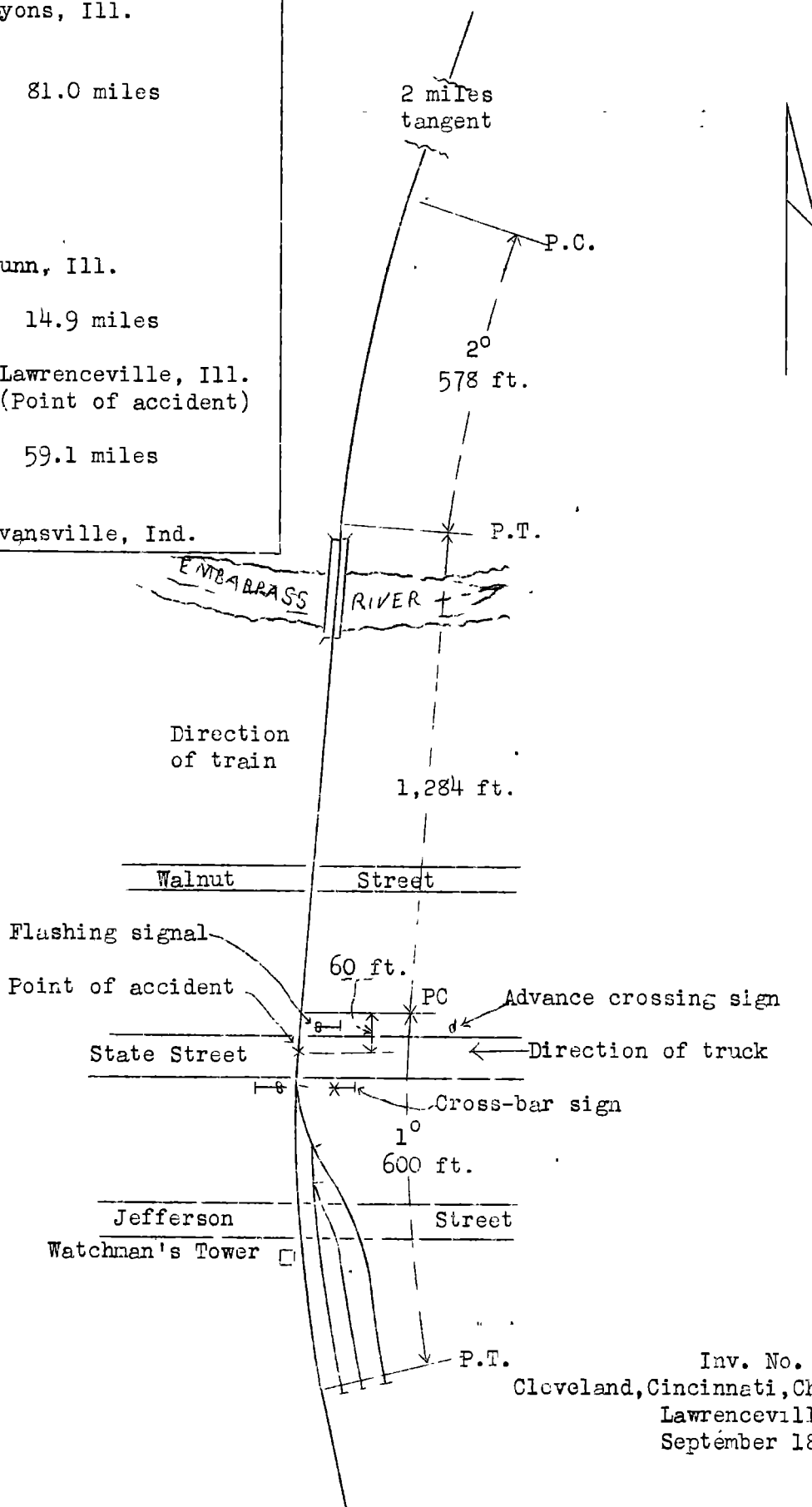
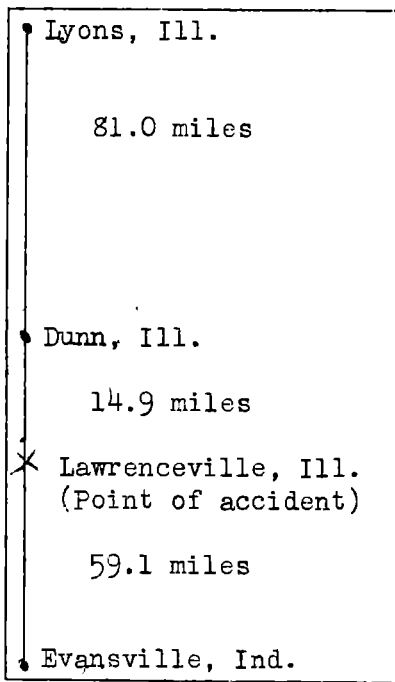
On September 18, 1934, a passenger train on the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis Railway struck a truck and was derailed at a highway grade crossing at Lawrenceville, Ill., this accident resulting in the death of 1 employee and 1 person who was riding on the truck, and the injury of 1 passenger and the driver of the truck.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Illinois Division extending between Lyons, Ill., and Evansville, Ind., a distance of 155 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred on State Street, where U. S. Route 50 crosses the track at an angle of 81° . Approaching the crossing from the north on the railroad, there is a 2° curve to the left 578 feet in length, 1,284 feet of tangent, and a 1° curve to the left 600 feet in length, the accident occurring on this latter curve at a point about 60 feet from its northern end. The grade for nearly 2,000 feet is 0.55 percent ascending for south-bound trains.

State Street is paved and is 30 feet in width; it extends east and west and is straight for a considerable distance on each side of the crossing, while the grade for west-bound traffic is descending to the crossing. South of State Street there are three short stub-end sidings which parallel the main track on the east; the main line switch leading to these sidings is a facing-point switch for south-bound trains and is located only a few feet south of the street crossing.

Between the hours of 6 a.m. and midnight the crossing is protected by electric flashing-light signals which are controlled by means of a switch manually operated by a crossing watchman from a tower located on the west side of the track south of Jefferson Street, which parallels State Street one city block



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farther south. From midnight to 6 a.m., within which period this accident occurred, no watchman is on duty and the flashing light signals are not in service. There is an advance railroad-warning sign of the reflector type on a pole on the north side of State Street located about 250 feet east of the crossing; also a cross-bar sign on the south side of State Street about 20 feet east of the track. There was no sign to indicate the hours during which the flashing-light signal was not in service.

From the driver's seat of a west-bound vehicle, the view of a train approaching from the north is materially restricted because of the angle of the crossing and by dwellings, trees, and a garage, making it necessary to approach close to the track before a south-bound train can be seen for any material distance. At a point 20 feet east of the center line of the track a south-bound train can be seen for a distance of 338 feet, but at a point 10 feet from the center line of the track it can be seen for a distance of 1,500 feet.

The weather was partly cloudy and visibility was fair at the time of the accident, which occurred about 5:35 a.m., shortly after sunrise.

Description

South-bound passenger Train No. 131 consisted of 2 express cars, 1 combination mail and baggage car, 2 coaches, 3 Pullman sleeping cars and 1 business car, in the order named, hauled by engine 6485, and was in charge of Conductor Leseure and Engineman Manley. The cars were of all-steel construction with the exception of the last car, which was of steel-underframe construction. According to the train sheet this train passed Dunn, the last open office, 14.9 miles north of Lawrenceville, at 5:21 a.m., 16 minutes late; it was derailed due to striking a motor truck on the crossing at State Street in Lawrenceville while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 30 and 35 miles per hour.

The motor truck involved consisted of a 6-cylinder, 1½-ton Diamond-T tractor, 1933 model, hauling a 3-ton Fruehauf semi-trailer, the total length of tractor and trailer being about 30 feet. The truck was owned and operated by the Ray Miller Trucking Co., Terre Haute, Ind.; at the time of the accident it was hauling a load of mixed freight and was being driven by Driver Everett Kiser. On arrival at Lawrenceville a stop was made at a point about one block east of the crossing and then the truck proceeded and was moving over the crossing at a speed estimated to have been about 6 miles per hour when it was struck by Train No. 131.

The tractor was thrown to the west of the track and the trailer to the east, both being demolished. Engine 6485, its tender and the first three cars were derailed; the engine followed the main track and was partly overturned, stopping with its front end about 300 feet south of the crossing; the cars followed the first of the stub-end sidings on the left or east side of the main track. The employee killed was the fireman.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Manley stated that the speed of his train was about 60 miles per hour when about 1 mile north of Lawrenceville; on entering the curve about 2,000 feet north of State Street crossing he made about a 15-pound brake-pipe reduction and also used sand, following which he kept the brakes applied. Just after passing the whistling post or when about half way over the bridge spanning Embarrass River he started to sound the whistle signal for the crossing at Walnut Street, located immediately north of State Street, and in the meantime he made a further brake-pipe reduction. The whistle signal was completed by the time his engine reached Walnut Street and he at once started sounding the whistle signal for State Street and then the fireman jumped off the seat box and shouted a warning of danger, whereupon the engineman immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position, no release having been made from the previous service application. Just before the engine reached State Street, at which time the speed of the train had been reduced to about 50 or 35 miles per hour, the tractor of the truck suddenly appeared directly in front of him. In his opinion the wreckage from the truck struck the switch stand of the switch leading to the stub-end sidings, resulting in the switch stand being torn out, opening the switch points and causing the derailment of the train. After the accident the bell on the engine was still ringing. Engineman Manley further stated that it was just daylight, but the headlight on his engine was still burning when the accident occurred; the air brakes on his train worked properly.

Conductor Leseure was in the fifth car and Brakeman Latsure in the sixth car; they were unaware of anything wrong until the accident occurred. Their statements as to what transpired prior to the accident, so far as the handling of the train was concerned, speed, braking, and whistle signals, were similar to those of Engineman Manley.

Truck Driver Kiser, 24 years old, stated that he stopped the truck when about one block from the crossing and that the man who had obtained permission to ride with him helped check the oil.

Driver Kiser said that he was familiar with this crossing, and knew that the view at the crossing was materially obstructed and that it was necessary to proceed at a low rate of speed; he also knew that it was protected by flashing-light signals; however, he was not aware of the fact that during certain hours these signals were not in service. His truck approached the crossing in low gear at a speed of about 6 miles per hour, and owing to the fact that the flashing-light signal gave no indication he assumed that no train was approaching; the first he knew of anything wrong was when he saw the engine only a short distance away, just before it struck the truck. He heard the engine whistle sounded when the truck was on the crossing, just before the accident occurred, but did not hear the engine bell ringing; he also said that the headlight on the engine was not burning. He further stated that the truck was in first-class condition in every respect. He said he had been on duty about 3 hours when the accident occurred, prior to which he had been off duty for more than 48 hours.

Mr. Ray Miller, of the Ray Miller Trucking Company, owner of the truck involved, stated that Driver Kiser had been in the employ of his company since August 8, 1954, prior to which time he had been employed by another trucking company for a period of about 4 years. All drivers are instructed to be sure that the way is clear before starting over railroad crossings at grade, and not to take any chances. A safety meeting was held about 3 weeks prior to the accident at which Driver Kiser was present. The other man riding on the truck, who was killed as a result of the accident, was not in the employ of the trucking company but had obtained permission to ride with a view toward later obtaining employment as a driver. The trucks owned by this company are serviced and checked after each round trip, totaling about 350 miles; the truck involved had covered approximately 50,000 miles and its general mechanical condition was good; on examining the tractor after the accident he found the motor in low gear. The driver's seat on the tractor was enclosed and the view therefrom was unobstructed.

First-trick Crossing Watchman Phelps, located at Jefferson Street, stated that the accident occurred during the period the tower is closed. When he is on duty he can see and hear an approaching south-bound train when it reaches a point about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile north of the tower, and he can see and hear a north-bound train when it reaches a point about 1 mile south of the tower. At Walnut Street, immediately north of State Street, the flashing-light signal is controlled by a track circuit but the signals at four other crossings, including State Street, are manually controlled. At the time of the accident he was standing on the platform at the passenger depot, located on the east side of the track and about two and one-half blocks south of State Street; he heard the crash but did not actually see the accident occur. He said the engine whistle on Train No. 131 was sounded for two of the cross-

ings, and he placed the time of the accident at 5:35 a.m., saying that the sun was up. He was unable to say whether the bell was ringing or the headlight burning.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by a motor truck being driven upon a railroad crossing at grade directly in front of an approaching passenger train.

The evidence indicated that the truck approached the crossing in low gear, moving at a low rate of speed. The driver was familiar with the crossing, and knew that the view was materially restricted; it further appeared that he knew the crossing was protected by flashing-light signals but did not know that during early morning hours these signals were not in operation, and he assumed that the absence of a signal indicated that no train was approaching. He therefore proceeded upon the crossing and the first knowledge he had of anything wrong was when he saw the engine only a short distance away, and heard the whistle just before the accident occurred.

There was no sign at this crossing to notify drivers that the flashing lights were not continuously in operation, and because of numerous signs along this route such a sign if erected might have attracted little if any attention; there was no stop board at this crossing and even had the truck involved in this accident stopped before proceeding upon the crossing the view is so obstructed that had the driver stopped at a safe distance from the track he would not have been able to see a train more than 350 feet distant. Under these circumstances the only warning of an approaching train was that afforded by the engine whistle and bell; the evidence indicated that these were being used by the engineman but were not heard by the driver until he was practically on the crossing, by which time he had seen the approaching train, but it was then too late to prevent the accident.

Route 50 is a main, heavily travelled route between St. Louis, Mo., and Cincinnati, Ohio. Because of the restricted view and the fact that between midnight and 6 a.m. the crossing signals were not in service, this crossing could only be used by drivers of west-bound vehicles practically at their own risk.

When flashing light signals or other crossing protection devices are installed at a crossing an element of increased danger is introduced if they are out of service part of the time or during certain hours of the day or night. Signals of the type installed at this crossing are designed to display flashing-light indications when a train is approaching the crossing, and the

lights are extinguished when no train is approaching the crossing; the latter is also the case when the signals are not in service, as in this instance, and this condition may therefore lead a motorist, not familiar with the details of operation of signal appliances at each railroad crossing, into the very danger the installation of signal devices was intended to avoid.

The investigation and the results of this accident demonstrate the need for additional protection at this crossing and it is therefore recommended that provision be made for continuous protection which will be adequate to warn users of the highway of the approach of trains.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.