INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3725

THE DELAWARE, LACKAWANNA AND WESTERN RAILROAD COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

AT SYRACUSE, N. Y., ON

DECEMBER 19, 1956

SUMMARY

Date:	December 19, 1956	
Railroad:	Delaware, Lackawanna and Western	
Location:	Syracuse, N. Y.	
Kind of accident:	Collision	
Equipment involved:	Locomotive with cars	: Cut of cars
Locomotive number:	Diesel-electric unit 411	:
Consists:	4 cars	: 17 cars
Estimated speeds:	1-2 m. p. h.	: 50 m. p. h.
Operation:	Operating rules	
Track:	Station track; $5^{\circ}15'$ curve; 2.63 percent descending grade northward	
Weather:	Clear	
Time:	5:50 p. m.	
Casualties:	1 killed; 3 injured	
Cause:	Cut of cars moving out of control on a grade as a result of an insufficient number of hand brakes being applied	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3725

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

THE DELAWARE, LACKAWANNA AND WESTERN RAILROAD COMPANY

January 24, 1957

Accident at Syracuse, N. Y., on December 19, 1956, caused by a cut of cars moving out of control on a grade as a result of an insufficient number of hand brakes being applied.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

TUGGLE, Commissioner:

On December 19, 1956, there was a collision between a locomotive with cars and a cut of cars on the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad at Syracuse, N. Y., which resulted in the death of one train-service employee, and the injury of one railway mail clerk and two train-service employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the New York Public Service Commission.

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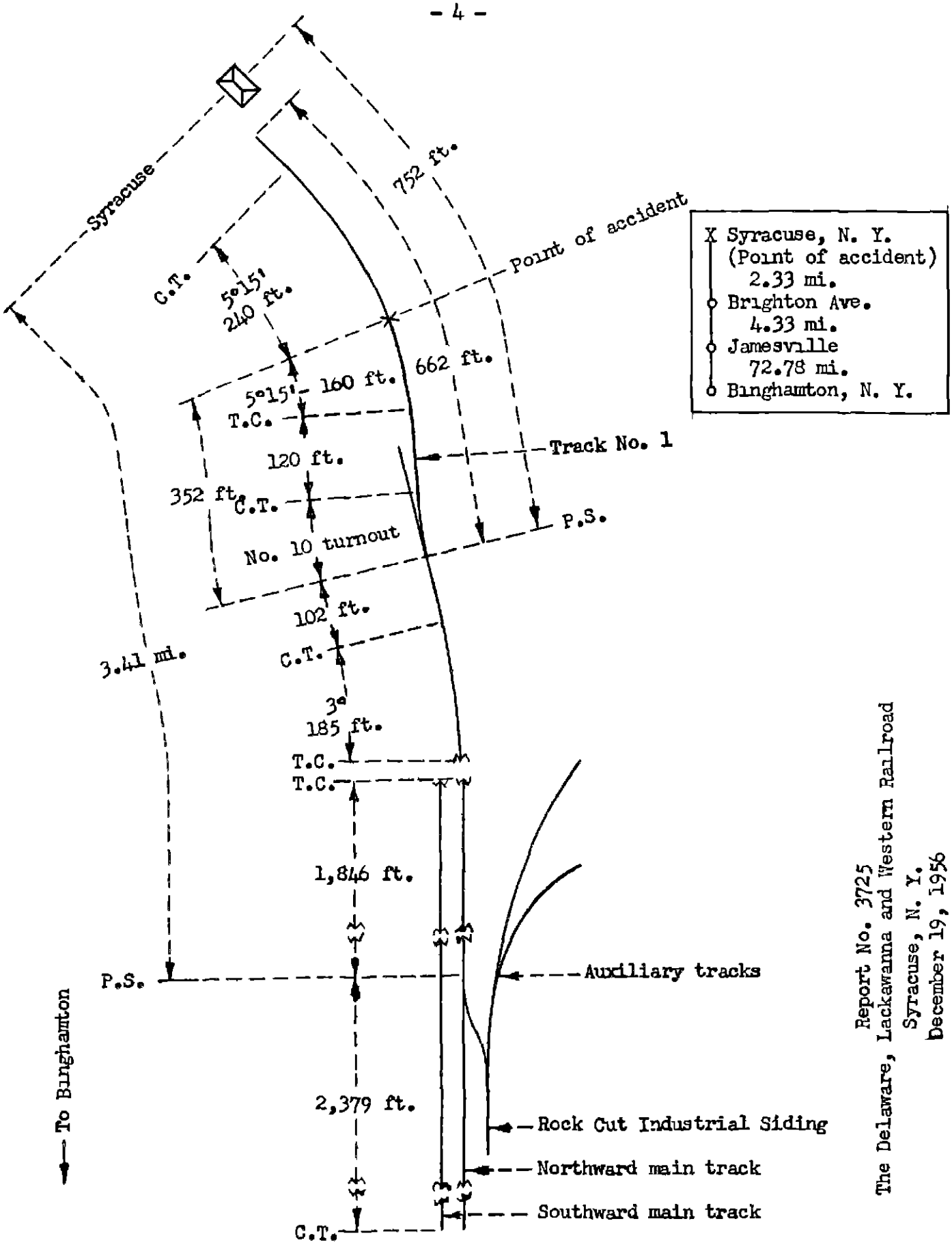
1 Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Tuggle for consideration and disposition.



Report No. 3725
The Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad
Syracuse, N. Y.
December 19, 1956

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Scranton Division extending between Binghamton and Syracuse, N. Y., 79.44 miles. Between Jamesville, 72.78 miles north of Binghamton, and Brighton Avenue, 77.11 miles north of Binghamton, this is a double-track line, and between Brighton Avenue and Syracuse it is a single-track line. Trains moving with the current of traffic on the double track and trains moving on the single track are operated by timetable, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The north switch of an auxiliary track which parallels the northward main track on the east is located 3.41 miles south of the station at Syracuse. This track is locally designated as Rock Cut Industrial Siding. An auxiliary track diverges from Rock Cut Industrial Siding near the north switch, and other auxiliary tracks which serve adjacent industries diverge from this track. In the vicinity of the station at Syracuse the tracks are laid on a fill supported by retaining walls. A stub-end station track 662 feet in length diverges from the main track toward the east at a switch located 752 feet south of the station. This track is designated in this report as track No. 1. The switch is facing-point for north-bound movements. The accident occurred on track No. 1 at a point 352 feet north of the switch. The main tracks are tangent throughout a distance of 2,379 feet immediately south of the north switch of Rock Cut Industrial Siding and 1,846 feet northward. North of this tangent there is a series of curves and tangents followed by a 3° curve to the left 185 feet in length, a tangent 102 feet, a No. 10 turnout to the right, a tangent 120 feet, and a 5°15' curve to the left 160 feet to the point of accident and 240 feet northward. Between the north switch of Rock Cut Industrial Siding and a point 282 feet north of the switch the grade is 0.33 percent descending northward, and between points 282 feet and 1,982 feet north of the switch it is 1.00 percent descending. Between the latter point and the south end of track No. 1 the grade varies between level and 1.25 percent descending northward, and it averages 0.78 percent descending.

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

> 160. When leaving cars on main tracks, running tracks, sidings or side tracks, hand brakes must be applied. If on grades, air brakes must be bled and such other precautions as necessary taken. * * *

The maximum authorized speeds are 50 miles per hour from Rock Cut Industrial Siding to Brighton Ave., 25 miles per hour through a spring switch at Brighton Ave., and 45 miles per hour from Brighton Ave. to Syracuse.

Description of Accident

About 5:50 p. m. Diesel-electric unit 411, pushing four cars, entered track No. 1 at Syracuse. The locomotive, which was assigned to yard service at Syracuse, was headed northward. From north to south this movement consisted of one mail car, three baggage cars, and the locomotive. While it was moving at an estimated speed of 1 or 2 miles per hour the rear end of the locomotive was struck by a cut of 17 freight cars. The accident occurred 352 feet north of the switch.

A short time before the accident occurred the crew of Diesel-electric locomotive 951, which was performing switching service, shunted a loaded car against the south end of a cut of 16 loaded freight cars which had previously been placed on the northward main track a short distance north of the north switch of Rock Cut Industrial Siding. Soon afterward the cut of 17 cars began to move northward on the descending grade, and while moving at an estimated speed of 50 miles per hour it entered track No. 1 at the south switch and struck yard locomotive 411.

The cars being handled by yard locomotive 411 were moved northward approximately 50 feet by the force of the impact. The north car, the south truck of the south car, and the locomotive were derailed. The front end of the north car was pushed over the retaining wall at the end of the track, and the front truck of this car dropped to the ground. The yard locomotive stopped at right angles to the track with the front end on the fill and the rear end on the ground east of the retaining wall. At this point the wall is 10 feet in height. The north car and the south car were considerably damaged, and the locomotive was destroyed. The eight cars at the north end of the cut of 17 cars were derailed and stopped in various positions on or near the track. Four of these cars were destroyed, and the other derailed cars were considerably damaged. The superintendent of the car department said that considering the position of the derailed equipment and the amount of damage he estimated that the speed of the cut of cars was approximately 50 miles per hour when the accident occurred.

The fireman of the yard locomotive was killed. The engineer and the yard conductor of this crew were injured.

The weather was clear and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred about 5:50 p. m.

Diesel-electric unit 411 was of the switcher type.

Discussion

When the accident occurred the crew of yard locomotive 411 was engaged in placing the mail car at a steam supply connection near the north end of track No. 1. Normal brake-pipe pressure was being maintained in the air-brake system of the cars. The enginemen were on the locomotive, and the yard conductor and two yard brakemen were on the ground on the east side of the cars. Neither the yard conductor nor the yard brakemen saw the approaching cars before the collision occurred. The engineer was so seriously injured in the accident that he could not be questioned during this investigation.

Before the accident occurred the crew of locomotive 951 was engaged in performing switching service on auxiliary tracks in the vicinity of Rock Cut Industrial Siding. The fireman, a qualified engineer, was operating the locomotive. This crew moved 16 cars from an auxiliary track to the northward main track and left them a short distance north of the north switch of Rock Cut Industrial Siding. The crew did not charge the air-brake system of the cars. The swing brakeman said that while those cars were being moved to the main track he observed that the brakes on the three cars at the north end of the cut had already been applied. He said he applied the hand brake on the car at the south end of the cut, and that after the cars were stopped and the slack was closed the brakes on these four cars held the cut stationary. The locomotive was then detached and coupled to several other cars on an adjacent auxiliary track. One car was shunted against the south end of the cut of cars on the main track, one was shunted toward an auxiliary track, and two were shunted toward the cars on the main track. The locomotive was then moved to an adjacent auxiliary track. At this time the swing brakeman saw that the cars on the main track were moving northward. He called a warning and made an unsuccessful attempt to overtake the cars. The locomotive was immediately moved to the northward main track and coupled to the two cars which had last been shunted to that track, and the fireman, who was operating the locomotive, then made an unsuccessful attempt to overtake the cut of cars. The front brakeman and the swing brakeman accompanied the locomotive. The conductor, who was a considerable distance away when the cars began to move, attempted to communicate

by telephone with employees at the station at Syracuse to warn them of the approaching cars. He was unable to reach anyone at the station before the accident occurred.

All members of the crew of locomotive 951 were regularly assigned and were familiar with the work at this point. The swing brakeman said he considered that the brakes which he observed applied on the three cars at the north end of the cut and the hand brake which he applied on the car at the south end of the cut were adequate to hold the cut while switching service was performed. He said that after the accident occurred he released the hand brake on the south car of the cut before the cars which were not derailed were removed from the scene of the accident.

Car inspectors examined the equipment which was not derailed approximately 40 minutes after the accident occurred. They said they observed no hand brakes which were applied and found no indications of heat on the wheels or brake shoes of the cars they inspected. The hand brakes on these cars were tested later and were found to function properly.

Cause

This accident was caused by a cut of cars moving out of control on a grade as a result of an insufficient number of hand brakes being applied.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-fourth day of January, 1957.

By the Commission, Commissioner Tuggle.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,

Secretary.