

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING
AN ACCIDENT ON THE GRAND TRUNK WESTERN RAILROAD AT FENTON,
MICH., ON SEPTEMBER 28, 1933.

January 8, 1934.

To the Commission:

On September 28, 1933, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and three yard engines, coupled, on the Grand Trunk Western Railroad at Fenton, Mich., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 1 employee. This accident was investigated in conjunction with the Michigan Public Utilities Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Holly Subdivision of the Detroit Division, extending between Durand and Detroit, Mich., a distance of 66.97 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time table and train orders, no block-signal system is in use but a train-order block is maintained behind passenger trains until the next station is reached or an interval of 20 minutes has elapsed. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 675 feet west of the east switch of the siding at Fenton; the siding is 4,694 feet in length and parallels the main track on the north. Approaching the point of accident from the west, the track is tangent for more than 2 miles, while approaching from the east there is a 1° curve to the right 3,620 feet in length, followed by 278 feet of tangent to the point of accident. The grade is practically level.

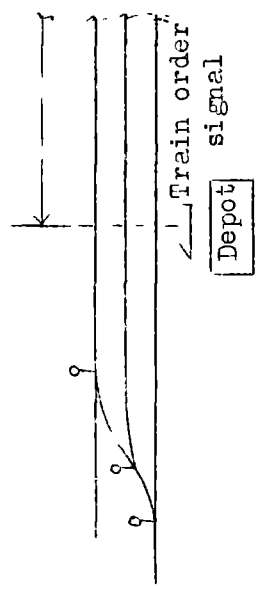
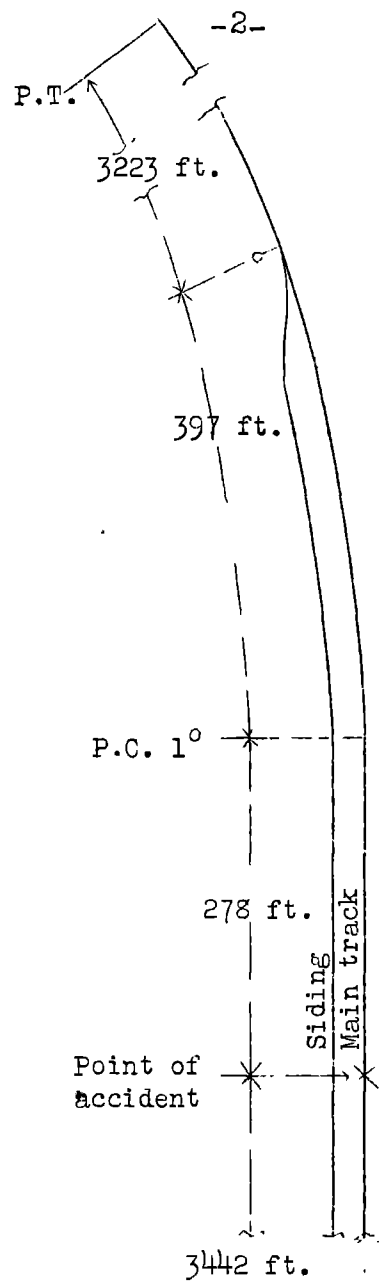
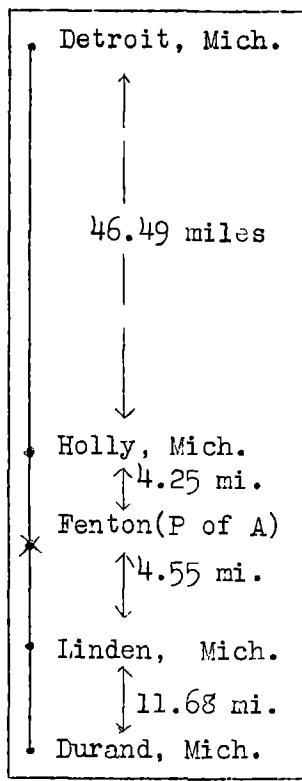
The depot at Fenton is located on the south side of the tracks and 577 feet east of the west switch of the siding, or 3,442 feet west of the point of accident.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 5:07 p.m.

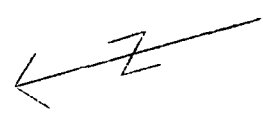
Description

East-bound extra 8375 consisted from east to west of yard engines 8375, 8376 and 7479, the last two being in tow, and was en route from Battle Creek to Detroit, in charge of Conductor Lenon and Engineman Finch, with an engine watchman on each of the last two engines. Extra 8375 departed from Durand at 4:20 p.m., according to the train sheet, passed Fenton depot at 5:05 p.m., train no. 19 having been overlooked, and had been brought to a stop before it was struck by that train.

West-bound passenger train no. 19 consisted of 1 deadhead coach, 1 baggage car, 1 combination mail and baggage car and 1



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coach, in the order named, hauled by engine 5038, and was in charge of Conductor Houghton and Enginemen Hamlin. The deadhead coach was of wooden construction, while the other cars were of all-steel construction. This train passed Holly, the last open office, 4.25 miles east of Fenton, at 5 p.m., according to the train sheet, on time, and on reaching Fenton it collided with extra 8375 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been from 30 to 40 miles per hour.

Engine 8375 remained upright, but its front end was badly damaged and wedged inside the frame of engine 5038; the tender of engine 8375 stopped on its side behind the engine and cross-wise of the main track. Engine 8376 and its tender turned over to the right and were badly damaged, but engine 7479 was only slightly damaged. Engine 5038 and its tender were derailed, but remained upright with the front end of the engine locked with engine 8375. The wooden coach in train no. 19 rode up and over the rear end of the tender and stopped on top of the tender and engine, practically demolished; the second car was derailed, but remained upright with its forward end against the rear of the tender, while none of the other equipment in this train was derailed or damaged. The employee killed was the engineman of train no. 19, and the employee injured was the fireman of that train.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Finch, of extra 8375, stated that the three yard engines were en route from Battle Creek to Detroit and that he participated in examining the brakes before leaving Battle Creek. They moved over the Chicago Division to Durand, where they entered upon the Holly Subdivision, and while at Durand he received from the chief dispatcher a Detroit Division time table and the chief dispatcher opened it and pointed out the Holly Subdivision. Before leaving Durand nothing was said between the engineman and conductor about train no. 19; the fireman, however, did ask the engineman if there was anything else besides the west-bound extra they had received orders to meet. Shortly after leaving Durand Engineman Finch again consulted his time table, but he said he failed to notice the schedule of train no. 19, due at Fenton at 5:07 p.m. After passing the depot at Fenton, moving at a speed of about 15 miles per hour, a whistle signal to stop was sounded on the second engine and Engineman Finch at once applied the air brakes in emergency and stopped the yard engines, following which the fireman gave warning of the approaching train, and immediately after they got off the yard engine the collision occurred. Engineman Finch could not see train no. 19 approaching as the curve east of the straight track upon which the accident occurred was in favor of the fireman. Engineman Finch, who was a regularly assigned engineman on the Chicago Division, said that he made his last trip as engineman over the Holly Subdivision, Detroit Division, in January, 1933, on a light engine, making a movement in each direction; he had not been assigned regularly over this part of the division,

but had made irregular trips, both as engineman and as fireman, and considered that he was familiar with the territory. Engineman Finch was unable to offer any explanation for his oversight.

Fireman Powell, of the yard engines, who was a promoted engineman, stated that he did not have a Detroit Division time table in his possession, nor did he personally consult the engineman's time table, but that before leaving Durand he saw the engineman looking at the time table and the engineman informed him that all of the scheduled trains had arrived. Fireman Powell had made trips over the Holly Subdivision occasionally during the past few years, as engineman and also as fireman, and during some of those trips had met train no. 19, but on this occasion that particular train did not enter his mind and he was entirely unaware of its presence until he saw it approaching across the inside of the curve about 20 or 25 car lengths away, after the second engine had sounded the stop signal on the whistle. His last trip was made in February, 1933, as an engine watchman.

Conductor Lenon said that he was riding on the fireman's side of the second engine and on nearing the east end of the siding at Fenton he looked across the inside of the curve and saw smoke from the engine of the opposing train, so he shouted a warning of danger to the engine watchman, who in turn sounded the whistle, and just after stopping the collision occurred. Conductor Lenon had a Detroit Division time table in his possession and had consulted it, but in some unexplained way he overlooked train no. 19; he also looked at the train register at Durand, but did not check it completely. He considered himself familiar with the Holly Subdivision, having made frequent trips as conductor and brakeman, the last trip having been in August, 1933.

Surviving members of the crew of train no. 19 were unaware of anything wrong until the air brakes were applied in emergency just prior to the accident; Conductor Houghton estimated the speed of his train to have been about 60 miles per hour approaching Fenton and about 35 or 40 miles per hour at the time of the collision; Baggageman Justin estimated the speed at the time of the accident to have been reduced to about 30 to 35 miles per hour. The air brakes had been tested and worked properly.

Tests conducted at the point of accident showed that when approaching from the east, a train standing at the point of accident first became visible when 1,347 feet distant, but it could not be determined on which track it was standing until it was only 923 feet distant.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the error of Conductor Lenon and Engineman Finch, of extra 6375, in overlooking the time table schedule of an opposing first-class train.

Extra 8375 was en route from Battle Creek, on the Chicago Division, to Detroit, on the Detroit Division, via Durand, and Engineman Finch said that at Durand he received from the chief dispatcher a Detroit Division time table; Fireman Powell did not have a Detroit Division time table, nor did he personally consult the one furnished to the engineman, but he saw the engineman looking at the time table at Durand and the engineman informed him that all scheduled trains were in. After leaving Durand, the engineman again consulted the time table, but failed to notice the schedule of train no. 19, and he was unaware of anything wrong until a whistle signal to stop was sounded on the second engine. Conductor Lenon said he looked over the train register at Durand, but did not check it completely; he also had a Detroit Division time table in his possession and had consulted it, but overlooked train no. 19. Neither the engineman nor the conductor could offer any explanation for their oversight.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,
Director.