

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3463
GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY
IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR SUPPLEE, WASH., ON
MAY 16, 1952

SUMMARY

Date: May 16, 1952

Railroad: Great Northern

Location: Supplee, Wash.

Kind of accident: Head-end collision

Equipment involved: Track motor-car : Freight train
3496-M

Train number: : Extra 134 North

Engine number: : Diesel-electric
unit 134

Consist: : Caboose

Estimated speeds: Undetermined : 20 m. p. h.

Operation: Train orders

Track: Single; 3° curve; 0.55 percent
ascending grade northward

Weather: Clear

Time: 9:35 a. m.

Casualties: 1 killed

Cause: Failure to provide adequate protection
for movement of track motor-car

Recommendation: That the Great Northern Railway Company
provide adequate protection for
movement of track motor-cars on
its line

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3463

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

GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY

June 17, 1952

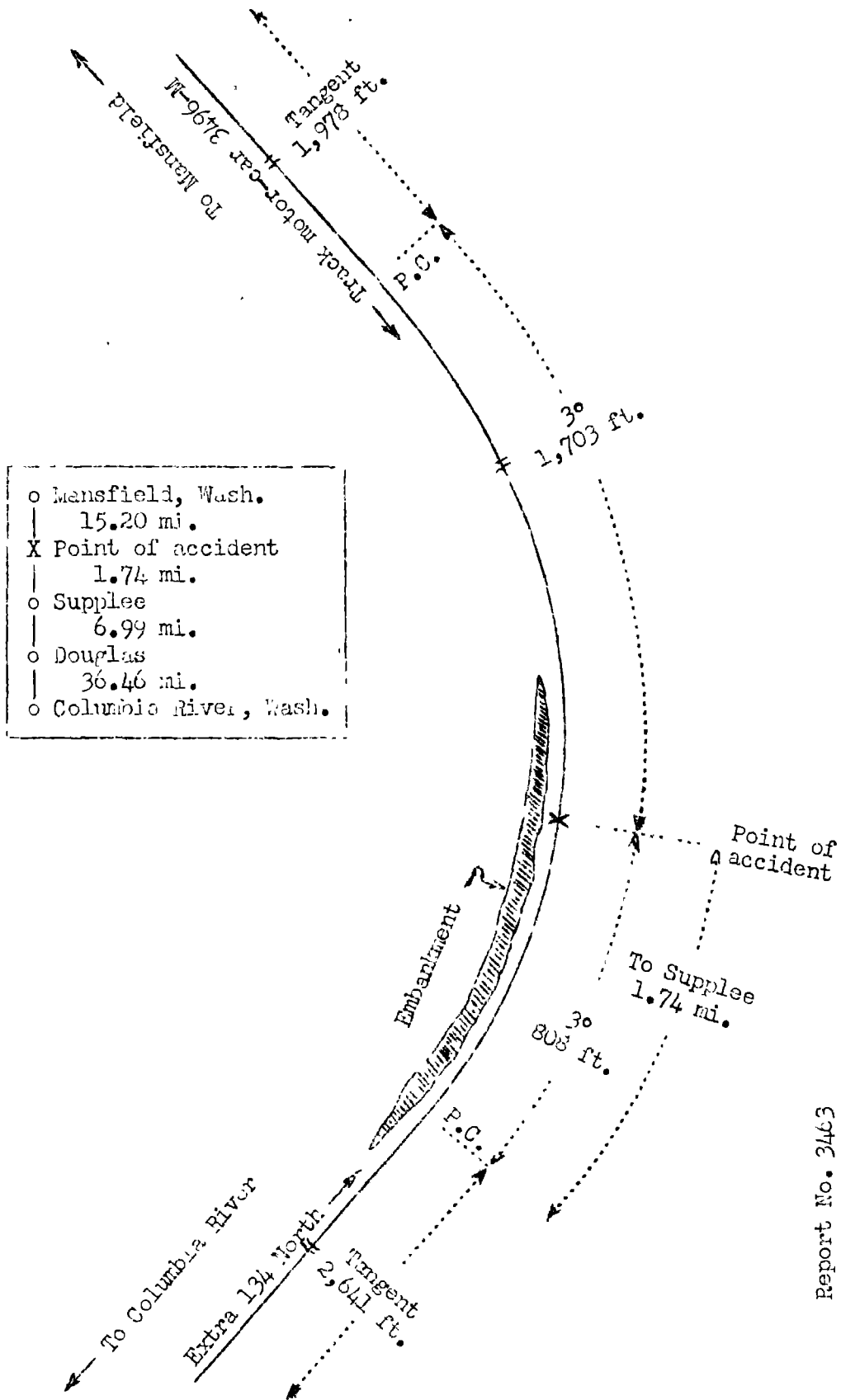
Accident near Supplee, Wash., on May 16, 1952, caused by
failure to provide adequate protection for the movement
of a track motor-car.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On May 16, 1952, there was a head-end collision between a track motor-car and a freight train on the Great Northern Railway near Supplee, Wash., which resulted in the death of one maintenance-of-way employee.

¹ 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. 3463
 Great Northern Railway
 Supplee, Wash.
 May 16, 1952

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Spokane Division extending between Mansfield and Columbia River, Wash., 60.39 miles, a single-track line, over which trains are operated by train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 15.20 miles south of Mansfield and 1.74 miles north of Supplee. From the north there are, in succession, a tangent 1,978 feet in length and a 3° curve to the right 1,703 feet to the point of accident and 808 feet southward. From the south there are, in succession, a tangent 2,641 feet in length and the curve on which the accident occurred. Between points 380 feet north and 835 feet south of the point of accident the track is laid in a cut. The west wall of the cut rises to a maximum height of 13 feet above the level of the tops of the rails. At the point of accident the grade is 0.55 percent ascending northward.

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

14. ENGINE WHISTLE SIGNALS

* * *

The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "—" for longer sounds. * * *

* * *

Sound.

Indication.

* * *

(1) — — o —

Approaching * * * obscured curves; also as frequently as necessary when moving in * * * obscured places to warn trackmen and others.

* * *

Rules and instructions for maintenance-of-way employees read in part as follows:

101. Line-up issued by the train dispatcher regarding train locations must, when practicable, be obtained from operators at train order offices before occupying the main track at the start of each day's work.

Additional line-ups may be obtained in the same manner during the day as is required.

* * *

At points where telegraphers are not employed, track car operators may use train dispatcher's telephone to obtain verbal information of train locations as is necessary at the time of their movement * * *

102. Line-up or other information regarding train locations will not relieve foreman or others operating track cars from responsibility of protecting their cars against collisions with trains, engines, or other track cars, as prescribed by the rules.

110. In operating track cars where view is obstructed or impaired such as by curves * * * the employe in charge of car must take the necessary precautions to prevent accident.

Bulletin instructions read in part as follows;

* * * foreman or other employe in charge of any track car must show each line-up he gets to all members of his crew riding on motor car with him or he must read it to them. * * *

When practicable motor car operators must have a fresh train lineup issued on the prescribed form at the beginning of the day's work. This report will give them information on the location of trains on the district covered by the lineup together with the intentions of the dispatcher at the time lineup was issued.

The information may be considered dependable for not over an hour after the time of issuance of the lineup. Suitable precautions should be taken for making movements with motor cars in territory where the length of vision is not sufficient to permit them to see an approaching train far enough in advance to stop their car and remove it from the track before the train reaches them.

Crews that have been working on line longer than an hour since receipt of a train location report and desire to move by motor car in territory where their length of vision is restricted because of curves * * * or other conditions, should first communicate with the dispatcher * * * and ascertain if it is safe to do so. In case it is not possible to communicate with the dispatcher, they must protect their movement by sending a flagman ahead in keeping with the rules.

The maximum authorized speed for trains was 20 miles per hour. The maximum authorized speed for track motor-cars was 20 miles per hour on tangent track and 8 miles per hour on curves.

Description of Accident

Track motor-car 3496-M, occupied by a section foreman, two section laborers, and a track motor-car repairman, departed south-bound from Mansfield about 9:10 a. m. About 9:35 a. m., while moving at an undetermined rate of speed, it collided with Extra 134 North at a point 15.20 miles south of Mansfield and 1.74 miles north of Supplee.

Extra 134 North, a north-bound freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric unit 134 and a caboose. The Diesel-electric unit was of the road-switcher type. This train departed from Columbia River at 7:35 a. m., departed from Douglas, 8.73 miles south of the point of accident and the last open office, at 9:20 a. m., and while moving at an estimated speed of 20 miles per hour it collided with track motor-car 3496-M.

The track motor-car, which was not derailed, was moved northward approximately 282 feet. It was badly damaged. Extra 134 North stopped with the front of the locomotive 232 feet north of the point of accident. The front of the locomotive was slightly damaged.

The section foreman was killed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 9:35 a. m.

Track motor-car 3496-M was of the four-wheel type. It was powered by an 8-13 horsepower gasoline motor and was equipped with four-wheel brakes. It weighed 1,045 pounds and had seating capacity for eight persons. It was equipped with a windshield.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 0.87 train.

Discussion

The rules of this carrier provide that the operators of track motor-cars must, when practicable, obtain a line-up of train movements before their motor-cars occupy the main track at the beginning of each day's work. On the line on which this accident occurred there is no direct telephone connection between the train dispatchers' office and the stations north of Columbia River. The train dispatcher customarily transmits a line-up to the operator at Columbia River about 7:30 a. m. each day. The operator at Columbia River relays this line-up to the agent at Douglas for the use of the section foremen at Douglas and Mansfield. Because the section foreman at Mansfield experienced difficulty in using the telephone, it was the custom for the custodian at Mansfield to obtain the line-up from the agent at Douglas. Ordinarily the only train movement on this line is a local freight which makes a round trip three days each week.

On the day of the accident the members of the section force at Mansfield reported for duty at 8 a. m. Before they departed from Mansfield a track motor-car repairman made a routine inspection of their track motor-car. When the inspection was completed it was arranged that the section force would take the repairman south to the point at which the section force from Douglas was working. During the conversation the section foreman remarked that the local freight train was assigned to operate on that day but they need not watch for the train until after 10 a. m. Soon after 9 a. m. the foreman entered the station and obtained a line-up which the custodian had received from the agent at Douglas about 8 a. m. This line-up contained the information that Extra 134 North, consisting of a locomotive and caboose only, had departed from Columbia River at 7:35 a. m. After the foreman received the line-up, the custodian, at the request of the foreman, called the agent at Douglas and asked him what time he expected the train to reach Douglas. The agent replied that he thought the train should arrive about 9:30 a. m. When the section foreman received this information he left the station, and he and the other employees departed south-bound on the track motor-car. The foreman did not mention the line-up or the train to the other employees on the track motor-car. As the track motor-car was approaching the point where the accident occurred all the occupants

were maintaining a lookout ahead. Two of the surviving occupants said they thought the speed was between 15 and 18 miles per hour. The third said he thought it was between 30 and 40 miles per hour. After the track motor-car entered the cut in which the accident occurred, the wall of the cut restricted the occupants' view of a train approaching from the south to a distance of about 535 feet. The surviving occupants said that the foreman applied the brake immediately after the train became visible to them. The collision occurred before the track motor-car could be stopped.

As Extra 134 North was approaching the point where the accident occurred the engineers were maintaining a lookout ahead from their positions in the control compartment of the locomotive. The members of the train crew were in the caboose. The brakes of the train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The crew had received no information that the track ahead was occupied by a track motor-car. The engineer sounded the prescribed engine-whistle signal on the pneumatic horn as the train was closely approaching the curve on which the accident occurred. The fireman said that when the track motor-car became visible to him he called a warning to the engineer. The engineer immediately made an emergency application of the brakes, but the collision occurred before the train could be stopped. Because of curvature of the track, the engineer could not see the track motor-car before the collision occurred. Members of the crew estimated that the speed was about 20 miles per hour at the time the brakes were applied.

According to the rules of this carrier, the operator of a track motor-car must, if practicable, obtain a line-up before his motor-car occupies the main track, but a line-up does not relieve the operator of responsibility for collision with a train or another track motor-car. Trains are not restricted by the issuance of a line-up, and train crews and the operators of other track motor-cars are not informed when a track motor-car is occupying the main track. This investigation disclosed that in the instant case both the train and the track motor-car were moving in excess of the maximum authorized speed before the accident occurred. The train maintained an average speed of 22.6 miles per hour between Columbia River and the point of accident. The exact time that the track motor-car departed from Mansfield was not determined. The agent at Douglas thought that the custodian at Mansfield called to inquire about Extra 134 North between 9:05 a. m. and 9:10 a. m. The custodian thought this conversation took place at 9:15 a. m. If the track motor-car

departed from Mansfield at 9:10 a. m., it maintained an average speed of 36.5 miles per hour between Mansfield and the point of accident. The fact that the train arrived at the point of accident earlier than it would have if the speed restrictions had been observed may have contributed to the cause of the accident, for the reason that the section foreman apparently determined from the information received at Mansfield that the motor-car could proceed some distance beyond the point where the accident occurred. However, a method of operation which places the responsibility on the operators of track motor-cars for computing the running times of trains and judging the approximate arriving times at stations and at other points does not provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars.

Since January 1, 1944, the Commission has investigated 38 collisions, including the present case, which were caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars. These accidents resulted in the death of 71 persons and the injury of 121 persons. In the reports of these accidents the Commission repeatedly has recommended that the carrier involved should provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars on its line. One of these accidents, which resulted in the death of 4 persons and the injury of 30 persons, occurred on the Great Northern Railway near Sieben, Mont., on September 8, 1948, and this recommendation was included in the Commission's report covering the investigation of that accident.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of a track motor-car.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Great Northern Railway Company provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars on its line.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this seventeenth day of June, 1952.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.