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RAILROAD ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION report EV. 753

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Report No 3801-3850

Dept. of Transportation
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ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD COMPANY

FOSTERS, LA

FEBRUARY 12, 1958



U.S. INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

Washington

SUMMARY

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DATE	February 12, 1958	
RAILROAD	Illinois Central	
LOCATION	Fosters, La	
KIND OF ACCIDENT	Collision	
EQUIPMENT INVOLVED	Passenger train	Motortruck
TRAIN NUMBER	205	
LOCOMOTIVE NUMBER	Diesel-electric unit 8801	
CONSIST	8 cars	
ESTIMATED SPEEDS	55 m p h	15-20 m. p h
OPERATION	Timetable and train orders	
TRACK	Single, tangent, level	
HIGHWAY	Tangent, crosses track at angle of 73°10', 6.0 percent ascending grade westward	
WEATHER	Clear	
TIME	12 40 p m	
CASUALTIES	3 killed	
CAUSE	Motortruck occupying rail-highway grade-crossing immediately in front of approaching train	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO 3801

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

ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD COMPANY

August 22, 1958

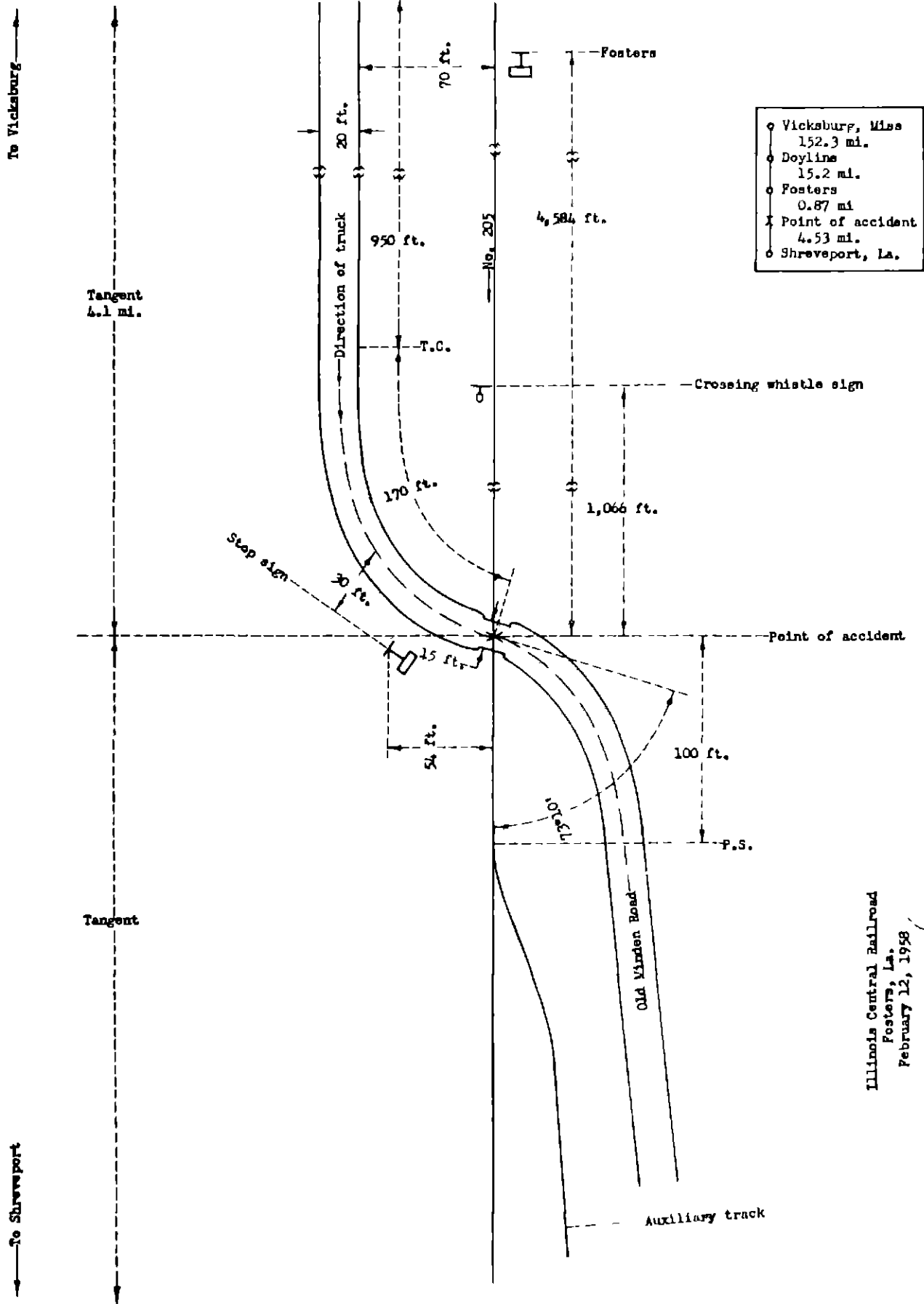
Accident near Fosters, La , on February 12, 1958, caused by a motortruck occupying a rail-highway grade-crossing immediately in front of an approaching train

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

TUGGLE, Commissioner

On February 12, 1958, there was a collision between a passenger train on the Illinois Central Railroad and a motortruck at a rail-highway grade-crossing near Fosters, La , which resulted in the death of the driver of the motortruck and two train-service employees

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



- Vicksburg, Miss
152.3 mi.
- Doyline
15.2 mi.
- Fosters
0.87 mi
- × Point of accident
4.53 mi.
- Shreveport, La.

Illinois Central Railroad
Fosters, La.
February 12, 1958

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Vicksburg Division extending between Vicksburg, Miss and Shreveport, La , 172.9 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is 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 168.4 miles west of Vicksburg and 4,584 feet west of the station sign at Fosters, La , where the railroad is crossed at grade by a secondary highway designated as Old Minden Road. An auxiliary track diverges southward from the main track in this vicinity and the auxiliary track switch, which is facing-point for westbound movements, is located approximately 100 feet west of the crossing. The main track is tangent throughout a distance of 4.1 miles immediately east of the point of accident and a considerable distance westward. The grade is practically level. The track is laid on a fill approximately 5 feet in height in the vicinity of the crossing.

In the vicinity of the point of accident the highway is surfaced with bituminous material to a width of 20 feet. From the east on the highway there is a tangent 950 feet in length, approximately 70 feet north of the track and parallel to it, and a curve to the left 170 feet to the crossing. The highway crosses the track at an angle of 73°10' and parallels the railroad on the south a considerable distance westward from this point. The surface of the highway is approximately 4 feet 6 inches below the track in either direction from the crossing. The crossing is 15 feet wide. A 6-inch by 8-inch timber is laid on each side of each rail at the crossing. The remaining area of the crossing is surfaced with bituminous material to the approximate level of the tops of the rails. On the highway in approach to the crossing from the north side of the track the grade is successively, level a considerable distance, a vertical curve 100 feet in length, 6.0 percent ascending 25 feet, a vertical curve 25 feet and level over the crossing.

A sign which bears the words "LOUISIANA LAW" above the word "STOP" in red on a white background is located 54 feet north of the centerline of the track and 30 feet west of the centerline of the highway in the curve in approach to the crossing. This sign is 4 feet 2 inches long and 3 feet 4 inches wide and is mounted on a post with the top of the sign 9 feet above the level of the highway. A crossing-whistle sign for westbound trains is located 1,066 feet east of the crossing.

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

14 Engine Whistle Signals

NOTE—The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds, "—" for longer sounds * * *

Sound	Indication
* * *	
(1) — — o —	Approaching public crossings at grade. To be prolonged or repeated until crossing is reached.

17 (B) On steamline and gas-electric trains, the headlight must be burning during daylight hours.

30 * * * the engine bell must be rung * * * while approaching and passing public crossings at grade * * *

Laws of the State of Louisiana relating to motor vehicles and their operation read in part as follows

Section 243 Railroad grade crossings

A It shall be the duty of every person operating, or permitting to be operated, a vehicle, when approaching a grade crossing of a public highway with any railroad or tramway, to bring such vehicle to a complete stop in such a manner and for such time as to enable the operator to observe the approach of trains or cars, by looking up and down the track in both directions and by listening therefor, before proceeding * * *

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 59 miles per hour

Description of Accident

No 205, a westbound first-class passenger train, consisted of diesel-electric unit 8801, a road-switcher type locomotive, 4 mail cars, 1 express car, 1 mail car, 1 coach, and 1 sleeping car, in the order named. The locomotive was headed eastward. All cars were of lightweight steel construction. This train departed from Doyline, La, 16.1 miles east of the point of accident and the last open office, at 12:21 p. m., 27 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 55 miles per hour it struck a motortruck at a rail-highway grade crossing 4,584 feet west of the station sign at Fosters.

The vehicle involved was a Ford tank truck owned and operated by H. H. Holt, Distributor, Gulf Refining Company products, Bossier City, La. The driver, who was the sole occupant, held Louisiana driver's license No 2050538. The truck was powered by an 8-cylinder gasoline engine and was equipped with air brakes. It was provided with a 5-speed transmission, 2-speed axle and dual wheels at the rear. The overall length of the truck was approximately 27 feet 6 inches. The cargo tank consisted of seven compartments with a combined total capacity of 2,000 gallons. Enclosed compartments on each side of the tank were provided for the transportation of barrels and packages. On the day of the accident the truck had departed from the owner's bulk plant about 9:30 a. m. with a cargo which consisted of 1,815 gallons of gasoline, 185 gallons of kerosene and 240 1-quart cans of motor oil. At the time of the accident the truck was en route to the owner's plant and the lading had been reduced to an estimated 1,215 gallons of gasoline, 75 gallons of kerosene and 120 cans of motor oil. This vehicle was moving westward on Old Minden Road at an estimated speed of 15 to 20 miles per hour when it entered the crossing and was struck by No. 205.

No. 205 stopped with the locomotive 1,880 feet west of the crossing and the rear end of the train 1,214 feet west of the point of collision. No equipment of the train was derailed. Appurtenances and attachments on the west end of the locomotive were somewhat damaged in the collision. The cargo tank of the motortruck was ruptured, and gasoline and other flammable materials became ignited. The engine and control compartments and exterior portions of the locomotive were considerably damaged, and the first five cars and the seventh car were slightly damaged by fire.

The motortruck was demolished by the impact. The truck cab, the cargo tank, and the rear wheels were torn loose from the frame. The frame struck and damaged the switch stand of the auxiliary track and stopped adjacent to the south side of the auxiliary track 142 feet west of the crossing.

The truck cab stopped about 20 feet south of the frame and parallel to it. The rear wheels stopped at a point 233 feet west of the crossing and 31 feet north of the track and the wreckage of the tank stopped 337 feet west of the crossing and 42 feet north of the track.

The engineer and the fireman of No. 205 were killed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 12:40 p. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement over the crossing was 7.63 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 12:01 a. m., February 19, 1958, 342 automobiles, 156 motortrucks, 4 buses and 10 other vehicles passed over the crossing.

Diesel-electric unit 8801 is equipped with a speed recorder. At the time of the accident there was no tape in the recording device.

Discussion

As No. 205 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were in the control compartment of the locomotive, and the conductor and the flagman were in the seventh car of the train. The brakes of the train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The conductor said that during the station stop at Monroe, 92.8 miles east of the point of accident, he had observed that the locomotive headlight was lighted. The conductor and the flagman estimated that the train was moving at a speed of about 55 miles per hour as it approached the crossing where the accident occurred. They said that they did not hear the sound of the locomotive whistle and they were unaware of anything being wrong until the brakes became applied in emergency immediately before the collision occurred. An assistant master mechanic of the carrier, who was in the seventh car, said that he heard the grade-crossing whistle signal sounded and then warning blasts were sounded on the locomotive horn and the brakes became applied in emergency. The conductor and the assistant master mechanic said that the cars were enveloped in flames immediately after the collision occurred. The train moved through the area where the flammable liquids were burning and stopped with the rear end clear of the fire.

The locomotive was inspected by the assistant master mechanic, who was on the train, immediately after the accident occurred. He said that he found the throttle in idle position, the automatic brake valve in emergency position, the bell-ringer valve in open position and the headlight switch positioned for bright illumination of the headlight.

A witness to the accident, who was in a house located approximately 300 feet southwest of the crossing, said that he heard repeated warning blasts sounded on the locomotive whistle as the train approached the crossing and he looked out a window to see if his livestock had strayed onto the track. He said that he then saw a motortruck moving westward on Old Miller Road at a distance of about 300 feet from the crossing. He estimated that this vehicle was moving at a speed of 15 to 20 miles per hour. He said that there was no appreciable reduction in the speed of the truck before it entered the crossing and was struck by the train.

The driver of the motortruck had been employed in this capacity by the carrier and operator of the vehicle since 1950. He was familiar with the crossing involved, which is located approximately one-half mile from the bulk plant at which the truck regularly was loaded.

In the vicinity of the point of accident a pole line is located approximately 40 feet north of the main track and parallel to it. As a vehicle approaches the crossing from the east on Old Minaen Road, with the exception of this pole line, the driver has an unobstructed view of an approaching westbound train. After the vehicle passes the pole line in the approach to the crossing the driver has an unobstructed view of the track eastward throughout a distance of several miles.

Cause

This accident was caused by a motortruck occupying a rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-second day of August, 1958.

By the Commission, Commissioner Tuggle

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,
Secretary