

RAILROAD ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

REPORT NO. 4137

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THE LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD COMPANY

HOLTSVILLE, N. Y.

OCTOBER 18, 1967

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION  
Washington



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RAILROAD SAFETY BOARD

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Synopsis

On October 18, 1967, a Long Island Rail Road passenger train struck a motortruck at a rail-highway grade crossing in Holtsville, N Y , resulting in death to one train-service employee and injury to 11 passengers and employees

The accident was caused by failure of the truck driver to stop his vehicle short of the rail-highway grade crossing and to remain standing until the closely approaching train had passed, as required by New York State law

### Location and Method of Operation

The accident occurred on that part of the Long Island Rail Road extending between Jamaica and Greenport, N Y., a distance of 85 0 miles. In the vicinity of the accident this is a single-track line over which trains operate by timetable, train orders, and a manual block-signal system.

The collision occurred on the main track 42.9 miles east of Jamaica and 1,925 feet east of the station at Holtsville, where the track is crossed at grade by Blue Point Road.

The crossing is protected by advance-warning highway signs, markings on the surface of Blue Point Road, and standard crossbuck railroad-crossing warning signs.

West of the Blue Point Road crossing, the main track is laid in a shallow cut. Because of the cut, trees, and other vegetation along the north side of the railroad, the view between an eastbound train approaching the crossing and a southbound vehicle approaching the track on Blue Point Road is materially restricted. However, as the vehicle approaches the crossing within a distance of 10 to 25 feet, the driver's view of the track westward increases to the extent that he may readily see any eastbound train approaching the crossing within 675 feet. As the vehicle approaches the track within 10 feet, the driver's view westward is unobstructed.

Details concerning the track, Blue Point Road and railroad crossing, crossing-warning signs, railroad carrier's operating rules, New York State vehicle and traffic law, and other factors are sent forth in the appendix.

At the time of the collision, it was slightly foggy in the area of the Blue Point Road crossing. The range of visibility was about one-half mile.

### Description and Discussion

No. 204, an eastbound first-class passenger train, consisted of diesel-powered passenger units 3101 and 3121, coupled in multiple-unit control. Each unit was of all-steel construction and had tightlock couplers. Unit 3101, the first unit, was 85 feet long and had vestibules at both ends. A control station was on the right side of the front vestibule. A doorway, 28 inches wide and 74 inches high, was at the rear of the vestibule, for entrance to, and exit from, the passenger compartment. The door opened inward to the passenger compartment aisle, which was 33 inches wide. See Plate 1 for details concerning the vestibule and control compartment at the front of unit 3101.

No. 204 left Jamaica at 9:11 a. m. the day of the accident, after its brakes had been tested and had been found to be functioning properly. The train made several station stops after leaving Jamaica, then stopped at the Holtsville station, 1,925 feet west of the point where the railroad is crossed at grade by Blue Point Road. It left this station at about 10:39 a. m., 15 minutes late, and proceeded eastward toward the Blue Point Road crossing. The engineer and fireman were in the control compartment at the front of the first passenger unit. The fireman, a qualified engineer, was at the

controls. The conductor, front brakeman, and flagman were at various locations in the cars. According to the fireman, the headlight was lighted.

The fireman said that the train attained a speed of about 30 miles per hour as it approached the crossing and that he began to sound the prescribed signal on the train horn while passing the crossing-whistle sign located 1,302 feet west of the crossing. He said that he continued to sound this signal throughout the approach of the train to the crossing. As the train approached the crossing, apparently within a distance of 675 feet, the fireman saw a southbound motortruck on Blue Point Road closely approaching the crossing at slow speed. Soon thereafter, when the train was within a few hundred feet of the crossing, he realized that the motortruck was not going to stop short of the crossing. He at once applied the train brakes in emergency, left his position at the controls, and entered the passenger compartment of the first unit. Immediately thereafter, at about 10:40 a.m., before its speed was materially reduced, the train entered the crossing and struck the semitrailer of the motortruck on the right side near the rear end. The engineer, age 72, did not leave the front vestibule before the impact.

The train stopped with the front end 582 feet east of the collision point. The impact of the collision caused the rear truck of the first unit to derail 67 feet west of the crossing. It rerailed itself as it moved over the Blue Point Road crossing. No other trucks were derailed. The front of the first unit was heavily damaged (see photo).

The engineer was killed. The fireman, conductor, one brakeman, the train baggageman, and 7 passengers were injured. The driver of the motortruck was not injured.

The motortruck was a combination vehicle about 44 feet long, owned and operated by Lizza Brothers, Inc., Oyster Bay, N. Y. It consisted of a tractor and semitrailer with air brakes throughout. The tractor was a 1967 Auto-car with a single rear axle having dual wheels, a diesel engine and a conventional cab. It carried 1967 New York license No. 46-107. The semitrailer was a 1967 Gar-Wood of the steel dump-body type, 24 feet in length. It had tandem axles with dual wheels, and carried 1967 New York license No. 310-414. At the time of the accident, the motortruck was transporting 60,000 pounds of asphalt in intrastate commerce.

About 8:00 a.m. on the day of the accident, the driver reported for work in Selden, N. Y., and was assigned to transport asphalt from Selden to a site in the vicinity of Holbrook, a distance of about 10 miles. After having made an initial delivery to Holbrook, the driver returned to Selden. The motortruck was reloaded and was again dispatched to the site near Holbrook. Shortly thereafter, while moving southward on Blue Point Road, it approached the railroad crossing. According to his statements, the driver neither saw nor heard any indication of the approaching eastbound train while driving in the area where his view westward was

obstructed by the trees and vegetation along the north side of the railroad. He stated that he shifted to a lower gear while nearing the crossing, and that the motortruck then approached the crossing at a slow speed

Although the driver's view westward improved considerably as the motortruck approached the crossing within 10 to 25 feet and was unrestricted when he was within 10 feet of the crossing, he still did not see or hear the closely approaching train and drove onto the crossing without stopping. A few seconds later, as the tractor was crossing the track, the driver again looked westward, observed the approaching train at a distance of about 125 feet, and heard the train horn. He immediately attempted to accelerate his vehicle and clear the track. However, before the motortruck was able to increase speed significantly, the train entered the crossing and struck the rear portion of the semitrailer

The tractor with the semitrailer attached, stopped on Blue Point Road, 35 feet south of the collision point (see photo) The tractor was heavily damaged and the semitrailer was destroyed

The driver of the motortruck was 30 years old and had been continuously employed by Lizza Brothers, Inc for a period of about one year He had about seven years experience driving tractor-trailer vehicles, and held New York Chauffeurs license No. B 0566741091772256. The driver was familiar with the route and crossing involved and had been on duty 2 hours 40 minutes at the time of the accident

The investigation revealed that the train approached the crossing at about 30 miles per hour, 10 miles below its maximum authorized speed, and that the headlight was lighted and the train horn was sounding, as required.

As the motortruck approached the crossing the driver's view of the approaching train was obstructed by the trees and vegetation In addition to not being able to see the train, he apparently was unable to hear the train horn being sounded. The motortruck was apparently moving at slow speed when it approached the crossing As it neared the track within a distance of 25 feet, the driver had an unobstructed view of the approaching train, which evidently was within a few hundred feet of the crossing at that time. However, he neither saw the train nor heard the sound of the train horn and drove onto the crossing without stopping, causing the collision

The driver's restricted view while approaching the crossing was a causal factor in the accident. The primary causal factor was the driver's failure to determine whether the way was clear before driving onto the crossing. Had he exercised due caution by listening and looking in both directions along the track for an approaching train when he reached a point where his view was not obstructed, he could have seen that No. 204 was closely approaching and stopped his vehicle short of the track. Thus, the accident would have been averted.

Findings

- 1 The train was being operated in accordance with applicable rules and regulations as it approached the crossing
2. The truck driver's view of the approaching train was obstructed until his vehicle reached a point about 25 feet north of the south rail
3. As the motortruck neared the crossing within 25 feet, the driver had an unobstructed view of the closely approaching train. However, he did not exercise due caution at this time to determine whether a train was approaching and thereby failed to see or hear the approaching train until his vehicle had moved onto the crossing.
- 4 The driver did not stop his vehicle short of the track, as required by New York State law when a train by reason of its speed or nearness is an immediate hazard.
- 5 The driver drove his vehicle onto the crossing immediately in front of the closely approaching train, causing the accident

Cause

This accident was caused by failure of the truck driver to stop his vehicle short of the rail-highway grade crossing and to remain standing until the closely approaching train had passed, as required by New York State law.

Dated at Washington, D. C , this 22nd  
day of July 1968  
By the Federal Railroad Administration  
Railroad Safety Board

Bette E Holt  
Acting Executive Secretary

(SEAL)

## Appendix

### Track

The main track is tangent a considerable distance east and west of the collision point. The average grade in this area is 0.34 percent descending eastward.

### Blue Point Road and Railroad Crossing

Blue Point Road is a two-lane road, surfaced with bituminous material to a width of 24 feet. It crosses the railroad at an 84-degree angle. It approaches the crossing from the north on a slight curve to the left and is tangent about 50 feet north of the crossing as shown in the sketch appended to this report. The grade is 3.6 percent descending for southbound vehicles in approach to, and over the crossing.

The crossing is 27 feet wide with planking laid along both sides of each rail. The remaining area is surfaced with bituminous material to the level of the rail tops.

### Railroad Crossing Warning Signs

A circular reflectorized railroad-crossing advance-warning sign, 30 inches in diameter, is adjacent to the west side of Blue Point Road, 376 feet north of the crossing. It is mounted on a mast 5 feet 6 inches above the road surface and bears two intersecting diagonal stripes and the letters "RR" in black on a yellow background. The letters are 6 inches high. In the vicinity of this sign, the southward lane of the road is painted with two intersecting diagonal white stripes and the letters "RR" in white. The diagonal stripes are 15 inches wide and 20 feet long. The letters are 21 inches wide and 8 feet long.

A standard crossbuck railroad-crossing warning sign is adjacent to the west of Blue Point Road, 15 feet 4 inches north of the track centerline. It is mounted on a mast 10 feet above ground level and bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black letters on a white reflectorized background. A similar sign for northbound traffic is provided in the southeast angle of the crossing.

### Railroad Carrier's Operating Rules

14. Engine Whistle Signals

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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, unless otherwise provided; ***  |
| 17 ***      |  |
| (b)         | From sunrise to sunset, R.D.C. (Budd) rail motorcars and diesel engines in road service will operate with dimmed headlight, unless weather or other conditions require the display of bright headlight |
| ***         |  |
| 30.         | The engine bell must be rung *** while approaching and passing public crossings at grade ***   |
| 31.         | The whistle must be sounded at all places where required by rule, or by law, at all whistle posts, portable whistle posts, and when necessary to prevent accidents                                     |

Vehicle and Traffic Law, State of New York

Special Stops Required

- §1170 Obedience to signal indicating approach of train
- (a) Whenever any person driving a vehicle approaches a railroad grade crossing under any of the circumstances stated in this section, the driver of such vehicle shall stop not less than 15 feet from the nearest rail of such railroad, and shall not proceed until he can do so safely. The foregoing requirements shall apply when:
- \*\*\*
- 3 A railroad train approaching within approximately one thousand five hundred feet of the highway crossing emits a signal audible from such distance and such railroad train, by reason of its speed, or nearness to such crossing, is an immediate hazard; or
- 4 An approaching railroad train is plainly visible and is in hazardous proximity to such crossing
- \*\*\*

### Other Factors

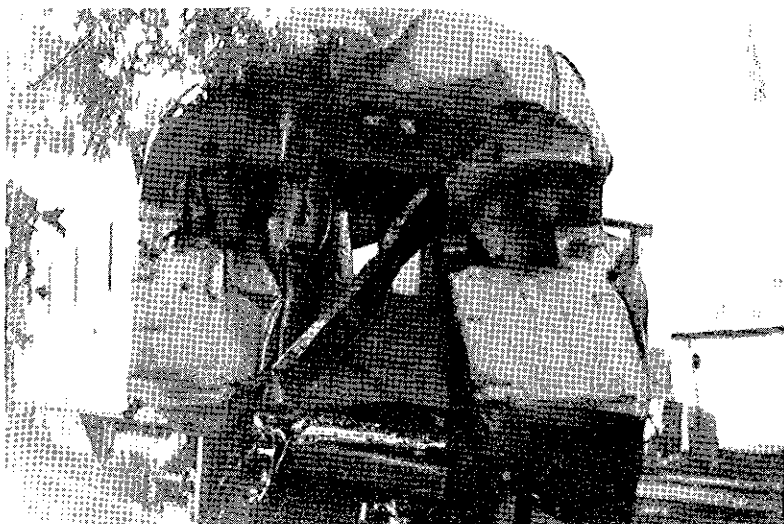
The collision occurred about 10:40 a.m. and there was light fog. The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains in the collision area is 40 miles per hour.

During the 30-day period immediately preceding the day of the accident, the average daily train movement over the Blue Point Road crossing was 5.8 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 9:30 p.m., October 18, 1967, a traffic count disclosed that 1,075 highway vehicles moved over the crossing.

According to the railroad carrier's records, the engineer and fireman of No. 204 had been on duty 2 hours 34 minutes at the time of the accident, and the conductor, front brakeman and flagman had been on duty 2 hours 6 minutes. All five crew members had previously been off duty over 14 hours.



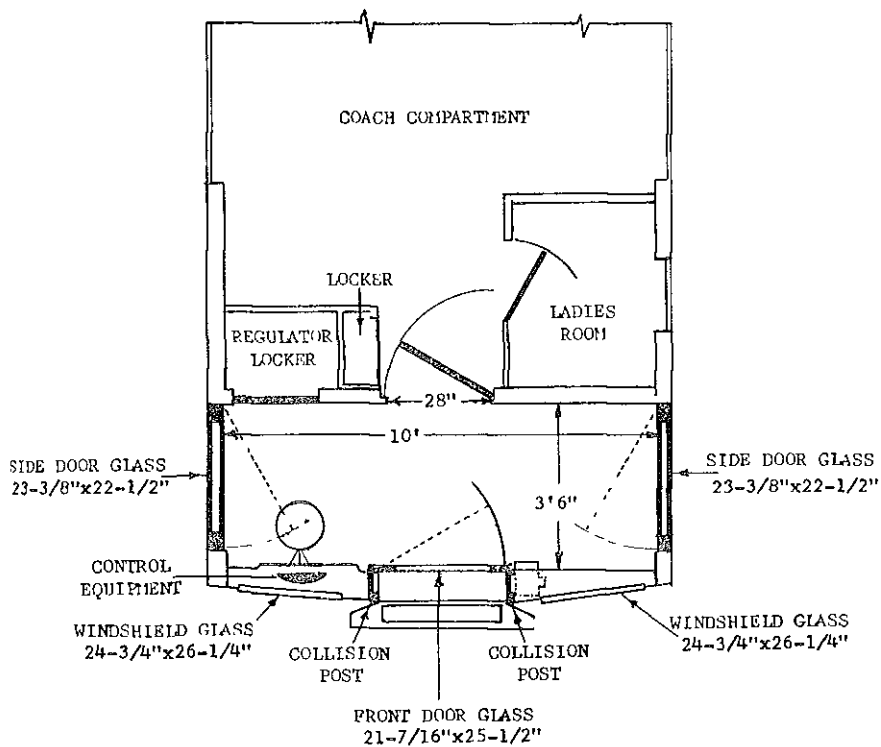
View of a southbound motortruck from an eastbound train approaching the crossing at 395 feet.



Unit 3101

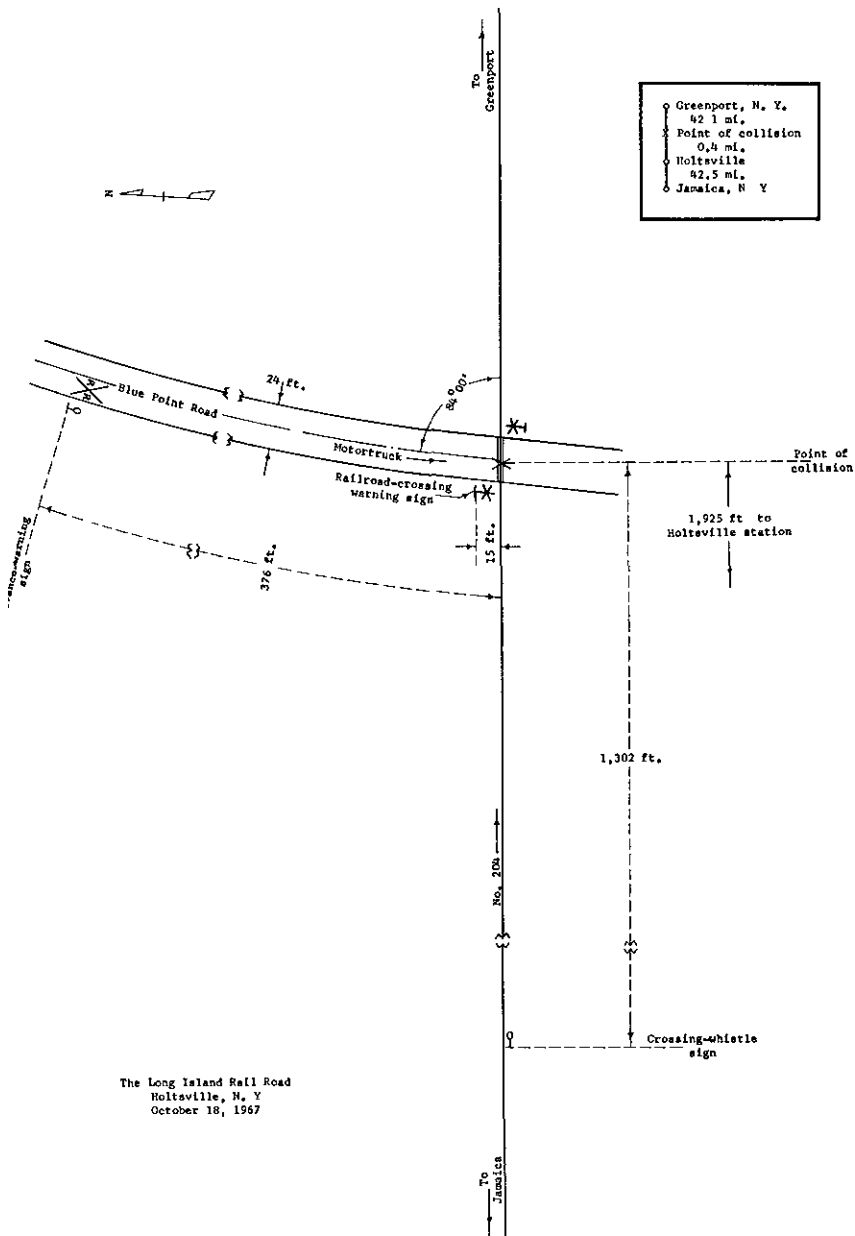
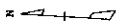


Arrows show direction of train and motortruck.



A. END

PLATE 1



The Long Island Rail Road  
Holtville, N. Y.  
October 18, 1967