

BUREAU OF SAFETY

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REPORT NO. 2014

Railroad: Long Island  
Date: October 16, 1935  
Location: Hicksville, N. Y.  
Kind of accident: Collision  
Train involved: Passenger : Motor tank truck  
Train Number: 642  
Engine Number: 34  
Consist: 5 cars  
Speed: 60 m.p.h. : Unknown  
Track: Tangent  
Weather: Clear  
Time: 5:48 p.m.  
Casualties: 1 killed; 2 injured  
Cause: Truck driven on crossing in  
front of train.

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN  
ACCIDENT ON THE LONG ISLAND RAILROAD AT HICKSVILLE, N.Y.,  
ON OCTOBER 16, 1935.

December 6, 1935.

To the Commission:

On October 16, 1935, there was a collision between a passenger train and a gasoline tank truck at a grade crossing on the Long Island Railroad at Hicksville, N. Y., which resulted in the death of the driver of the truck and the injury of two railroad employees.

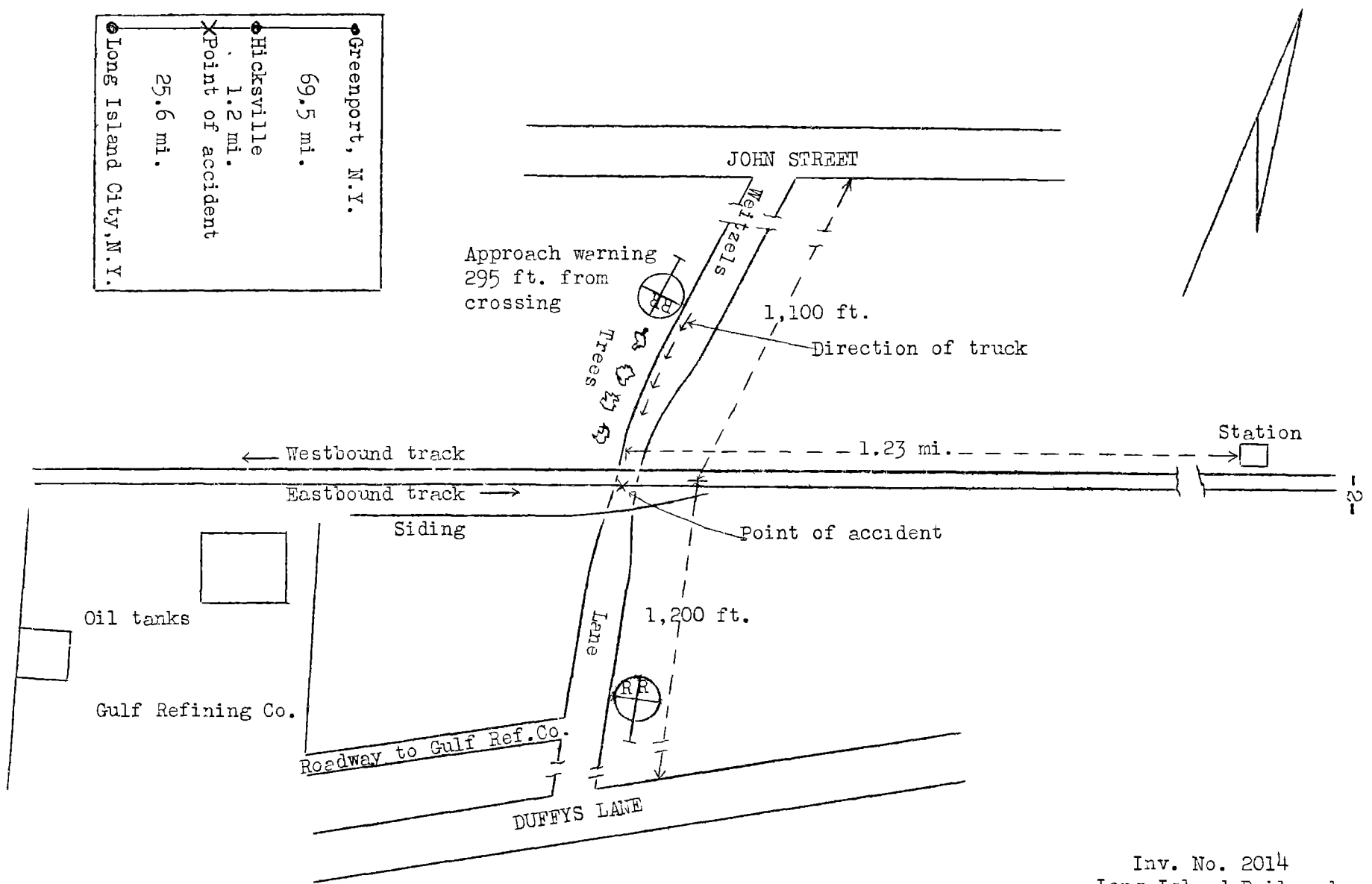
## Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the main line which extends between Long Island City and Greenport, N. Y., a distance of 96.3 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred on the east-bound track at a point approximately 1.23 miles west of the station at Hicksville, where a roadway known as Weitzels Lane crosses the tracks. Approaching this point from the west, the track is tangent for several miles, this tangent extending about 1 mile beyond the crossing. The grade for east-bound trains is 0.3 percent ascending at the point of accident. There are no whistle boards on either side of the crossing.

Weitzels Lane extends nearly north and south, connecting John Street, which parallels the tracks on the north, with Duffys Lane, which parallels the tracks on the south, the distance between the two streets via Weitzels Lane being 2,300 feet. Weitzels Lane is a dirt road with an oiled surface, approximately 25 feet wide, with dirt shoulders from 5 to 7 feet in width; at the crossing it is 15 feet wide, with wooden planks on each side of the rails and filled in with amelsite. Approaching from the north on the roadway, the grade is slightly descending.

An approach warning sign of the disk type is located on the west side of the roadway at a point 295 feet from the crossing; there also is a sign of the same type located in a similar

Greenport, N.Y.	69.5 mi.
Hicksville	1.2 mi.
X Point of accident	25.6 mi.
Long Island City, N.Y.	



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position on the south side of the crossing, no other protection being provided.

Approaching the crossing from the north, the view to be had by the driver of a motor vehicle of an approaching east-bound train is very much restricted by trees, poles and shrubbery, together with an embankment varying from 2 to 6 feet in height on the north side of the track. When at a point 270 feet from the crossing the smoke and also the top of an engine can be seen for a distance of 1,100 feet, and when 40 feet from the crossing a similar view can be had; at a point 18 feet from the crossing a view can be had for a distance of more than 1,000 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 3:48 p.m.

#### Description

Train No. 642, an east-bound passenger train, consisted of 1 baggage car and 4 coaches, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 34, and was in charge of Conductor Wheeler and Engineman Dow. This train departed from Jamaica, N. Y., its initial terminal, at 3:26 p.m., on time, left Westbury, 3.4 miles west of Hicksville, at 3:45 p.m., according to the statement of the conductor, on time, and collided with a motor truck on the crossing at Weitzels Lane in Hicksville while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 60 miles per hour.

The motor tank truck involved was a Dodge 2-ton 1934 model, 70 horse power, equipped with a tank having a capacity of 800 gallons. The truck was being operated by its owner, R. W. Gould, and was en route from the Broadway Garage at Hicksville to the Gulf Refining filling station, located on the south side of the Long Island Railroad near Weitzels Lane. The truck apparently came over John Street and proceeded southward on Weitzels Lane, passed over the west-bound track, and was on the east-bound track when it was struck by Train No. 642.

The truck was demolished and kerosene which was being carried in the tank was sprayed over the engine and cars and immediately became ignited, causing slight damage to the train. The tank was torn from the chassis of the truck and thrown to the left on the west-bound track, while the cab of the truck was thrown to the right of the east-bound track, the chassis being carried on the pilot of the engine to a point 1,293 feet east of the crossing. No part of the train was derailed. The employees injured, as a result of burns, were the engineman and fireman.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Dow stated that the train was traveling at a speed of about 60 or 65 miles per hour; he started to sound a crossing whistle signal when about 1,500 to 1,800 feet from the crossing and had just completed the last blast of the whistle when he saw the front end of a truck moving over the crossing from north to south, the engine then being between 60 and 100 feet from the crossing. He immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, and said that the front wheels of the truck were about on the south rail of the east-bound track when the engine struck it, after which the engine was enveloped in flames. While this is a private crossing and he is not required to sound a crossing whistle signal, Engineman Dow said it was his practice to do so as the crossing is used for bringing animals and machinery across from a nearby farm. The engine bell was ringing at the time of the accident.

The statements of Fireman Gresl corroborated those of the engineman as to the operation of the train and action taken by the engineman on approaching the crossing. Fireman Gresl stated that he did not see the truck; he was attending to the fire and had just closed the firebox door when the engineman applied the brakes in emergency.

Conductor Wheeler, Head Brakeman Smith and Flagman Christopher stated that they heard the crossing whistle signal sounded and felt the air brakes applied in emergency, followed by the flames sweeping over the train, although no flames entered the cars and the fire died down almost instantly.

Supervisor of Track Stoltzer stated that he was en route to Hicksville in his automobile and was approximately 1,200 feet from the crossing, approaching John Street, when he saw a flash of fire, although he was unable to see the train or the truck. On proceeding to the scene he saw that the front wheels of the truck had made a mark along the south side of the ties and that the truck frame was bent in a V-shape, apparently caused by the chassis being struck in the center. He stated that this crossing is not used extensively, although at times he had seen trucks passing over it en route to the Gulf refining plant located southwest of the crossing. He did not consider this to be a hazardous crossing.

Division Engineer Davis stated that on his arrival at the scene of the accident he inquired of the people in that vicinity as to the status of the crossing and was informed that it was a private crossing. The railroad company's records also showed

it to be a private crossing and there was no record showing that it had been changed to a public crossing, although it is the practice of the local township or county officials to notify the railroad company in case of a change in status from that of a private crossing to that of a public crossing.

Road Foreman of Engines Stewart stated that while some of the enginemen sound the whistle signal for this crossing, others do not, and they are not disobeying any rule by not doing so.

The Commission's inspectors interviewed several people who had been acquainted with the driver of the truck and he was found to have been a young man of good character. Mr. Murchie, in charge of the Broadway Garage, where Mr. Gould stored his truck, stated that Mr. Gould apparently had been a careful driver as there were no marks or dents on his truck, which was very unusual.

The records of the township of Oyster Bay showed that the original name of the road in question was Miley's Road, that Mr. E. E. Witzel had made application to have this road accepted as a public highway, and that on September 1, 1908, the Town Board of Oyster Bay acted upon it and accepted it as a 50-foot highway, extending from Duffy Avenue to East John Street. The average number of movements over this crossing during the 30 days ending on the date of the accident was slightly more than 62 trains daily, but the traffic using the highway was very light, a 24-hour check showing the following movements: Automobiles, 125; trucks, 44; pedestrians, 10, and bicycles, 4.

#### Discussion

Engineman Dow had just finished sounding a road crossing whistle signal when he saw the truck moving over the crossing, not more than 100 feet ahead of the engine, and at once applied the brakes in emergency. With the exception of the engineman, there was no known eyewitness of the accident or of the movement of the truck as it approached the crossing. The physical characteristics at this crossing, however, are such that caution is required in order to insure safe movement over it, the view to be had of an east-bound train by the driver of a south-bound vehicle being very materially restricted by trees, poles and shrubbery, and an unobstructed view not being had until only 18 feet from the crossing, where a train can be seen for a distance of more than 1,000 feet; had the driver of the truck stopped close to the crossing

before passing over it, he could have seen the train as it approached.

There appears to be a difference in the records of the town and those of the railroad as to the status of this roadway, the records of the railroad showing it to be a private crossing, and while some of the enginemen sound crossing whistle signals, there are no whistle boards on either side of the crossing, nor is there any protection afforded on the highway other than approach warning signs located approximately 300 feet on each side of the crossing. It appears, however, that this road is used as a public thoroughfare, and, therefore, protection necessary for a public highway with a similar amount of traffic should be provided, in addition to the installation of whistle posts for the guidance of enginemen.

#### Conclusion

This accident was caused by a motor truck being driven upon a railroad crossing at grade directly in front of an approaching train.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.