

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 3147
MISSOURI-KANSAS-TEXAS RAILROAD COMPANY
OF TEXAS
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR COMAL, TEX., ON
DECEMBER 10, 1947

SUMMARY

Railroad: Missouri-Kansas-Texas of Texas
Date: December 10, 1947
Location: Comal, Tex.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Passenger : Passenger
Train numbers: 6 : 3
Engine numbers: 404 : 388
Consists: 11 cars : 10 cars
Speeds: About 50 m. p. h. : About 30 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; tangent; 0.833 percent
descending grade northward
Weather: Misting
Time: 11:40 p. m.
Casualties: 4 killed; 42 injured
Cause: Inferior train occupying main
track on time of opposing
superior train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 3147

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

MISSOURI-KANSAS-TEXAS RAILROAD COMPANY OF TEXAS

February 16, 1948

Accident near Comal, Tex., on December 10, 1947, caused
by an inferior train occupying the main track on
the time of an opposing superior train.

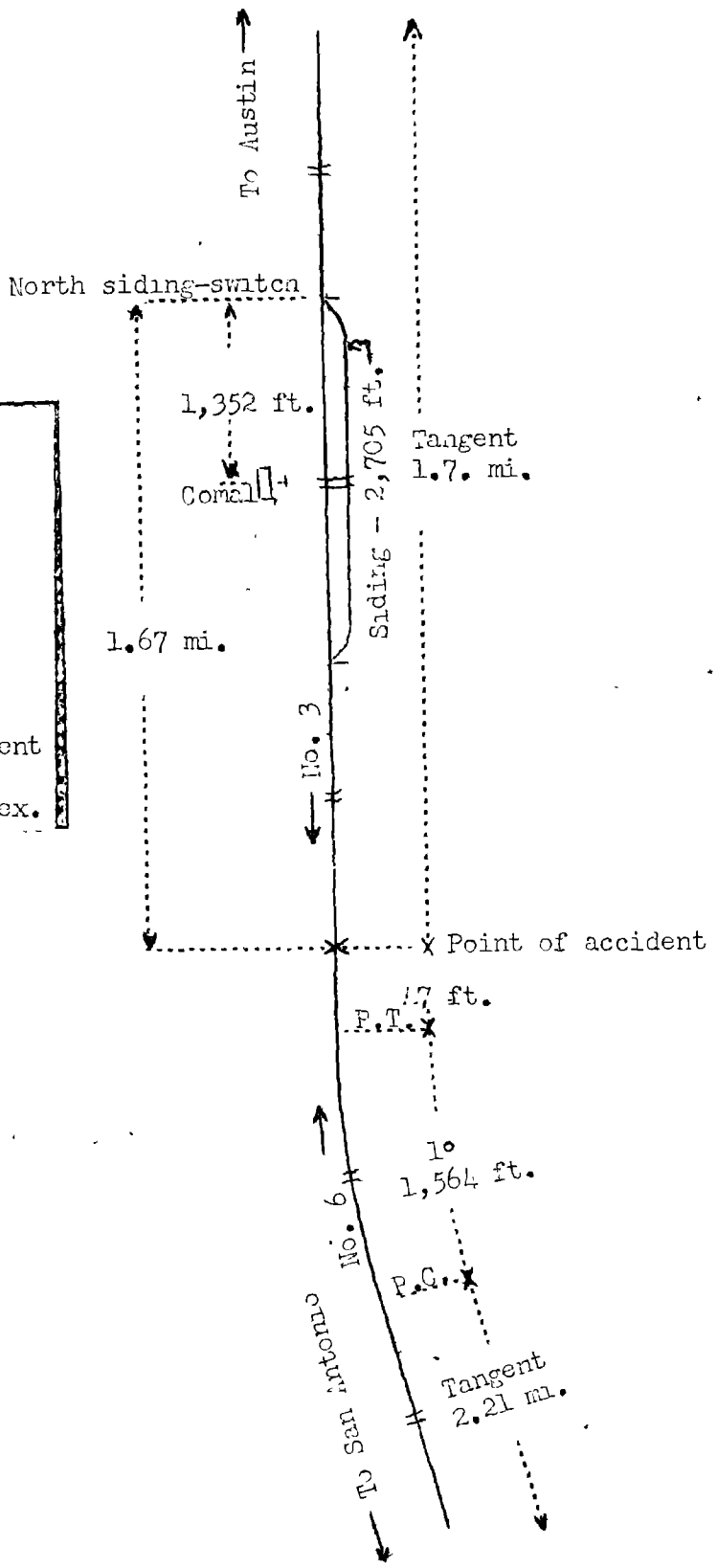
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On December 10, 1947, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the line of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad Company of Texas near Comal, Tex., which resulted in the death of 2 train-service employees, 1 train porter and 1 car inspector, and the injury of 28 passengers, 8 railway-mail clerks, 4 baggagemen and 2 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 Patterson for consideration and disposition.

o	Austin, Tex.	29.40 mi.
o	M-K-T Junction	1.40 mi.
o	San Marcos	16.80 mi.
o	New Braunfels	7.50 mi.
o	Comal	1.41 mi.
X	Point of accident	26.49 mi.
o	San Antonio, Tex.	



Inv. No. 3147
 Missouri-Kansas-Texas
 Railroad Company of Texas
 Comal, Tex.
 September 10, 1947

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the San Antonio Division extending between San Antonio and M-K-T Junction, near Austin, Tex., 53.6 miles, a single-track line. In the vicinity of the point of accident trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. At Comal, 27.9 miles north of San Antonio, a siding 2,705 feet in length parallels the main track on the east. The north switch of this siding is 1,352 feet north of the station sign. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 1.67 miles south of the north siding-switch at Comal. From the south there are, in succession, a tangent 2.21 miles in length, a 1° curve to the right 1,564 feet and a tangent 47 feet to the point of accident. From the north the main track is tangent throughout a distance of 1.71 miles to the point of accident. The grade is 0.833 percent descending northward.

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

5. * * *

* * * the time applies to the switch where an inferior train enters the siding; * * *

* * *

14. Engine Whistle Signals

Note--The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds, "___" for longer sounds. * * *

SOUND

INDICATION

* * *

(n) ___ __ o

Approaching meeting or waiting points. (See Rules * * * 84(b) * * *.)

* * *

16. Communicating Signals

Note--"o" for short sounds, "___" for longer sounds.

SOUND

INDICATION

* * *

(1) o Approaching meeting point.
 * * *

* * *

71. A train is superior to another train by right, class or direction.

Right is conferred by train order; class and direction by time-table.

* * *

Direction is superior as between trains of the same class.

72. * * *

Trains in the direction specified by the time-table are superior to trains of the same class in the opposite direction.

84(b). When a passenger train approaches a station at which it is to stop for an opposing train, the conductor must sound one short blast of the air signal whistle 3/4-mile from point where restrictions become effective which the engineman will acknowledge by two long and one short sound of the engine whistle. (See Rules 14(n) and 16(1).)

84(d). Should the engineman fail to sound signal 14(n) as prescribed * * * the conductor must take immediate action to stop the train.

87. An inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains and failing to clear the main track by the time required by rule must be protected as prescribed by Rule 99.

88. At meeting points between trains of the same class, the inferior train must clear the main track before the leaving time of the superior train.

* * *

99. When a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately, with flagman's signals, a sufficient distance to insure full protection, * * *

* * *

The front of the train must be protected in the same way when necessary by the head brakeman and if the head brakeman is not available by the fireman.

* * *

210(a). Enginemen must show train orders and clearance to firemen and when practicable to trainmen. Conductors must, when practicable, show train orders and clearance to trainmen.

Firemen and trainmen must carefully read train orders when shown them or when available to them, keep in mind their requirements, as well as requirements of rules and special instructions affecting train rights and safety; and if engineer or conductor is not observing them, or appears to have overlooked them, firemen and trainmen are responsible for the making of every reasonable effort to give timely notice of such non-observances to engineer and conductor.

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS

* * *

E

TIME ORDERS

* * *

(3) No. 1 wait H 9 59 a. m. for No. 2.

The train first named must not pass the designated point before the time given, unless the other train has arrived. The train last named is required to run with respect to the time specified, at the designated point or any intermediate station where schedule time is earlier than the time specified in the order, as before required to run with respect to the schedule time of the train first named.

* * *

Time-table special instructions provide that north-bound trains are superior to trains of the same class in the opposite direction.

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains is 60 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

At San Antonio the crew of No. 6, a north-bound first-class passenger train, received copies of train order No. 264 reading as follows:

No. 6 Eng 404 Wait
Comal 1147 PM for No. 3
Eng 388

No. 6 consisted of engine 404, one baggage car, one passenger-box car, two baggage-mail cars, one mail car, three coaches and three sleeping cars, in the order named. All cars were of steel construction. This train departed from San Antonio, the last open office, at 11 p. m., on time, and at 11:40 p. m., while moving at an estimated speed of approximately 50 miles per hour, it collided with No. 3 at a point 1.67 miles south of the north siding-switch at Comal.

At San Marcos, 24.3 miles north of Comal, the crew of No. 3, a south-bound first-class passenger train, received copies of train order No. 264. No. 3 consisted of engine 388, one express car, one passenger-box car, three express cars, one baggage car, one baggage-mail car, two coaches and one sleeping car, in the order named. The first, third, fourth and fifth cars were of steel-underframe construction, and the remainder of the cars were of all-steel construction. This train departed from San Marcos at 11:06 p. m., 1 hour 32 minutes late, departed from New Braunfels, the last open office, 7.5 miles north of Comal, at 11:30 p. m., 1 hour 28 minutes late, passed the north siding-switch at Comal, where it was required to enter the siding and to remain clear of the main track until No. 6 had cleared the south siding-switch, and while moving at an estimated speed of approximately 30 miles per hour it collided with No. 6.

The engines of both trains, the first five cars of No. 6 and the first six cars of No. 3 were derailed. Both engines, and the first five cars of No. 3 were later destroyed by fire. The fifth to eighth cars, inclusive, of No. 6 and the sixth to ninth cars, inclusive, of No. 3 were slightly damaged.

The engineer and the fireman of No. 6 were killed. The engineer and the fireman of No. 3 were injured.

It was misting at the time of the accident, which occurred at 11:40 p. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in this territory was 12.3 trains.

Discussion

The crews of both trains held copies of train order No. 264, which required No. 6, a north-bound first-class passenger train, to wait at Comal until 11:47 p. m. for No. 3, a south-bound first-class passenger train. No. 3 was inferior to No. 6 by direction and, under the rules, if it proceeded to Comal to meet No. 6, No. 3 was required to enter the siding at Comal at the north switch and to remain clear of the main track until No. 6 had cleared the south siding-switch. These trains collided at 11:40 p. m., at a point 1.67 miles south of the north siding-switch at Comal.

As No. 6 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 50 miles per hour. The engineer and the fireman were killed in the accident. The members of the train crew were in various locations throughout the cars of the train, and the first they knew of anything being wrong was when the brakes were applied in emergency immediately before the collision occurred. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly en route. Because of an embankment and vegetation on the inside of the curve immediately south of the tangent on which the collision occurred, the view had by the enginemen of the track ahead was materially restricted.

The members of the crew of No. 3 had compared time, and there was a variation of only a few seconds in their watches. They received copies of train order No. 264 at San Marcos, 24.3 miles north of Comal, about 35 minutes prior to the time the accident occurred. Each member of the crew read the train order. They understood that, under the provisions of the order, their train was required to enter the siding at Comal at the north switch and to remain clear of the main track until No. 6 had passed the south siding-switch, if their train proceeded to Comal to meet No. 6. As No. 3 was approaching Comal the speed was about 60 miles per hour. The headlight was lighted brightly. The enginemen

and the train porter were in the engine cab. The train porter was killed. The engineer, who was seriously injured in the accident, said that he could not recall having been aware of his location at any time after his train departed from New Braunfels, 7.5 miles north of Comal, and he was not aware of any unusual occurrence until a considerable time after the collision occurred. The fireman said that he and the train porter were conversing and that they were not aware of their location until the engine was passing the south siding-switch at Comal, then the fireman warned the engineer. The fireman said the engineer then moved the brake valve to service position, but the collision occurred before the train could be stopped. He estimated the speed of his train as about 40 miles per hour at the time he jumped from the engine. The conductor was in the ninth car and the flagman was in the rear car. These employees were not aware that their train had passed Comal until they saw the lighted switch lamp of the south siding-switch after their train had passed the switch. The flagman said he then opened the emergency valve on the rear car, but this action was not taken soon enough to prevent the collision. The conductor said that, because he had instructed the train porter to ride the engine from New Braunfels to Comal and to inform the engineer that their train was to enter the siding at Comal, he did not sound the meeting-point signal on the train communication system.

At the time the accident occurred trains were being operated in this territory by timetable and train orders only. However, this carrier is now installing an automatic block-signal system in the territory in question.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by an inferior train occupying the main track on the time of an opposing superior train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this sixteenth day of February, 1948.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.