

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3373

MISSOURI-KANSAS-TEXAS RAILROAD COMPANY
OF TEXAS

IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR REEDVILLE, TEX., ON

OCTOBER 21, 1950

SUMMARY

Date: October 21, 1950

Railroad: Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad
Company of Texas

Location: Reedville, Tex.

Kind of accident: Collision

Equipment involved: Freight train : Motor-truck

Train number: 281 :

Engine number: Diesel-electric :
units 331A and
331C

Consist: 57 cars, caboose :

Estimated speeds: 40 m. p. h. : Unknown

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; tangent; 0.09 percent
ascending grade westward

Highway: Tangent; crosses track at angle of
52°57'; level

Weather: Clear

Time: 7:30 a. m.

Casualties: 4 killed

Cause: Motor-truck occupying rail-highway
grade crossing immediately in front
of approaching train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3373

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

MISSOURI-KANSAS-TEXAS RAILROAD COMPANY OF TEXAS

December 28, 1950

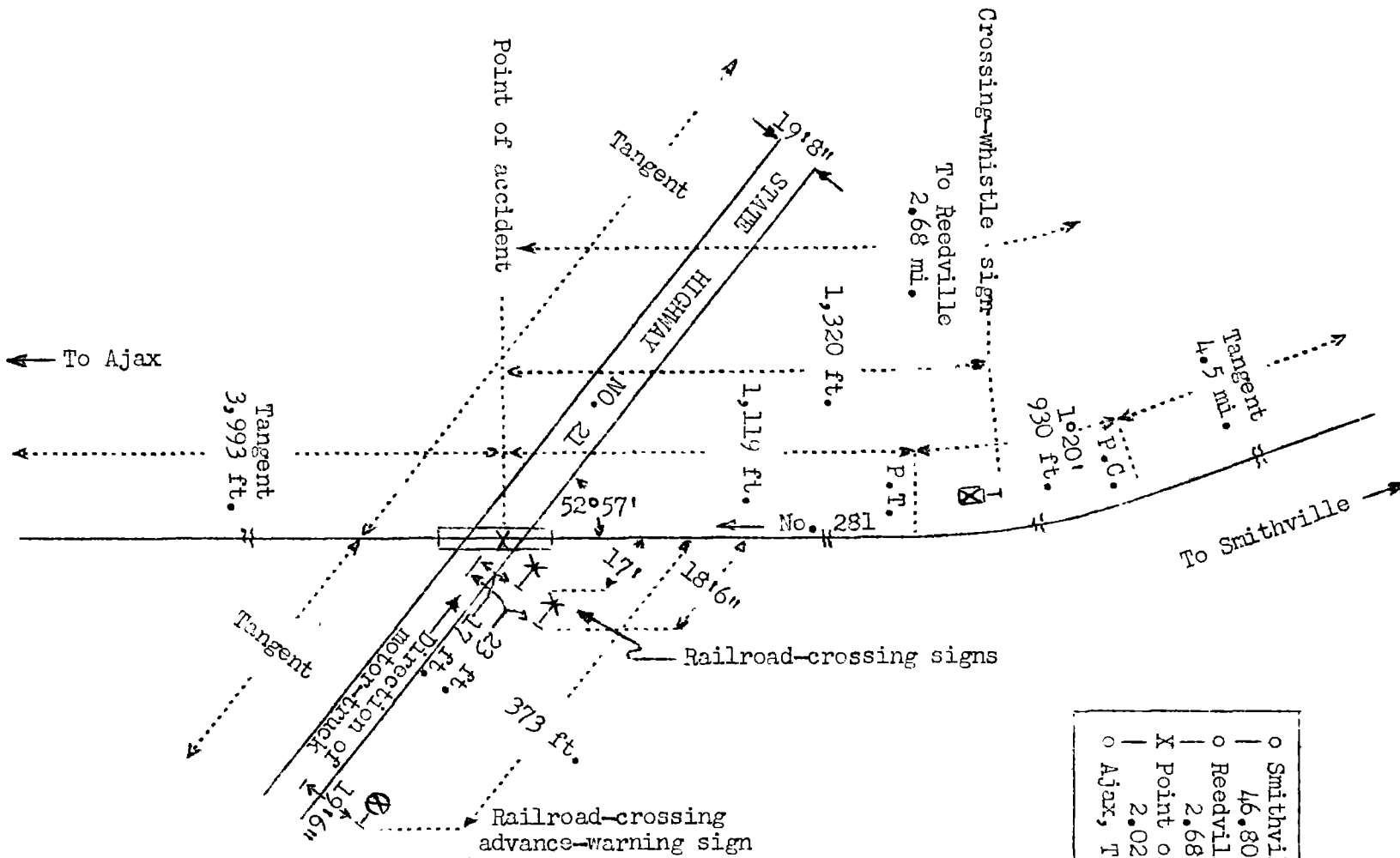
Accident near Reedville, Tex., on October 21, 1950, caused
by a motor-truck occupying a rail-highway grade
crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On October 21, 1950, there was a collision between a freight train on the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad of Texas and a motor-truck at a rail-highway grade crossing near Reedville, Tex., which resulted in the death of the driver of the motor-truck and three 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 | Smithville, Tex. |
| | 46.80 mi. |
| o | Reedville |
| | 2.68 mi. |
| X | Point of accident |
| | 2.02 mi. |
| o | Ajax, Tex. |

Report No. 3373
 Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad Company of Texas
 Reedville, Tex.
 October 21, 1950

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the South Texas Division extending between Smithville and Ajax, Tex., 51.5 miles, 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 49.48 miles south of Smithville and 2.68 miles south of the station at Reedville, where the railroad is crossed at grade by State Highway No. 21. Timetable directions on the railroad are north and south, but the track at the point of accident extends east and west. Geographic directions are hereinafter used. From the east on the railroad there are, in succession, a tangent 4.5 miles in length, a $1^{\circ}20'$ curve to the right 930 feet, and a tangent 1,119 feet to the point of accident and 3,993 feet westward. The grade is 0.09 percent ascending westward at the point of accident. State Highway No. 21 intersects the railroad at an angle of $52^{\circ}57'$. This highway is tangent throughout a distance of more than 1,000 feet on either side of the crossing. It is 19 feet 8 inches in width, and is surfaced with asphalt. The grade for north-bound vehicles is 0.60 percent ascending throughout a distance of 500 feet immediately south of the crossing, and it is level over the crossing and throughout a distance of 100 feet northward. The crossing is 48 feet wide. An area 20 inches in width outside each rail and the area between the rails is surfaced with planking. Flangeways $1\text{-}3/4$ inches in width are provided. The surface of the crossing is level with the tops of the rails.

A circular railroad-crossing advance-warning sign 2 feet 6 inches in diameter is located to the right of the direction of north-bound highway traffic, 19 feet 6 inches east of the center-line of the highway and 373 feet south of the crossing. This sign is mounted on a mast, 3 feet $3\text{-}1/2$ inches above the ground, and bears two intersecting diagonal lines and the letters "RR" in black on a yellow background. A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign is located in the southeast angle of the intersection, 23 feet east of the center-line of the highway and 18 feet 6 inches south of the center-line of the track. This sign is mounted on a mast, 10 feet 2 inches above the ground, and bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING LOOK OUT FOR THE CARS" in black on a white background. Another cross-buck railroad-crossing sign is located in the southeast angle of the intersection, 17 feet east of the center-line of the highway and 17 feet south of the center-line of the track.

This sign is mounted on a mast, 11 feet 3 inches above the ground, and bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in white on a black background. The letters of the sign are provided with reflector buttons. A crossing-whistle sign for west-bound trains is located 1,320 feet east of the crossing.

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

14. Engine Horn or Whistle Signals.--The horn or whistle must be sounded as prescribed by rule or law, * * *

* * *

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 occupied by engine or car. * * *

* * *

* * *

17. Headlights.--The standard white headlight must be displayed brightly to the front of every train by day and by night.

* * *

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

The Uniform Act Regulating Traffic on the Highways of the State of Texas reads in part as follows:

ARTICLE XI

Special Stops and Restricted Speeds Required

Sec. 86. Obedience to Signal Indicating Approach of Train. Whenever any person driving a vehicle approaches a railroad grade crossing, the driver of such vehicle shall stop within fifty (50) feet but not less than fifteen (15) feet from the nearest rail of such railroad and shall not proceed until he can do so safely when:

* * *

(c) A railroad engine approaching within approximately fifteen hundred (1500) feet of the highway crossing emits a signal audible from such distance and such engine by reason of its speed or nearness to such crossing is an immediate hazard;

(d) An approaching train is plainly visible and is in hazardous proximity to such crossing.

Sec. 89. Certain Vehicles Must Reduce Speed at All Railroad Grade Crossings. (a) The driver of any vehicle carrying explosive substances or flammable liquids as its principal cargo before crossing at grade any track or tracks of a railroad, shall if travelling in excess of twenty (20) miles per hour, reduce the speed of such vehicle to twenty (20) miles per hour before approaching within two hundred (200) feet from the nearest rail of such railroad and shall listen and look in both directions along such track for any approaching train * * * and shall not cross such track until he can do so safely. * * *

* * *

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains was 40 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 281, a south-bound third-class freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 331A and 331C, coupled in multiple-unit control, 57 cars and a caboose. This train departed from Smithville, the last open office, at 5:53 a. m., 2 hours 33 minutes late, and while moving at a speed of about 40 miles per hour it struck a motor-truck at a rail-highway grade crossing 2.68 miles south of the station at Reedville.

The vehicle involved was a tractor and a semi-trailer owned by the Phoenix Refining Co., Inc., San Antonio, Tex. The driver, who was the sole occupant, held Texas operators license No. 702368. The tractor was a 1950 model Ford F-7, and bore Texas license No. VA620. It was equipped with dual tires on the rear wheels and hydraulic power brakes on all wheels, and was provided with an enclosed steel cab. The semi-trailer was equipped with dual tires on all wheels and vacuum-operated power brakes. It bore Texas license No. TD 9452. A cylindrical steel tank was mounted on the semi-trailer, and at the time of the accident the cargo consisted of 4,020 gallons of gasoline. The cargo was loaded at San Antonio, Tex., and was destined to Camp Hood, Tex. The total weight of the tractor, semi-trailer and cargo was 40,400 pounds, and the total length of the tractor and semi-trailer, coupled, was 36 feet. This vehicle was moving northward on State Highway No. 21 at an unknown speed when it entered upon the crossing and was struck by No. 281.

The tractor was separated from the semi-trailer and stopped on the west side of the highway and 50 feet north of the crossing. It was badly damaged by fire. The semi-trailer was demolished, and the cargo was consumed by fire.

The Diesel-electric units, the first to the fifteenth cars, inclusive, and the front truck of the sixteenth car of No. 281 were derailed. The first Diesel-electric unit stopped in reverse direction, on its left side, with its rear end 203 feet west of the crossing and 20 feet north of the track and its front end 50 feet north of the track. The second Diesel-electric unit stopped with its front end on the track 219 feet west of the crossing and its rear end 23 feet north of the track. It leaned to the north at an angle of about 45 degrees. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the track. The second Diesel-electric unit and the first, second, eighth, and twelfth cars were badly damaged, and the first Diesel-electric unit and the other derailed cars, except the sixteenth car, were destroyed as a result of the derailment and fire which followed. The sixteenth car was not damaged.

The engineer, the fireman and the front brakeman were killed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7:30 a. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement over the crossing was 4.2 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 7 a. m., October 30, 1950, 408 automobiles, 224 trucks, 2 school buses and 7 other vehicles passed over the crossing. Eight of the trucks were carriers of inflammable cargoes.

Discussion

As No. 281 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 40 miles per hour. The engineer and the front brakeman were in the control compartment at the front of the first Diesel-electric unit, and the conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. Witnesses who were in the vicinity of the crossing said that the headlight was lighted brightly, the bell was ringing, and the grade-crossing whistle signal was sounded as the train approached the crossing and continued to sound until the front of the train reached the crossing. The employees on the first Diesel-electric unit were killed in the accident, and it could not be determined whether they were aware that the motor-truck was approaching the crossing. After the accident occurred, the throttle of the first Diesel-electric unit was found in full open position, the transition lever was in normal running position, the automatic brake valve was in running position, and the independent brake valve was in release position.

When the motor-truck reached a point 300 feet south of the crossing, the driver could have obtained a view of the track throughout a distance of 300 feet immediately east of the crossing. Between points 200 feet and 150 feet south of the crossing the view of the track east of the crossing was somewhat obstructed by vegetation in the southeast angle of the intersection, but from a point 100 feet south of the crossing there was an unobstructed view of the track throughout a distance of 1,600 feet immediately east of the crossing. The driver of the motor-truck died as a result of injuries incurred in the accident, and the only statement by him concerning the cause of the accident was that he did not observe the approaching train until after the motor-truck had entered the crossing.

Cause.

It is found that this accident was caused by a motor-truck occupying a rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-eighth day of December, 1950.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.