

Inv-2155

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE

NEW YORK, CHICAGO & ST. LOUIS

RAILROAD

ST. MARYS, OHIO

MARCH 6, 1937

INVESTIGATION NO. 2155

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Summary

Inv-2155

Railroad: New York, Chicago & St. Louis
Date: March 6, 1937
Location: St. Marys, Ohio
Kind of accident: Derailment
Train involved: Freight
Train number: Second No. 47
Engine number: 701
Consist: 65 cars and cabooses
Speed: 35-50 miles per hour
Track: Tangent; 0.54 per cent descending grade
Time: 4:10 p.m.
Weather: Clear
Casualties: 2 killed, 1 injured
Cause: Excessive speed within yard limits.

April 28, 1937.

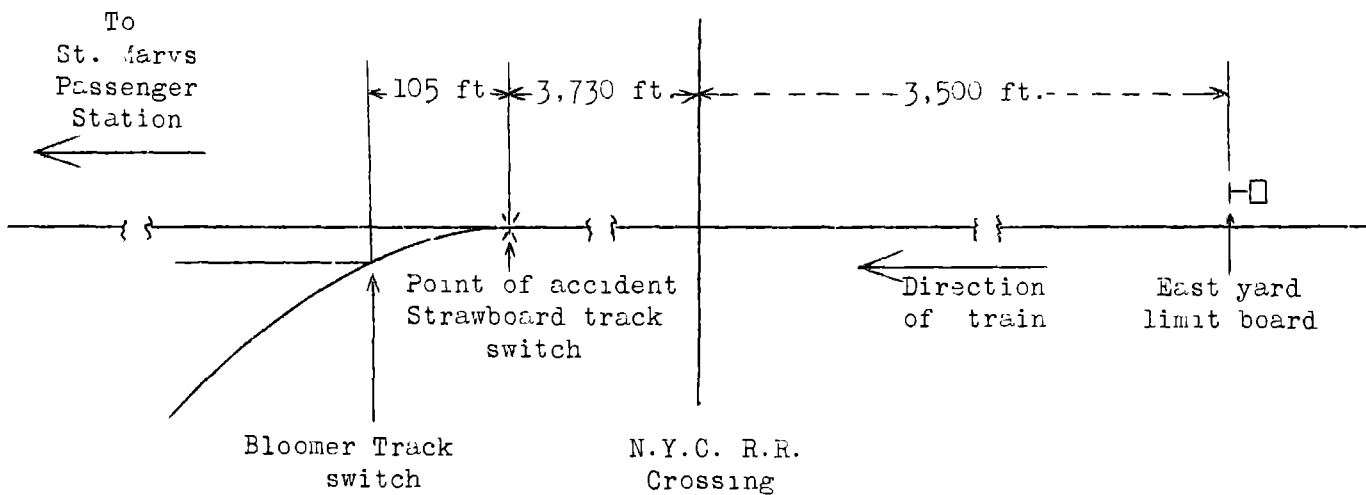
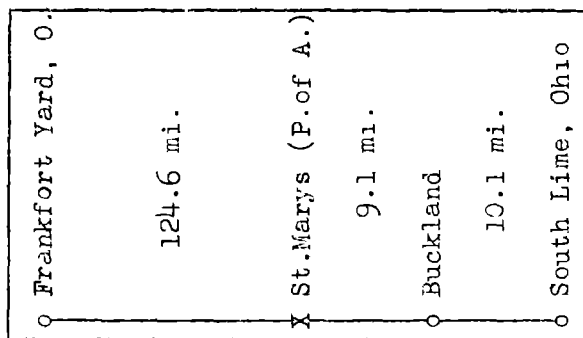
To the Commission:

On March 6, 1937, there was a derailment of a freight train on the New York, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad at St. Marys, Ohio, which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 1 employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Sandusky Division of the Lake Erie and Western District which extends between South Lima, Ohio, and Frankfort Yard, Indiana, a distance of 144.4 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders, and a manual block-signal system for following trains. The accident occurred within yard limits, on an industrial track known as the Strawboard track. The switch leading to this track is located approximately 3,400 feet east of the passenger station and 7,230 feet west of the east yard-limit board at St. Marys. Approaching this switch from the east the track is tangent for several miles, this tangent extending several hundred feet west of the switch. The grade from the New York Central Railroad crossing located 3,730 feet east of the switch, is 0.54 percent descending westward.

The Strawboard track has a facing point switch with a No. 11 turnout, and diverges to the left in a southwesterly direction. The switch stand, which is of the standard intermediate type, is located south of the main track and is 8 feet, 8½ inches high; it is equipped with targets set at right angles to each other; when the switch is closed a white diagonal target is displayed to an approaching train; when it is lined for a movement to the Strawboard track the red target is displayed. The red target consists of two 11½ inch circular discs, one on each side of the spindle, each being perforated by a 3½ inch hole; the centers of these discs are 7 feet 8 inches above the head block ties. Another industrial track, known as the Bloomer Track, diverges to the north from the Strawboard track and parallels the main track on the south. The switch stand to this track is of the low type and is located 105 feet west of the Strawboard main track switch. At the time of the accident a number of box cars were standing on the Bloomer track. The maximum speed authorized for freight trains, between South Lima and Frankfort, is 50 miles per hour.



Inv. No. 2155
New York, Chicago & St. Louis RR
St. Marys, Ohio
March 6, 1937

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4:10 p.m.

Description

Train No. 55, a second class west-bound local freight train, consisted of 27 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 452 and was in charge of Conductor Downey and Engineman Miller. This train arrived at St. Marys at 2:46 p.m., according to the train sheet and the engine with several cars later entered the Strawboard track, leaving the main track switch open.

Train 2nd No. 47, a second class west-bound freight train, consisted of 65 cars and a caboose hauled by engine 701, and was in charge of Conductor Lex and Engineman Brown. This train left South Lima at 3:40 p.m., according to the train sheet, passed Buckland, the last open office, at 3:57 p.m., 3 hours and 29 minutes late and while traveling at an estimated speed of between 40 and 50 miles per hour entered the Strawboard track and was derailed 104 feet west of the switch.

The engine and tender stopped on their right sides to the south of the main track with the front end of the engine about 467 feet west of the main track switch, the tender remaining coupled to the engine.

The four head cars in the train were derailed and badly damaged, stopping crosswise of the Strawboard track; the lead truck of the fifth car was derailed; the eleventh to the nineteenth cars, inclusive, were strewn on both sides of the main track and badly damaged; the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth cars were crosswise of the track and one pair of wheels of the rear truck of the thirty-first car was derailed.

The employees killed were the engineman and the fireman of Train Second No. 47 and the employee injured was the head brakeman of that train.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Downey, of Train No. 55, stated that his train arrived at St. Marys at 2:45 p.m. and was placed on the passing track, and work was performed at that point. About 3:35 p.m. the engine, with a few cars, left the passing track and proceeded to the Strawboard track where switching was done which required

the use of the main track as well as the industrial tracks at that point; the main track switch to the Strawboard track was left open while he remained near it to handle the switch. Later his engine attempted to move seven cars out to the main track but stalled in the attempt. He was located along the main track west of the Strawboard switch at the time and after looking to see if anything was coming he held a short conversation with his brakeman, who was located about 350 feet west of the main line switch and he then started towards the switch and had walked about 150 feet when he saw a train approaching about 600 or 700 feet away and coming very fast; he started running toward the switch but when he had reached a point 5 or 10 feet from it, the engine entered the side track at a high rate of speed. He did not hear any whistle signals sounded for road crossings in the vicinity and thought that had they been sounded he probably would have heard them. He also stated that he assumed Train Second No. 47 would observe yard limit rules which would give him a chance to perform his work and look after the switch; he did not rely wholly upon yard limit rules nor did he depend entirely upon the switch banner for protection although flagging was not necessary except when working under bad weather conditions. He further stated that, commencing at a point about 800 feet west of the Strawboard track, trains are required, and usually do, reduce speed to 20 miles per hour and are further required by city ordinance to run at a speed of 8 miles per hour within the city limits of St. Marys; this latter restriction, however, he thought was not generally observed. He said that he did not see any indication of the brakes being applied on the train either before or after the engine passed him. He had no general understanding with his brakemen as to who would attend the switch but as a rule he takes care of it himself and was doing so on this occasion. The work was being performed in the usual way and Conductor Downey said, if Train Second No. 47 had been approaching at the speed normally used by west-bound freight trains at that point he would have had ample time to close the switch before the engine reached it.

Brakeman Easter, of Train No. 55, stated that several switching movements were made at the industries after entering the Strawboard track and during this time his conductor was located about 150 feet west of the main track switch and 25 feet south of the main line. No understanding was had as to who would look after the main track switch, but the practice had been for the conductor to do so. He also said that it is the practice to use the main track without flag protection while switching at this point but under adverse weather conditions, or if the view is obscured, the movement is protected by a flagman. He stated that the main track is straight for several miles approaching from the east and he estimated the distance one could see as being about one mile.

Flagman Hooks of Train No. 55, stated that Conductor Downey threw the Strawboard track switch and it was customary for the conductor to remain near the switch and to assume responsibility for its care. Several switching movements were made after entering the Strawboard track, which required Flagman Hooks to take a position on top of the cars. About 4 or 5 minutes before the accident occurred he had a view of the track to the east but did not see or hear any train approaching; at that time the conductor was located about 200 feet west of the switch and he did not see him again. After releasing a brake he was about to get off the car when he saw the engine of the approaching train entering the siding. He said that he had been employed on this run for about 5 years and when making movements to and from the main track at this point, the yard limit boards were depended upon and flag protection is not required except when occupying the main track on the time of a first class train or when weather conditions are bad.

Engineman Miller of Train No. 55, stated that his engine entered the Strawboard track about 3:35 or 3:40 p.m., and after doing switching an attempt was made to move several cars out upon the main track; after receiving a back-up signal from the fireman an attempt was made to move the cars but the engine stalled and just as the second attempt was being made, the fireman warned him that a train was entering the siding and they both left their engine, which was about 400 to 500 feet west of the main track switch. He said that under yard limit rules, he had a right to back out upon the main track at this point without flag protection. Frequently he had been employed on through freight trains and when in charge of a west-bound train of 65 cars, in order to comply with speed restrictions which require trains to reduce speed to 20 miles per hour at a point about 800 feet west of the point of accident, he would usually start applying the brakes in the vicinity of the New York Central crossing.

Fireman Hackenberger of Train No. 55 estimated the speed of Train Second No. 47 when entering the siding to have been 35 or 40 miles per hour and said he saw no indications of the brakes being applied on the train.

Head Brakeman Wheeler, of Train Second No. 47, stated that the air brakes of his train were tested before leaving Lima Yard; approaching the yard limits at St. Marys he was on the seat box on the left side of the engine, immediately back of the fireman; the speed was about 50 miles per hour and no reduction of speed was made; when the engine reached a point approximately 1,400 feet east of the Strawboard switch, he saw the switch target displaying a bright red indication and he immediately called a warning to his engineman and got down on the steps on the left side of the engine

which was then about 15 car lengths from the open switch. When he called the warning the engineman left his seat but Brakeman Wheeler did not think an application of the brakes was made. The engineman and fireman appeared normal in every respect throughout the trip and the engineman called the home signal indication as the train approached the New York Central crossing; he could not, however, advance any reason why he failed to close the engine throttle. He estimated the speed at the time his engine entered the siding to have been 50 miles per hour and said that he left the engine just as it was about to turn over, west of the switch. He further stated that in order to comply with speed requirements, it is a general practice for enginemen to commence reducing speed in the vicinity of the New York Central crossing or farther west, and he expected his engineman to start braking the train shortly after passing over this crossing. The sun was shining brightly and he had no difficulty in determining the position of switch targets or other signals; he also said that he has ridden with Engineman Brown heretofore and that "he was pretty fast and he let them go as a rule until the last possible time until he could reduce speed, at most points".

Conductor Lex, of Second No. 47, stated that after his train departed from South Lima no stops or brake applications were made prior to the time his train was derailed. He said his time had been occupied with clerical work from the time of departure until his train was approaching the New York Central crossing, whereupon he left his desk and moved to the bunk seat on the south side of the caboose. He estimated the speed of his train at this time to have been about 40 miles per hour and did not consider the speed excessive. He looked at the air gauge which indicated a pressure of 70 pounds and was bracing himself as he expected the brakes would be applied at any moment; just after the caboose passed over the crossing the brakes were applied in emergency, the caboose stopping approximately 1,400 feet west of the crossing. He believed that the engineman applied the brakes in emergency prior to the derailment and based this opinion upon the manner in which the train stopped. After the accident he went ahead and found the main track switch open and the switch target displaying a red indication. He further stated that Engineman Brown appeared to be normal before leaving South Lima yard; about one month ago it had been necessary to caution him a couple of times about exceeding speed limits at other points on the division. Flagman Slade stated that a terminal air brake test was made by the car inspectors before the departure of his train; he estimated the speed of his train as it passed over the New York Central crossing to have been 50 miles per hour.

Car Inspectors Klausing, Deafendeffin and Copus stated that they made an air test of Second No. 47 before its departure from Lima and found the air brakes working properly.

Test-out-man Brennan at Lima enginehouse stated that he inspected the air brake equipment on engine 701 on March 6, prior to its departure from Lima, and found it to be in good condition.

Road Foreman of Engines Baumberger stated that he reached the point of accident about 5:20 p.m., March 6, and made an inspection of engine 701 as soon as possible thereafter. He found the automatic brake valve in emergency position, independent brake valve in running position, sanders open in first position, forward motion, and the throttle lever was in half open position on the quadrant; neither the brake valves, throttle lever or quadrant were damaged. The clear vision and side windows were open on both sides of the cab.

Discussion

The investigation developed that the engine of Train No. 55 entered the Strawboard track about 3:55 p.m.; as it was necessary to use the main track in performing switching, the switch was left open and the conductor remained in the vicinity of the switch to care for it and to pass signals. Approaching from the east the track is tangent for more than 15 miles. The conductor looked for approaching west-bound trains just prior to the accident, and seeing none, he walked about 350 feet west of the switch and conversed with one of his brakemen; he had started toward the switch again and had gone about 150 feet when he noticed Train Second No. 47 approaching at a very high rate of speed, about 600 or 700 feet distant. He then ran toward the switch in an endeavor to close it and had reached a point 5 or 10 feet from the switch when the engine of Train Second No. 47 entered the turnout.

Rule 93 of the operating rules reads as follows:

"Within yard limits the main track may be used, protecting against first-class trains.

Second-class and extra trains must move within yard limits, prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear."

The east yard limit board at St. Marys is located 7,230 feet east of the Strawboard main track switch and after passing this yard limit board Train Second No. 47, under rule 93, should have

been operated under such control that it could be stopped short of an obstruction. The sun was shining, visibility was good and the target on the switch stand was displaying a brilliant red, which the head brakeman of Train Second No. 47 noticed when the engine was still about 1,400 feet east of the switch, and he immediately called the indication to the engineman. The brake equipment on engine 701 was inspected and an air test was made of the train brakes before leaving South Lima and nothing wrong was found with the braking system on either the engine or the train at that time.

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains between Lima and St. Marys is 50 miles per hour and according to estimates made by the head brakeman and the flagman, the train was still running at about the maximum authorized speed when it crossed the New York Central tracks, located 3,500 feet inside of the yard limits and members of the train crew noticed but very little reduction in speed before the accident occurred.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by failure to operate Train Second No. 47 under control within yard limits.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON

Director.