

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2831
THE NORTHERN PACIFIC RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR LITTLE ROCK, WASH., ON
SEPTEMBER 20, 1944

SUMMARY

Railroad: Northern Pacific
Date: September 20, 1944
Location: Little Rock, Wash.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Freight : Freight
Train numbers: Extra 1903 West : Extra 1802 East
Engine numbers: 1903 : 1802
Consist: 60 cars, caboose : 2 cars, caboose
Estimated speed: 30 m. p. h. : 30 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; 2°10' curve; 1 percent
descending grade eastward
Weather: Clear
Time: 2:25 p. m.
Casualties: 2 killed; 7 injured
Cause: Overlapping of authority of two
opposing extra trains
Recommendation: That the Northern Pacific Railway
Company establish an adequate
block system on the line on which
this accident occurred

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO 2831

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

THE NORTHERN PACIFIC RAILWAY COMPANY

November 6, 1944.

Accident near Little Rock, Wash., on September 20, 1944,
caused by overlapping of authority of two opposing
extra trains.

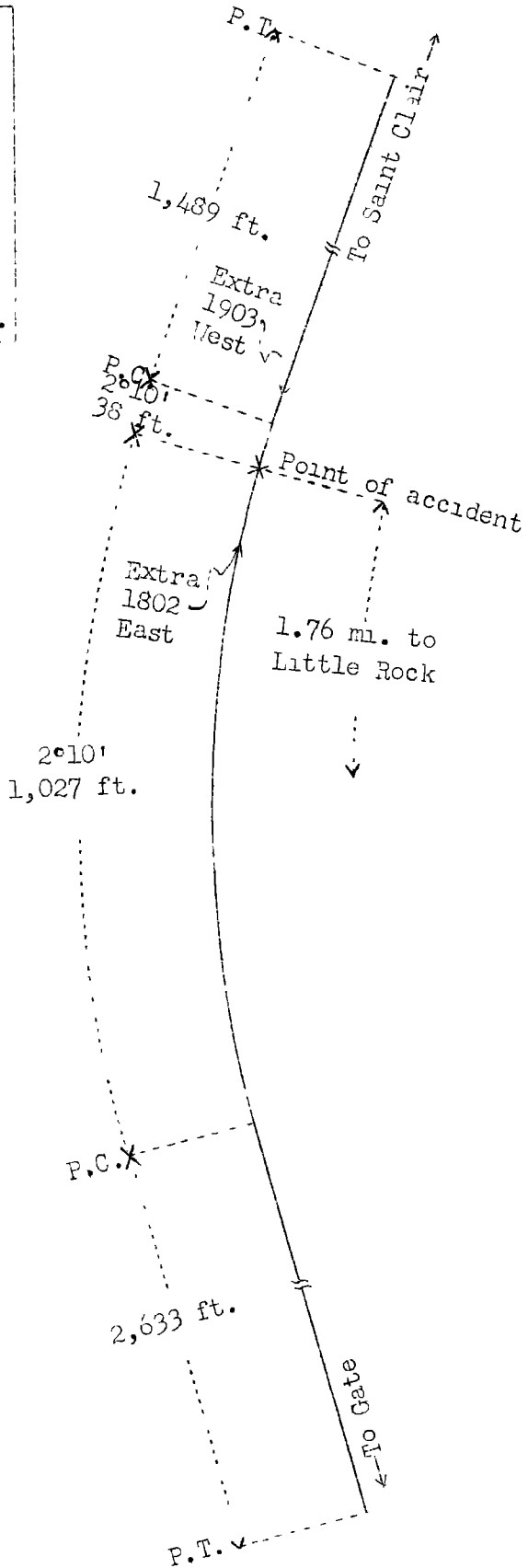
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On September 20, 1944, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Northern Pacific Railway near Little Rock, Wash., which resulted in the death of two employees, and the injury of seven employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Department of Labor and Industry of the State of Washington.

¹Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Chairman Patterson for consideration and disposition.

Sixteenth Sub-division	o Saint Clair, Wash.	9.40 mi.
	o Olympia	10.14 mi.
	o Point of accident	1.76 mi.
	o Little Rock	7.30 mi.
	o Gate	11.40 mi.
	o Blakeslee Jct., Wash.	



Inv. No. 2831
 Northern Pacific Railway
 Little Rock, Wash.
 September 20, 1944

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Sixteenth Sub-division extending eastward, according to time-table directions, from Gate to Saint Clair, Wash., 28.6 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this was a single-track line over which trains were operated by timetable and train orders. There was no block system in use. The accident occurred 9.06 miles east of Gate, at a point 1.76 miles east of the station at Little Rock. From the west there was a tangent 2,633 feet long, which was followed by a 2°10' curve to the right 1,027 feet to the point of accident and 38 feet eastward. From the east there was a tangent 1,489 feet long, which was followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. At this point the grade was 1 percent descending eastward.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

S-87. * * *

Extra trains * * * will be governed by train orders with respect to opposing extra trains.

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS.

* * *

S-A

Fixing Meeting Points for Opposing Trains.

(1.) No 1 meet No 2 at B.

* * *

* * *

Trains receiving these orders will run with respect to each other to the designated points and there meet in the manner prescribed by the rules.

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains was 35 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

At Olympia, 11.9 miles east of Little Rock and the last open office, the crew of Extra 1903 West, a west-bound freight train, received copies of train order No. 29 reading in part as follows:

Eng. 1903 run extra Olympia to
Blakeslee Jct. * * *

Blakeslee Jct., a station on the Eighteenth Sub-division, was 11.4 miles west of Gate. The order was made complete at 1:07 p. m. Extra 1903 West, consisting of engine 1903, 60 cars and a caboose, departed from Olympia at 2 p. m., and while moving at an estimated speed of 30 miles per hour it collided with Extra 1802 East.

At Gate, the last open office, the crew of Extra 1802 East, an east-bound freight train, received copies of train order No. 32 reading as follows:

Eng. 1802 run extra Gate to Saint Clair.

This order was made complete at 1:51 p. m. Extra 1802 East departed from Gate at 1:55 p. m. At Little Rock a car was picked up, and this train, consisting of engine 1802, 2 cars and a caboose, departed about 2:20 p. m. While it was moving at an estimated speed of 30 miles per hour it collided with Extra 1903 West.

From an engine moving in either direction in the vicinity of the point of accident, the view of a train approaching from the opposite direction was restricted to a distance of about 400 feet, because of vegetation on the inside of the curve.

The front end of each engine was considerably damaged. The first 5 cars of Extra 1903 were derailed and demolished. The cars and the caboose of Extra 1802 were somewhat damaged.

It was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2:25 p. m.

The fireman and the front brakeman of Extra 1903 were killed. The engineer and the swing brakeman of Extra 1903, and the engineer, the fireman, the conductor, the front brakeman and the swing brakeman of Extra 1802 were injured.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 4.6 trains.

Discussion

The rules governing operation on this line provide that extra trains will be governed by train orders with respect to opposing extra trains.

The investigation disclosed that train order No. 29, which authorized the movement of Extra 1903 West from Olympia to Blakeslee Jct., was issued at 1:07 p. m., and that train order No. 32, which authorized the movement of Extra 1802 East from Gate to Saint Clair, was issued at 1:51 p. m. Extra 1802 East departed from Gate, the last open office west of the point of

accident, at 1:55 p. m., and Extra 1903 West departed from Olympia, the last open office east of the point of accident, at 2 p. m. No provision was made to establish a meeting point or otherwise to protect the movement of these two opposing extra trains, and the crew of each train had no knowledge of the existence of the other train. This resulted in an overlapping of authority of the trains involved. The collision occurred on the main track 1.76 miles east of Little Rock. Because of vegetation on the inside of the curve in this vicinity, the members of the crew on the engine of each train were unable to see the other train more than a few hundred feet. Action to stop their respective trains was taken by the engineers, but the distance was not sufficient to avert the collision.

The train dispatcher understood that the movement of two opposing extra trains must be protected by train order. However, when he issued order No. 32 at 1:51 p. m. to authorize the movement of Extra 1802 East he overlooked the fact that he had issued order No. 29 at 1:07 p. m. to authorize the movement of Extra 1903 West. He could give no explanation for this oversight. On the day of the accident his work was of normal volume. His territory consisted of 11 sub-divisions, of which most were branches. The aggregate length of these sub-divisions was approximately 465 miles. At the time of the accident there were 29 authorized train movements on this dispatching district.

The book of operating rules of this carrier contains manual-block rules which provide for blocking of opposing movements, but these rules were not in effect in the territory involved. If an adequate block system had been in use in this territory, these opposing trains would not have been permitted to occupy the same block simultaneously, and this accident would not have occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by overlapping of authority of two opposing extra trains.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Northern Pacific Railway Company establish an adequate block system on the line on which this accident occurred.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this sixth day of November, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.