

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD
AT
JEWETT, OHIO
ON
NOVEMBER 14, 1935

INVESTIGATION NO. 2020

SUMMARY

Railroad: Pennsylvania
Date: November 14, 1935
Location: Jewett, Ohio
Kind of accident: Train struck automobile and was derailed
Train involved: Freight : Automobile
Train number: APH-7
Engine number: 6725
Consist: 67 cars and caboose
Speed: 30-35 m.p.h. : 15-20 m.p.h.
Track: Tangent; view at crossing materially
restricted; crossing protected by
fixed signs only.
Weather: Cloudy
Time: 6:52 a.m.
Casualties: 2 killed; 2 injured
Cause: Automobile driven on crossing in front
of freight train.

January 9, 1916.

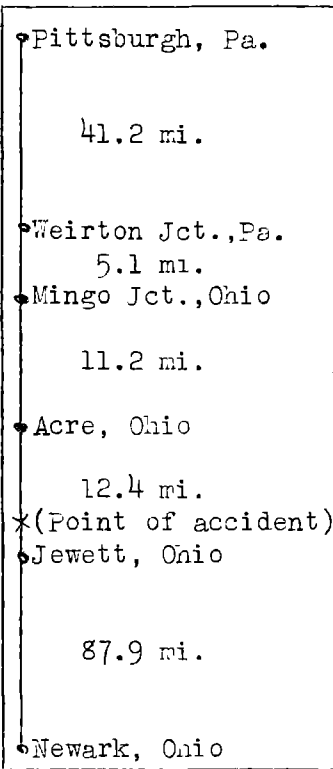
To the Commission:

On November 14, 1935, near Jewett, Ohio, a freight train on the Pennsylvania Railroad struck an automobile at a grade crossing and was derailed, resulting in the death of 2 employees, and the injury of 1 employee and the driver of the automobile. This accident was investigated in conjunction with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

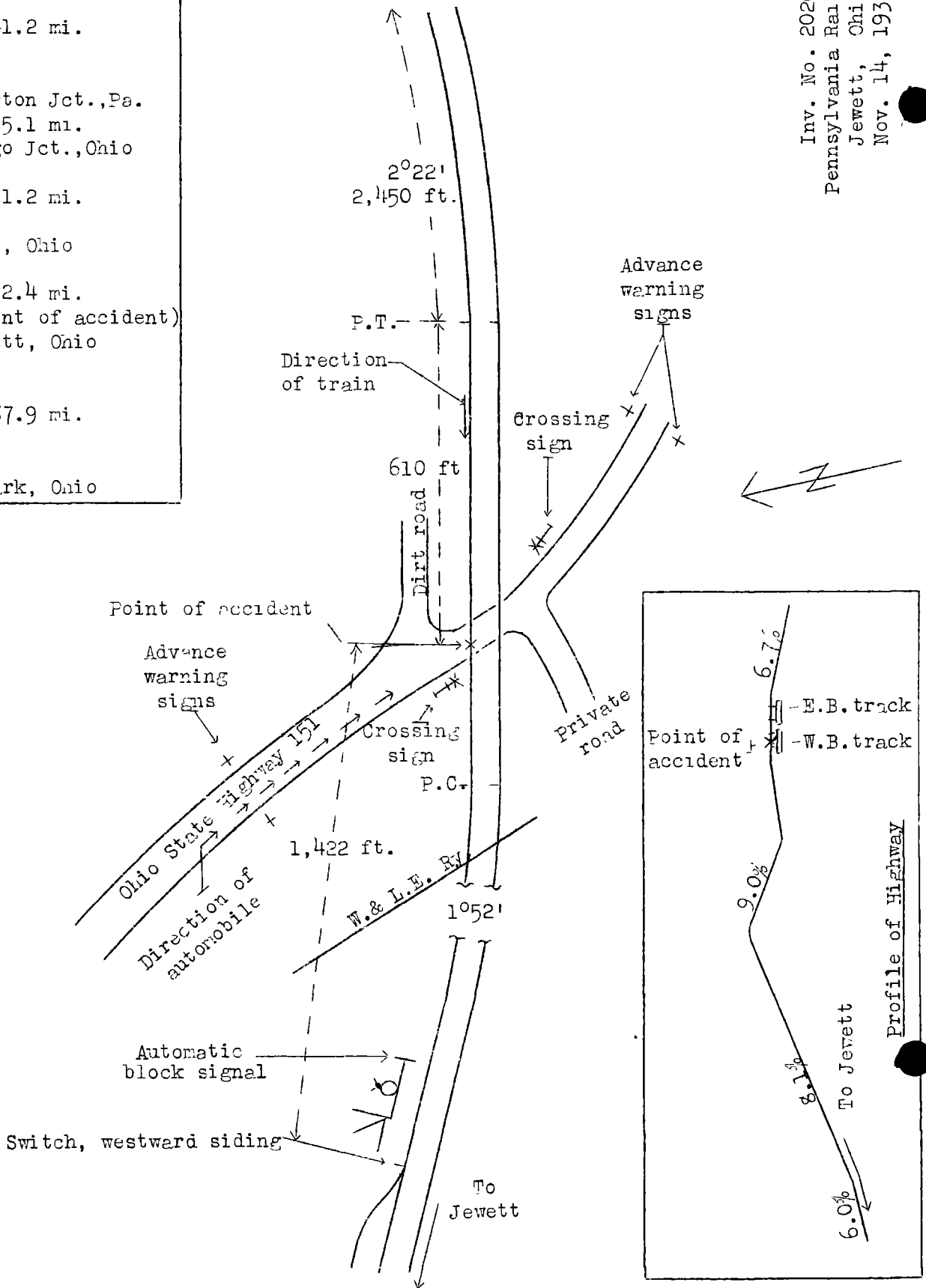
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Panhandle Division, extending between Pittsburgh, Pa., and Newark, Ohio, a distance of 157.8 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 and cab-signal system. The accident occurred on the west-bound track at a point about 1 mile east of Jewett, where Ohio state highway 151 crosses the tracks at grade, the crossing being locally known as Busby's Crossing. Approaching from the east on the railroad, there is a $2^{\circ}22'$ curve to the right 2,450 feet in length, followed by 610 feet of tangent to the center of the crossing; this tangent extends 110 feet west of the crossing to a $1^{\circ}52'$ curve to the right, which curve extends approximately to the facing-point switch of the westward siding at Jewett, which parallels the tracks on the north, the frog of the switch being located 1,466 feet west of the crossing. At a point 37 feet east of this switch there is a west-bound block signal. The grade for west-bound trains is 0.52 percent descending at the point of accident.

The highway involved parallels the tracks eastward from Jewett to a point about 370 feet from the crossing, and then it curves to the right and crosses the tracks at an angle of about 45° from northwest to southeast. Approaching the crossing from Jewett the grade is ascending, varying from 6 to 8.1 percent until a point about 90 feet from the crossing is reached, where it changes to 9 percent descending for about 60 feet, following which it again ascends a distance of 30 feet to the west-bound track, the highway being level over the crossing. The highway is of macadam construction and at the crossing the traveled portion of the roadway is about 15 feet wide.



Inv. No. 2020
 Pennsylvania Railroad
 Jewett, Ohio
 Nov. 14, 1935



The crossing is protected on each side of the tracks by advance warning signs of the disk type, with reflector buttons; on the north side of the tracks these signs are located on each side of the highway and opposite each other, about 250 feet from the crossing; the sign on the west side of the highway is 28 inches in diameter with the letters "RR" thereon, separated by diagonal crossed lines, while the sign on the east side of the highway has the letters "RR", separated by one vertical line and underscored with two horizontal lines. At a point 45 feet north of the crossing and on the west side of the highway there is located a crossing sign of the cross-bar type mounted on a mast, this sign reading "RAILROAD CROSSING", and underneath the crossed bars there is another sign reading "DANGER".

When a south-bound automobile reaches a point 75 feet from the tracks an approaching west-bound train can be seen for a distance of only 180 feet, due to an embankment in the northeast angle of the crossing; however, on reaching a point 15 feet from the tracks an unobstructed view of a train can be had for 1,118 feet.

The weather was cloudy and day was breaking, but visibility was good at the time of the accident, which occurred about 6:52 a.m.

Description

Train APH-7, a west-bound freight train, consisted of 67 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 6725, and was in charge of Conductor Farner and Engineman Burke. This train passed Acre, the last open office, 12.4 miles east of Jewett, at 6:22 a.m., according to the train sheet, and was approaching Jewett when it struck the automobile at the crossing while traveling at a speed estimated by members of the crew to have been between 30 and 35 miles per hour.

The automobile involved was a 1930 Studebaker sedan, owned and operated by W. E. Prather, New Rumley, Chic, who was the only occupant of the car. The automobile proceeded southward on the highway and was moving over the crossing at a speed of about 15 or 20 miles per hour when it was struck just back of the left front wheel by Train APH-7.

The automobile was thrown to the north and stopped in an upright position, badly damaged, headed west and parallel with the tracks, 110 feet west of the crossing; the left front wheel was torn off and the front of the car was demolished. The indications were that only the front pair of wheels of the engine truck was derailed as a result of the accident until the turnout of the facing-point switch of the westward siding was

encountered, at which point the engine, tender, and first 19 cars were derailed and scattered across and along both sides of the tracks; the engine stopped on its left side across the westward siding, headed southwest, with its front end 274 feet west of the point of frog. The employces killed were the enginemen and fireman, and the employee injured was the head brakeman.

Summary of evidence

Head Brakeman Johnson stated that he was in the brakeman's booth located at the back end of the tank. Approaching the crossing involved he looked ahead for the signal near the switch and saw it displaying a clear indication, and then he looked back along the train to inspect it as it rounded the curve. The whistle post is located 1,350 feet east of the crossing, and the head brakeman said that the enginemen sounded the proper whistle signal, prolonging the last blast until the crossing was practically reached. An air-brake application was made at the first curve east of the crossing, the brakes being released when the train was about 12 or 15 car lengths from the crossing, and steam was not being worked at the crossing. Just after passing the crossing the head brakeman felt the air brakes apply again, apparently a service application, and he wondered why the engineman made the second application, particularly in view of the fact that the speed was only about 30 or 35 miles per hour, which was lower than usual, and he again looked ahead at the signal and then looked back along the train. He did not see the crossing when it was passed, nor did he know that an automobile had been struck or that there was anything wrong until the derailment of the engine and cars occurred at the switch leading to the westward siding. Head Brakeman Johnson said he would not know whether or not the headlight was burning when he looked ahead, nor could he tell whether or not the engine bell was ringing, as it is customary to put on the blower in this locality when steam is shut off and under such circumstances it is not possible to hear the engine bell ringing when riding in the booth back on the tank;

it was daylight, however, at the time. The air brakes had been tested and worked properly, and had not been used after leaving Mingo Junction, 23.6 miles east of Jewett, until the train was approaching the crossing involved. Head Brake-man Johnson had talked to the engineman at Weirton Junction and also at Mingo Junction and he said the engineman appeared normal in every respect.

Conductor Farnier and Flagman Thompson were in the caboose and were not aware of what had occurred until after the accident; they estimated the speed to have been between 30 and 35 miles per hour approaching the crossing, and thought the speed had been reduced to about 15 or 20 miles per hour before the equipment was

derailed at the switch. Conductor Farnor felt a service application of the brakes when the engine was in the immediate vicinity of the crossing, and after the train had traveled about 25 or 30 car lengths the brakes were applied in emergency, and it appeared to him that the emergency application occurred as a result of the equipment being derailed on encountering the facing-point switch. The train stopped with the caboose about 20 car lengths east of the crossing, following which the conductor started ahead and saw the wrecked automobile at the crossing.

Block Operator Rogers, at Acre, stated that when Train APH-7 passed his office at 6:22 a.m. the headlight on the engine was burning brightly, while members of the crew of an east-bound freight train, as well as members of the crew of the pusher engine which was coupled to the rear end of that train, stated that their train passed Train APH-7 a short distance east of Busby's crossing and that the headlight on the engine of Train APH-7 was burning brightly, and some of those on the rear end said that the whistle was being sounded, when the engine passed their caboose at a point between 25 and 35 car lengths east of the crossing.

Telegraph Operator O'Donnell, employed by the Pittsburgh & West Virginia Railway, stated that he was walking southward along the Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway track, which track parallels Ohio state highway 151 on the west in the vicinity of the crossing and is located 360 feet therefrom; when he was about 500 feet north of the intersection of the two railroads he heard the west-bound Pennsylvania train approaching and at the same time saw the automobile proceeding south-bound on the highway. He wondered whether the automobile was going to be driven on the crossing and then witnessed the occurrence of the accident. Afterwards he saw fire flying from the front wheels of the engine and when it reached the turnout of the facing-point switch the equipment became derailed. Operator O'Donnell further stated that the engine whistle was sounded as the train approached the crossing, with the headlight burning brightly, and that the automobile was about 150 to 200 feet from the crossing when he heard the whistle.

E. Prather, 42 years old, New Rumley, Ohio, who was the owner and operator of the automobile involved, stated that he is a coal miner and was on his way to work. Approaching Busby's crossing he was driving on the right side of the road at a speed of from 35 to 45 miles per hour, with the windshield and all car windows closed. When he reached the top of the hill just north of the crossing he reduced speed to about 5 miles per hour, shifted to low gear, and locked in each direction several times, but he neither saw nor heard any train approaching.

On reaching a point about 40 or 50 feet from the crossing he looked toward the right or west and saw a clear indication displayed by the signal near the east switch and therefore knew that a west-bound train was coming and that it was in the block, and for that reason he was more careful than usual. Before entering upon the crossing he looked toward the east several times, and not seeing any headlight he assumed that the way was clear and went ahead, shifting directly from low gear to high gear and increasing speed to about 15 or 20 miles per hour. When close to or on the track he saw the engine about 20 feet away and endeavored to turn his car to the right, but he could not say whether he managed to get it turned or whether he used the brakes, nor could he say whether he was still in the car when it was struck. Mr. Prather was unable to say whether the engine whistle or bell signals had been sounded for the crossing, but he did not hear them. He was positive, however, that the headlight on the engine was not burning, saying that had it been burning he would have seen its reflection. Mr. Prather further stated that he had been driving an automobile for 25 years; he did not have a driver's license and had never undergone any examination, saying that the only requirement necessary to drive a car in the State of Ohio is to possess a registration card for the car. There was no difficulty about the car as to its brakes or general operation, no mist on the windshield, and visibility was good, although it was dark enough to be using his headlights, which were burning brightly. He was thoroughly familiar with the crossing involved, had used it to and from work practically every day since May, 1931, and knew that it was a dangerous place, particularly in connection with the view to the east from a south-bound vehicle, and said that in 1931 he started a petition which was signed by over 2,000 people requesting that this crossing be abolished. It further appeared from Mr. Prather's statements that he had no physical defects that would interfere with operating an automobile, that he had proper rest the night before the accident, and that on the morning in question he was not sick and was in good mental and physical condition; he said also that he had not been involved in any previous automobile accidents.

Inspection of the track by the Commission's inspectors indicated that the forward pair of wheels of the engine truck was derailed to the right at a point 44 feet west of the crossing as a result of the accident, and markings on the ties, spikes and tieplates indicated that only one pair of wheels was derailed until the facing-point switch was encountered where the derailed wheels followed the turnout to the frog of the switch, precipitating the final derailment.

A traffic check for a 24-hour period, from 11:30 a.m., November 19, to 11:30 a.m., November 20, 1935, showed that a total of 489 vehicles and 50 trains passed over the crossing; the maximum hourly traffic of 57 vehicles passed during the period from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.; the heaviest hourly train movements were between 3:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m., 5:30 a.m. and 6:30 a.m., and 8:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.; during each of these three 1-hour periods four trains passed over the crossing. Observation of the whistle signals sounded by trains for this crossing, disclosed that the crossing warning signal was sounded and that usually the last blast was prolonged until the crossing was reached. It also was noted that vehicles using the crossing reduced speed and that care was exercised in passing over the crossing.

The elimination of this crossing is now on the program of the Ohio Department of Highways, and the railroad company has submitted plans and estimates covering the portion of the work to be carried out by its own forces.

Discussion

The driver of the passenger automobile involved said that he was thoroughly familiar with the crossing and knew that a good view could not be had of an approaching west-bound train until his automobile had reached a point only a short distance from the crossing. When he got to the top of the hill just north of the crossing he reduced speed to about 5 miles per hour and shifted to low gear, and when closer to the crossing he looked to the right and saw a clear indication displayed by the signal near the east switch, which indicated to him that a west-bound train was coming. He claimed, however, that he did not see any reflection from the headlight of the engine, although other evidence was to the effect that the headlight had been burning brightly, consequently he assumed that the way was clear over the crossing, and shifted from low to high gear and increased speed to about 15 or 20 miles per hour. When close to or upon the track he saw the engine a short distance away, too late to avert the accident. Knowing that the view was obstructed until close to the tracks, and knowing also that a train was approaching, this driver should have stopped where he could have a view of the track, and then should have proceeded over the crossing only when the way was seen and known to be clear.

Conclusion

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

Respectfully submitted,
W. J. PATTERSON,
Director.