

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2635

THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR CUTHBERT, GA., ON

OCTOBER 15, 1942

SUMMARY

Railroad: Seaboard Air Line

Date: October 15, 1942

Location: Cuthbert, Ga.

Kind of accident: Rear-end collision

Trains involved: Freight : Freight

Train numbers: First 74 : Second 74

Engine numbers: 544 : 529

Consist: 36 cars, 1 deadhead: 38 cars, caboose
engine, caboose

Speed: 8-12 m. p. h. : 20-35 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders, and
manual-block system for follow-
ing passenger trains only

Track: Single; tangent; 1.10 percent
ascending grade eastward

Weather: Clear

Time: About 8:10 p. m.

Casualties: 2 killed; 2 injured

Cause: Accident caused by failure to provide
adequate protection for preceding
train

Recommendation: That the Seaboard Air Line Railway
Company establish an adequate block-
signal system on the line involved
in this accident

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2635

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

THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY COMPANY

December 7, 1942.

Accident near Cuthbert, Ga., on October 15, 1942, caused
by failure to provide adequate protection for pre-
ceding train.

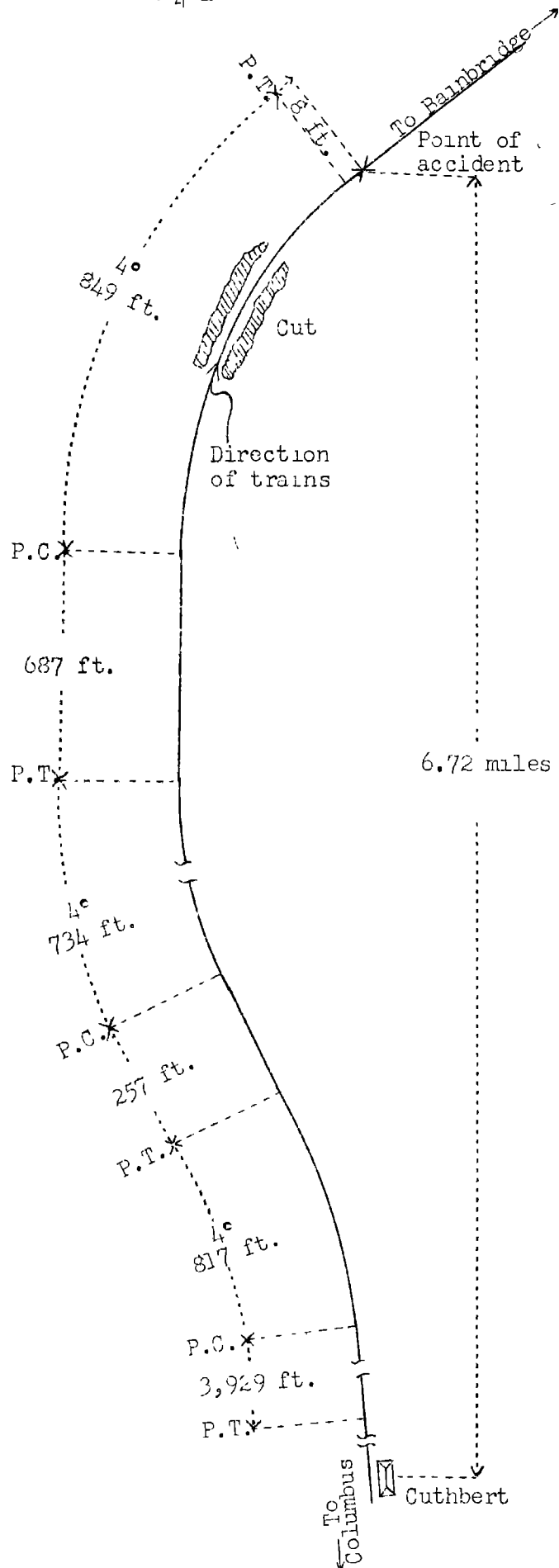
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On October 15, 1942, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Seaboard Air Line Railway near Cuthbert, Ga., which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of one person carried under contract and one employee.

¹Under 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	Bainbridge, Ga.	57.68 mi.
x	Point of accident	6.72 mi.
o	Cuthbert	26.30 mi.
o	Richland	38.70 mi.
o	Columbus, Ga.	



Inv. No. 2635
 Seaboard Air Line Railway
 Cuthbert, Ga.
 October 15, 1919

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the South Carolina Division designated as the Richland Sub-division and extending between Columbus and Bainbridge, Ga., a distance of 129.4 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, and a manual-block system for following passenger trains only. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 6.72 miles east of the station at Cuthbert. Approaching from the west there are, in succession, a tangent 3,929 feet in length, a 4° curve to the left 817 feet, a tangent 257 feet, a 4° curve to the right 734 feet, a tangent 687 feet, a 4° curve to the right 849 feet and a tangent 8 feet to the point of accident and a considerable distance beyond. The grade for east-bound trains varies between 0.20 and 0.84 percent descending a distance of 2,700 feet and then it varies between 0.30 and 1.10 percent ascending 3,700 feet to the point of accident, and is 1.10 percent at the point of accident.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

11. Except in automatic block signal territory a fusee on or near the track burning red must not be passed until burned out.

* * *

19. The following signals will be displayed, one on each side of the rear of every train, as markers, to indicate the rear of the train: * * *; by night, yellow lights to the front and side, and red lights to the rear, * * *

91. Unless some form of block signal is used, trains in the same direction must keep at least ten minutes apart, except in closing up at stations. * * *

99. * * *

When a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection. By night, * * *, lighted fusees must be thrown off at proper intervals.

* * *

In the vicinity of the point of accident the maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 35 miles per hour; however, because of certain equipment being hauled in the trains involved, the maximum authorized speed for the preceding train was 20 miles per hour and for the following train, 25 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

First 74, an east-bound second-class freight train, departed from Richland, 26.3 miles west of Cutnbert, at 5:35 p. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, 1 hour 36 minutes late. After cars were added, this train, consisting of engine 544, 35 loaded cars, 1 deadhead engine, a caboose and 1 loaded car, in the order named, departed from Cutnbert at 7:37 p. m., 2 hours 29 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 8 to 12 miles per hour its rear end was struck by Second 74.

Second 74, an east-bound second-class freight train, consisted of engine 529, 34 loaded and 4 empty cars and a caboose. This train departed from Richland at 6:30 p. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, 2 hours 29 minutes late, passed Cutnbert at 7:48 p. m., 2 hours 40 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 20 to 35 miles per hour it collided with the rear end of First 74. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly en route.

Because of a cut, track curvature and vegetation in the vicinity of the point of accident, the view from the right side of an east-bound engine of the point where the accident occurred is considerably restricted.

The rear car of First 74 was derailed to the right and badly damaged. The caboose was demolished. The deadhead engine was derailed and stopped, badly damaged, across the main track. The tender was demolished. The car next ahead of the deadhead engine was derailed and stopped, badly damaged, upright and in line with the track. Engine 529, of Second 74, was derailed to the south and stopped on its left side, badly damaged, with the front and rear ends, respectively, 178 and 200 feet beyond the point of collision. The front end and the cab were demolished. The frame, deck castings, water glass and water column were broken. The tender was torn loose from the engine and stopped, badly damaged, on its left side north of the track. The first four cars were derailed. Of these cars, the first was demolished and the remainder were badly damaged. The front truck of the fifth car was derailed and the car was slightly damaged. The wreckage was contained within a distance of 250 feet.

It was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8:10 p. m.

The employees killed were the engineer and the fireman of Second 74, and the employee injured was the front brakeman of Second 74.

Data

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 11.37 trains.

Discussion

The rules governing operation on the line involved provide that when a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection. At night, lighted fuses must be thrown off at proper intervals. A fuse burning red on the track or near it requires a train to stop until the fuse is burned out. At night, lighted markers are required to be displayed on each side at the rear of each train. All surviving members of both crews involved understood these requirements.

Because of a broken brake pipe on a tank car at Cuthbert, this car was added to the train at the rear of the caboose of First 74. The train departed from Cuthbert at 7:37 p. m. with lighted markers displayed on the caboose, but there was no marker or lighted lantern on the rear of the train. While the train was moving at a speed of about 8 to 12 miles per hour on an ascending grade its rear end was struck by Second 74 at a point 6.72 miles east of Cuthbert.

Second 74 departed from Cuthbert, the last reporting station, at 7:48 p. m., 11 minutes after First 74 departed from that station. As this train was approaching the point where the accident occurred, the headlight was lighted, the throttle was three-fourths open, the speed was 25 to 35 miles per hour, the engineer and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead, and the fireman was tending the fire. The front brakeman said that as the engine was moving on the 4-degree curve to the right immediately west of the point of accident the engineer called a warning and moved the brake valve to emergency position, but the distance was not sufficient for Second 74 to stop short of First 74. At the time the brakes were applied in emergency the rear of First 74 was only a short distance ahead and the markers were lighted. The engineer and the fireman of Second 74 were killed in the accident. The conductor of Second 74 said that after the brakes became applied in emergency the train stopped abruptly in a distance of about 250 feet. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly at all points where used en route.

Because of certain equipment being hauled by First 74, the maximum authorized speed of this train was 20 miles per hour in territory where the maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 35 miles per hour. First 74 was proceeding at a speed of 8 to 12 miles per hour when the accident occurred, and under this condition it might be overtaken by another train. This train moved at less than normal speed throughout a distance of 6.72 miles west of the point of accident, and, under the rules, was required to provide flag protection. Although the speed of Second 74 was restricted to 25 miles per hour because of certain equipment in the train, the crew of First 74 had no knowledge of this restriction. As First 74 was approaching the point where the accident occurred, the conductor and the flagman were in the caboose and the flagman was engaged in clerical duties. The conductor said that when his train departed from Cuthbert there was no indication of a following train. He knew Second 74 was following his train but depended upon the 10-minute spacing rule to delay Second 74 sufficiently so that flag protection would not be

necessary until his train reached the top of the ascending grade. He did not drop any lighted fuses nor instruct the flagman to do so. First 74 was gradually reducing speed on the grade, but the conductor thought that a lighted fuse would cause Second 74 to stall on the grade. He was maintaining a lookout to the rear and first became aware of the approach of Second 74 when he observed the headlight as it rapidly rounded the curve at the rear of his train. He lighted a fuse, jumped off the caboose on the right side, ran toward the approaching train and gave stop signals, but the distance was too short to avert the accident. The flagman said that he jumped off on the left side and lighted a fuse. Some time later, the remains of a freshly burned fuse and the tops of two fuses were found at points, respectively, about 75 and 100 feet west of the point of accident. The conductor and the flagman said that the engine of Second 74 was still using steam at the time of the accident.

The preceding train was required to provide rear-end protection, but the only flag protection provided consisted of the fuses held by the conductor and the flagman when they jumped from their caboose just before the accident occurred. If lighted fuses had been dropped at proper intervals on the track, Second 74 would have been required to wait until they were consumed. As a result, considerable spacing would have been provided and the accident averted. The rules provided also that at night lighted markers must be displayed at the rear of a train; however, in this instance the markers were displayed on the second rear car of First 74.

On the line involved trains are operated by timetable and train orders only. Recently the Commission investigated two other accidents which occurred on the line of this carrier in territories where operation is by timetable and train orders only. The first, which resulted in the death of 2 persons and the injury of 78 persons, was a head-end collision between two passenger trains at Hypoluxo, Fla., on February 19, 1942. The second, which resulted in the death of 1 person and the injury of 5 persons, was a head-end collision between two freight trains at Roanoke Rapids, N. C., on May 6, 1942. The reports of the Commission covering the investigation of these accidents recommended the establishment of an adequate block system on the lines involved. In the instant case, if an adequate block system had been in use, the accident would not have occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the preceding train.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Seaboard Air Line Railway Company establish an adequate block-signal system on the line involved in this accident.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this seventh day of December, 1942.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.