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INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 3051
SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILROAD COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT SUFFOLK, VA., ON
DECEMBER 22, 1946

SUMMARY

Railroad: Seaboard Air Line

Date: December 22, 1946

Location: Suffolk, Va.

Kind of accident: Rear-end collision

Trains involved: Passenger : Engine

Train numbers: 17 : Extra 494
South

Engine numbers: 240 : 494

Consist: 11 cars :

Estimated speeds: 2 m. p. h. : 10 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders, and
manual-block system for following
first-class trains and trains
carrying passengers; yard limits

Track: Single; 1° curve; 0.3 percent
descending grade southward

Weather: Clear

Time: 4:34 p. m.

Casualties: 56 injured

Cause: Failure properly to control speed
of following train moving within
yard limits

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 3051

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 8, 1910.

SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILROAD COMPANY

January 31, 1947.

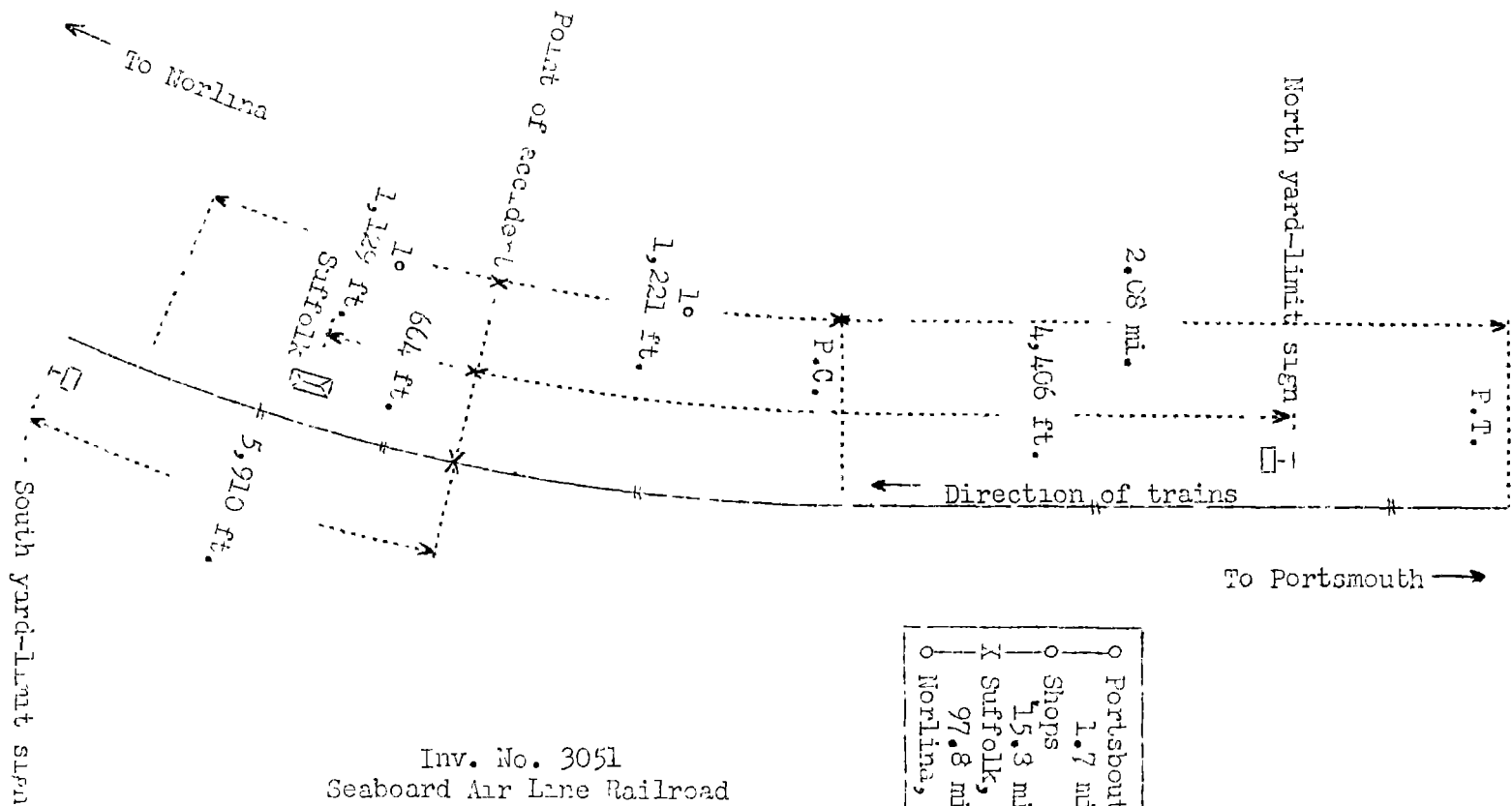
Accident at Suffolk, Va., on December 22, 1946, caused
by failure properly to control the speed of the
following train moving within yard limits, *and by failure to properly protect the yard.*

¹
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On December 22, 1946, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger train and an engine on the Seaboard Air Line Railroad at Suffolk, Va., which resulted in the injury of 44 passengers, 1 railway-mail clerk, 9 dining-car employees and 2 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.



Inv. No. 3051
Seaboard Air Line Railroad
Suffolk, Va.
December 22, 1946

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Virginia Division extending between Portsmouth, Va., and Norlina, N. C., 115.3 miles, a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, and a manual-block system for following first-class trains and trains carrying passengers. The accident occurred within yard limits on the main track at Suffolk, 17.5 miles south of Portsmouth, at a point 4,406 feet south of the north yard-limit sign, 664 feet north of the station and 5,910 feet north of the south yard-limit sign. From the north there is a tangent 2.08 miles in length, which is followed by a 1° curve to the right 1,221 feet to the point of accident and 1,129 feet southward. The grade for south-bound trains varies between 0.2 percent and 0.6 percent ascending throughout a distance of 3,180 feet, then it is, successively, 0.1 percent descending 505 feet, 0.2 percent descending 1,000 feet and 0.3 percent descending 681 feet to the point of accident and 324 feet southward.

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.

* * *

35. The following signals will be used by flagmen:

Day Signals--A red flag.

Torpedoes and Fusees.

* * *

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. A train following a train carrying passengers must keep at least ten minutes behind it.

93. * * *

Second and inferior class and extra trains will approach and move between yard limit boards under control with the ability to stop within one-half the range of vision, unless the track is seen or known to be clear. When the view is obstructed, additional precaution must be taken.

* * *

All trains carrying passengers must protect within yard limits, as per Rule 99.

* * *

99. When a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection, * * *

* * *

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, or by day when the view is obscured, lighted fuses must be thrown off at proper intervals.

* * *

Time-table special instructions read in part as follows:

BLOCK RULES.

C 14--All first class trains, and all trains carrying passengers moving in the same direction will be blocked one telegraph station apart. * * *

The maximum authorized speeds on this line are 60 miles per hour for passenger trains and 40 miles per hour for freight trains. Time-table special instructions prescribe the maximum authorized speed for all trains in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident as 25 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 17, a south-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 240, two express cars, one mail-baggage car, four coaches, one dining car and three Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named. All cars were of steel construction. This train departed from Portsmouth at 4 p. m., on time, passed Shops, 15.8 miles north of Suffolk and the last open office north of Suffolk, at 4:08 p. m., 1 minute late, and stopped at Suffolk at 4:28 p. m. About 6 minutes later, after this train had started and had moved a few feet southward, the rear end was struck by Extra 494 South at a point 4,406 feet south of the north yard-limit sign.

Extra 494 South, a south-bound engine, departed from Shops at 4:19 p. m., passed the north yard-limit sign at Suffolk, and while moving at an estimated speed of 10 miles per hour it struck No. 17.

The rear truck of the eleventh car of No. 17, and the engine-truck wheels and the Nos. 1, 2 and 3 driving wheels of the engine of Extra 494 South were derailed. The front end of the engine of Extra 494 South, and the eleventh and eighth cars of No. 17 were considerably damaged. The remainder of the equipment of No. 17 was somewhat damaged.

The fireman and the brakeman of Extra 494 South were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4:34 p. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 14.3 trains.

Discussion

The rules of this carrier governing operation within yard limits provide that all trains except first-class trains must be operated in such manner that they can be stopped within a distance of one-half the range of vision, and flag protection must be provided for all trains carrying passengers. The employees concerned in this investigation understood these requirements.

No. 17 stopped at the station at Suffolk at 4.28 p. m. About 6 minutes later, after this train had started and had moved a few feet southward, the rear end was struck by Extra 494 South at a point 4,406 feet south of the north yard-limit sign.

The flagman of No. 17 said that when his train was approaching Suffolk he dropped a lighted 10-minute fusee from the rear car about 1 mile north of the station and that when No. 17 stopped he proceeded northward to provide protection against following trains. He had reached a point about 400 feet to the rear of his train when the engine-whistle signal recalling him was sounded. Then he placed a lighted 10-minute fusee on the track and proceeded southward. He had reached a point a few feet north of the rear end of his train when he heard the following train approaching. Then he ran northward and was giving stop signals with a lighted fusee when Extra 494 South passed him.

Extra 494 South consisted of the engine only, and the crew consisted of an engineer, a fireman and a brakeman. As this train was approaching the north yard-limit sign at Suffolk the speed was about 40 miles per hour. The engine-men and the brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead. There was no condition of the engine which obscured their vision or distracted their attention. The engineer said that soon after the engine passed the north yard-limit sign he made a service brake-pipe reduction, and he thought the speed was reduced sufficiently for the engine to be stopped within one-half the range of vision, if necessary. No flagging signals were seen or heard until the engine reached a point about 430 feet north of the point where the collision occurred, then the employees on the engine saw the rear of the preceding train and stop signals being given with a lighted fussee. The engineer made another service brake-pipe reduction, but soon afterward he realized that he had misjudged the speed of his engine, and then moved the brake valve to emergency position, but the distance was too short to avoid the collision. The brakes of engine 494 had been tested and had functioned properly. Because of the curve, buildings and ~~vegetation~~ adjacent to the track and an overhead bridge in the vicinity of the point of accident, the view of the track ahead from a south-bound engine is restricted to a distance of about 430 feet.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure properly to control the speed of the following train moving within yard limits.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this thirty-first day of January, 1947.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,

Secretary