INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3684

SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILROAD COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR PORTSMOUTH, VA., ON

APRIL 28, 1956

SUMMARY

Date:	April 28, 1956	
Railroad:	Seaboard Air Line	
Location:	Portsmouth, Va.	
Kind of accident:	Collision	
Equipment involved:	Passenger train	: Power-operated earth-moving scraper
Train number:	18	:
Locomotive number:	Diesel-electric unit 3049	:
Consist:	7 cars	:
Estimated speeds:	35 m. p. h.	: 5-10 m. p. h.
Operation:	Timetable and train orders	
Tracks:	Single; tangent; 0.05 percent descending grade northward	
Highway:	Tangent; crosses track at angle of 78°; practically level	
Weather:	Clear	
Time:	9:07 a. m.	
Casualties:	22 injured	
Cause:	Power-operated earth-moving scraper occupying private-road grade crossing immediately in front of approaching train	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3684

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

SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILROAD COMPANY

June 25, 1956

Accident near Portsmouth, Va., on April 28, 1956, caused by a power-operated earth-moving scraper occupying a private-road grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

CLARKE, Commissioner:

On April 28, 1956, there was a collision between a passenger train on the Seaboard Air Line Railroad and a power-operated earth-moving scraper at a private-road grade crossing near Portsmouth, Va., which resulted in the injury of 12 passengers, 1 railway express messenger, 3 dining-car employees, 1 railway mail clerk, 1 car attendant, the driver of the scraper, and 3 train-service employees.

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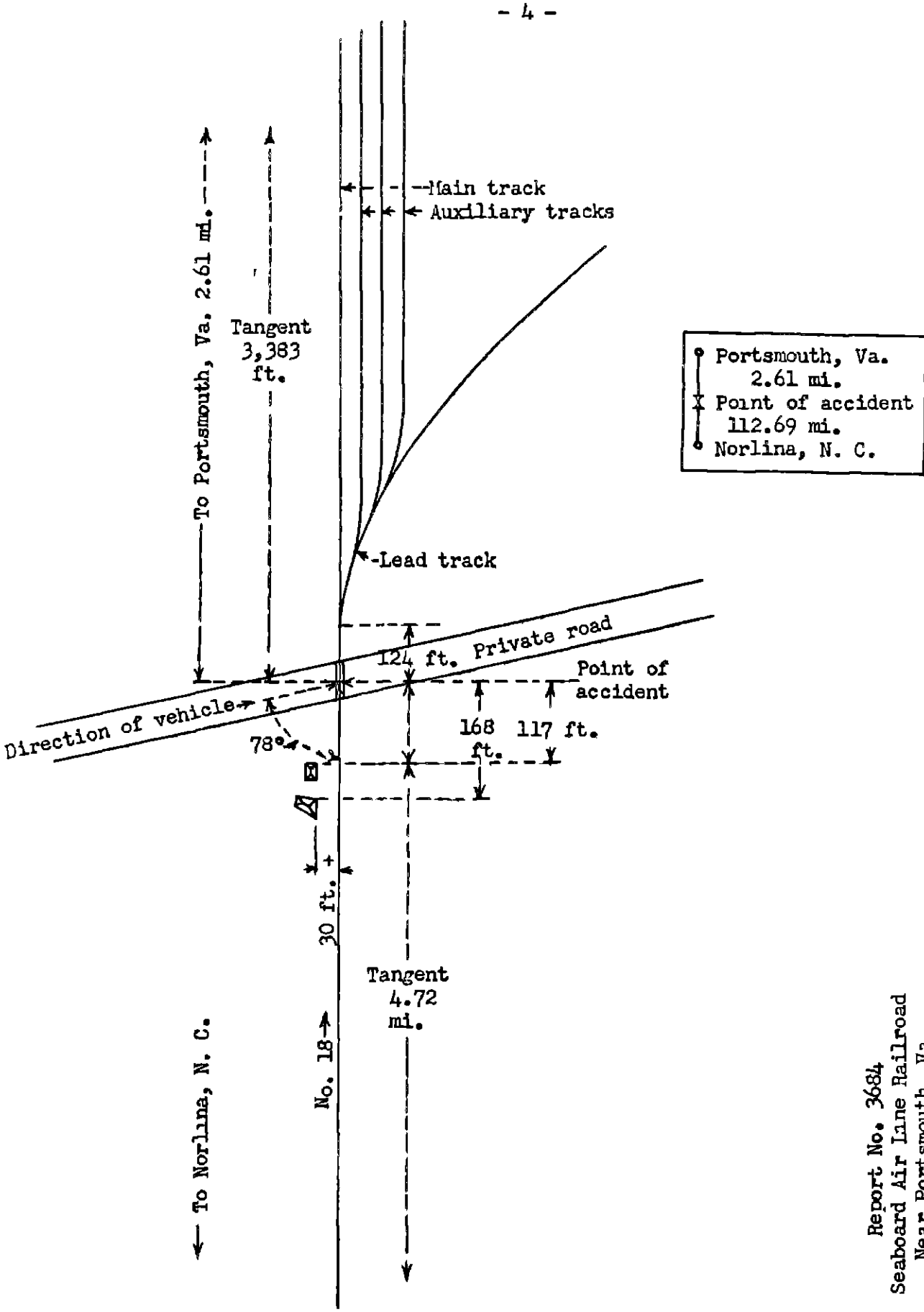
[1] Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Clarke for consideration and disposition.



Report No. 3684
Seaboard Air Line Railroad
Near Portsmouth, Va.
April 28, 1956

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Virginia Division extending between Norlina, N. C., and Portsmouth, Va., 115.3 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. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 2.61 miles south of the station at Portsmouth, where the railroad is crossed at grade by a private road. The track is tangent throughout a distance of 4.72 miles immediately south of the point of accident and 3,383 feet northward. The grade is 0.05 percent descending northward at the point of accident. North of the crossing a lead track, which extends northward to a connection with the Norfolk and Portsmouth Belt Line, connects the main track with three auxiliary tracks which parallel the main track on the east. The lead-track switch, which is facing-point for north-bound movements, is 124 feet north of the crossing.

The southwest angle of the intersection between the railroad and the private road is 78°. The private road is an unimproved dirt road about 20 feet in width. It provides access for contractor's equipment from a public highway east of the track to a highway construction project west of the track. The road is tangent throughout a distance of about 200 feet immediately west of the track. A plank is laid on each side of each rail throughout the width of the crossing, and the remaining area of the crossing is filled with sand to the level of the tops of the rails. The grade is practically level.

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 45 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 18, a north-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of Diesel-electric unit 3049, one express car, one mail-baggage car, one dining car, one sleeping car, two coaches, and one sleeping car, in the order named. The fifth and sixth cars were of lightweight construction, and the other cars were of conventional all-steel construction. The third to the seventh cars, inclusive, were equipped with tightlock couplers. This train departed from Norlina at 6:20 a. m., 1 hour late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 35 miles per hour it struck a power-operated earth-moving scraper at a private-road grade crossing 2.61 miles south of the station at Portsmouth.

The vehicle involved was an Euclid 12-yard scraper, Model S-12, owned by C. H. Lawson, a road contractor of Williamsburg, Va. At the time of the accident the operator was the sole occupant. The vehicle had an over-all length of 35 feet 3 inches and a width of 9 feet 9 inches and was equipped with pneumatic tires. The wheelbase was 21 feet 9 inches. It was powered by a 6-cylinder 218-horsepower Diesel engine. The motor was located forward of the front axle, with the front end of the motor 8 feet 7 inches ahead of the front wheels. The body of the scraper was located ahead of the rear axle and had a capacity of 16 cubic yards. The cutting blade had a width of 9 feet 6 inches and a maximum cutting depth of 14 inches. It was equipped with air brakes on each wheel. The light weight of the vehicle was 45,170 pounds. At the time of the accident it was fully loaded with dirt. The estimated gross weight was 85,170 pounds. This vehicle was moving eastward at an estimated speed of 5 to 10 miles per hour when it entered the crossing and was struck by No. 18.

The locomotive, the first six cars, and the front truck of the seventh car of No. 18 were derailed. Separations occurred at each end of each of the first two cars. The locomotive stopped on the track structure of the lead track, at an angle of approximately 45 degrees to that track, with the rear end 648 feet north of the point of accident. The first car remained upright and stopped at an angle of approximately 60 degrees to the tracks at a point 487 feet north of the point of accident. The second car overturned and stopped at right angles to the tracks at a point 449 feet north of the point of accident. The other cars remained upright and stopped approximately in line with the lead track. At the time of the accident several freight cars were stored on the auxiliary tracks. These cars were struck by derailed equipment, and four of them were demolished. The locomotive of No. 18 was considerably damaged, the first and second cars were destroyed, the tender car was considerably damaged, and the other derailed cars were somewhat damaged. The scraper stopped in the northeast angle of the intersection. It was demolished.

The engineer, the fireman, and the train baggageman were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 9:07 a. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement over the crossing was 5.8 trains.

Discussion

As No. 18 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 45 miles per hour. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment at the front of the locomotive, and the members of the train crew were in the cars of the train. The brakes of the train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The headlight was lighted brightly. The enginemen said that the engineer sounded the grade-crossing whistle signal for several grade crossings south of the point at which the accident occurred. The private crossing at which the accident occurred is used by pedestrians, and he prolonged the signal until the locomotive reached that point. The locomotive bell was ringing during this time. As the train approached the crossing the engineer made a service application of the brakes to reduce the speed in compliance with a speed restriction beyond the crossing. The engineer saw the scraper approaching the crossing, and when the locomotive reached a point which he thought was 75 or 100 feet south of the crossing he saw that the scraper would not stop short of the track. He then made an emergency application of the brakes. The collision occurred almost immediately afterward. The enginemen estimated that the speed of the train was about 35 miles per hour and the speed of the scraper was between 5 and 10 miles per hour when the collision occurred.

The driver of the scraper was not available for questioning during this investigation.

The private road which crosses the track at the crossing involved was used by contractor's equipment working in the vicinity. An agreement between the Seaboard Air Line Railroad Company and the T. E. Ritter Corporation gave the contractor the right and license to construct and maintain the road across the property and track of the railroad. Under the terms of this agreement the contractor was required to notify the carrier when heavy equipment was to be moved across the track, and the carrier was to provide a flagman to protect the movement. The road had not been used, except by pedestrians, during a period of several months before the accident occurred, and a barricade had been erected to prevent vehicles from using the crossing. At the time of the

accident the barricade had been removed and the crossing was being used by the equipment of a sub-contractor. The officials of the carrier were not aware that the barricade had been removed.

As an east-bound vehicle approaches the crossing, the driver's view of an approaching north-bound train is somewhat obstructed by several buildings and oil tanks located in the southwest angle of the intersection. Two of these structures are located approximately 30 feet west of the track at points 117 feet and 168 feet south of the crossing. After a vehicle reaches a point 30 feet west of the track the driver has an unobstructed view of an approaching north-bound train.

Cause

This accident was caused by a power-operated earth-moving scraper occupying a private-road grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-fifth day of June, 1956.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,

Secretary.