

BUREAU OF SAFETY

REPORT NO. 2015

Railroad: Southern Pacific
Date: October 19, 1935.
Location: West Glendale, Calif.
Kind of accident: Collision and derailment
Trains involved: Passenger : Motor truck
Train number: 76
Engine Number: 2451-4355
Consist: 16 cars
Speed: 40-50 m.p.h. : Slow
Track: 0°41' curve; level
Weather: Clear
Time: 8:39 a.m.
Casualties: 20 injured
Cause: Motor truck driven on grade crossing
in front of approaching train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE LINE OF THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY AT
WEST GLENDALE, CALIF., ON OCTOBER 19, 1935.

December 9, 1935.

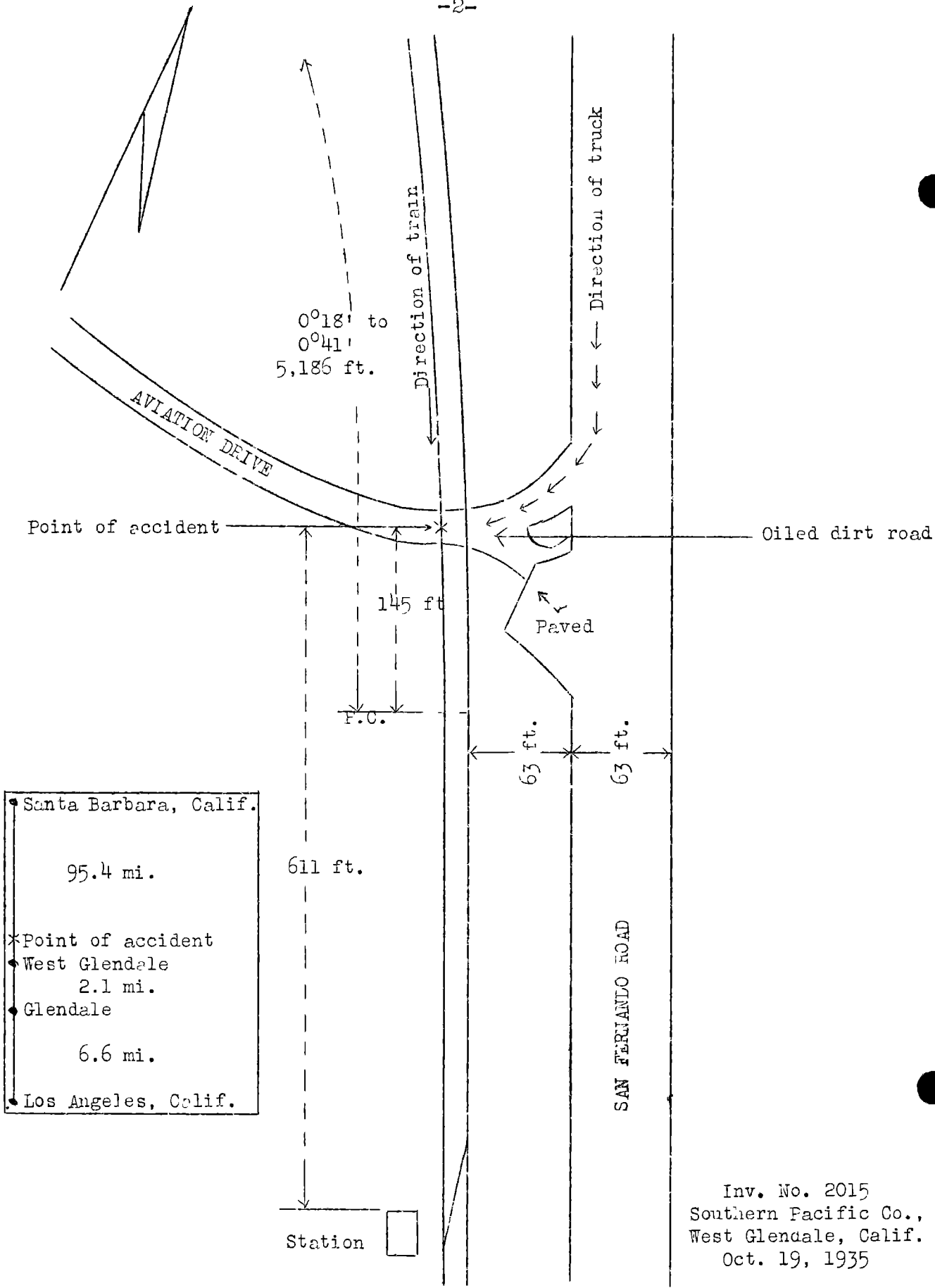
To the Commission:

On October 19, 1935, there was a derailment of a passenger train as a result of striking a motor truck at a grade crossing on the line of the Southern Pacific Company at West Glendale, Calif., which resulted in the injury of 9 passengers, 7 dining-car employees, 3 Pullman employees, and the driver of the truck. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Railroad Commission of California.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Ventura Sub-division of the Los Angeles Division which extends between Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, Calif., a distance of 104.1 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-signal system. The accident occurred on the east-bound track, at the point where the tracks cross a highway known as Aviation Drive, located 611 feet west of the station at West Glendale. Approaching this point from the west, there is a compound curve to the right 5,186 feet in length, varying in curvature from $0^{\circ}18'$ to $0^{\circ}41'$, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 145 feet from its eastern end. The grade is level at the point of accident. There is a cross-over near the station, the east switch, a trailing-point switch for east-bound trains, being located 664 feet east of the point of accident. The maximum speed for passenger trains is 50 miles per hour.

Aviation Drive was first installed by the Southern Pacific Company about 20 years ago at the request of the Los Angeles Park Commission in order to give them access to one of the city parks. At the time of this accident it was a dirt road with an oiled surface, and it led off from San Fernando Road and curved gradually to the right until it crossed the tracks practically at a right angle, the tracks being separated from San Fernando Road by a distance of 63 feet. The roadway was approximately 15 feet in width over the crossing and there was a slight ascending grade leading to the tracks from San Fernando Road; the roadway then



• Santa Barbara, Calif.
 95.4 mi.
 *Point of accident
 • West Glendale
 2.1 mi.
 • Glendale
 6.6 mi.
 • Los Angeles, Calif.

Station

Inv. No. 2015
 Southern Pacific Co.,
 West Glendale, Calif.
 Oct. 19, 1935

was level across the tracks, following which there was a descending grade on the opposite side. The surface of the roadway at the crossing was not well maintained, being bumpy and having irregular jagged edges. There is a pole line on the inside of the curve of the railroad tracks, but when the driver of a motor vehicle is 25 feet from the nearest rail of the crossing he would have an unobstructed view of an east-bound train for a distance of 800 feet. Under the law, the truck involved in this accident was not required to stop before proceeding over this crossing, and the only protection provided at the time of the accident consisted of a standard warning sign, but two crossing signals with second-train indicators were being installed, the masts and signal posts having been placed in position; this added protection having been ordered by the California State Railroad Commission because of the fact that a new street was being built along the south side of the tracks and east of Aviation Drive, and this crossing was to be used as the northern outlet for this new street into San Fernando Road.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8:39 a.m.

Description

Train No. 76, an east-bound passenger train, consisted of 1 mail car, 6 Pullman sleeping cars, 1 lounge car, 1 dining car, 6 Pullman sleeping cars, and a club car, hauled by engines 2451 and 4355, and was in charge of Conductor Adams and Enginemen Champlin and Darms. This train passed Burbank Junction, Calif., the last open office, 3.4 miles west of West Glendale, at 8:34 a.m., according to the train sheet, 9 minutes late, and was derailed when it struck a motor truck on the crossing at Aviation Drive while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 40 and 60 miles per hour.

The truck involved was a G.M.C., 6-wheel dump truck, 1926 model, owned and operated by the Consolidated Rock Products Company of Los Angeles. This truck was loaded with 8.89 tons of gravel and sand and was driven by Earl J. Chaney. It left the Roscoe Plant, near Burbank, Calif., at 8:06 a.m., and was en route to Verdugo, Wash., about 1,000 feet south of the Southern Pacific tracks. It proceeded eastward on San Fernando Road, entered Aviation Drive, and continued toward the crossing at a low rate of speed without stopping, and was on the east-bound track when its rear end was struck by Train No. 76.

The truck was thrown to the right of the track, completely turned around, and was badly damaged, the contents being thrown out. The front pair of the wheels of the engine truck of engine 2451 was derailed to the right and dropped to the ties about 18

feet east of the center of the crossing, and, on encountering the frog of the cross-over, 567 feet farther east, both engines, their tenders and the first two cars were derailed. Engine 2451 and its tender were badly damaged and stopped to the right of the track approximately 850 feet beyond the crossing, with the engine leaning at an angle of 45°, while engine 4355 stopped crosswise of the east-bound track 148 feet farther east; its tender and the two derailed cars remained in general line with the track. The train broke in two between the eighth and ninth cars.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Champlin, of the lead engine of Train No. 76, stated that he sounded the crossing whistle almost continuously after leaving Burbank, there being a series of crossings in that territory, and was still sounding the signal for the crossing at Aviation Drive when he saw some one on the south side of the crossing about 5 or 6 car lengths distant giving a signal, but he did not think it was for him; the fireman then called to him to stop and he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency. Engineman Champlin said he did not see the truck until an instant before the engine struck it, when the front end of the truck came within his range of vision. The automatic bell had been ringing continuously after leaving Burbank and on approaching the crossing Engineman Champlin was operating a drifting throttle; he estimated the speed of his train to have been about 45 miles per hour at the time of the accident. He further stated that the crossing could be seen for a distance of about 1/2 mile from the right side of the engine cab.

Fireman Colwell, of the lead engine, stated that while rounding the curve he was on his seat box and that the engine was approximately 4 or 5 car lengths from the crossing when he first saw the truck. It appeared to him that the truck almost stopped, and he thought the driver hesitated and then changed gears after which the truck picked up speed and started over the crossing. He immediately warned the engineman, the engine then being about 2 or 3 car lengths from the crossing.

Fireman Woodruff, of the second engine, stated that when he first saw the truck it was on Aviation Drive and the train then was approximately 400 feet from the crossing, although he could not see the crossing itself. The driver reduced the speed of the truck just before reaching the west-bound main track and the fireman thought the truck was stopping; it did not stop, however, but started across in front of the train at a very low rate of speed. He then shouted to Engineman Darms, who heard the fireman say something but did not know what he said and then looked out and saw the truck as the train struck it. Conductor Adams estimated the speed of the train to have been about 40 miles per

hour at the time of the accident, while Flagman Faler thought it was about 50 miles per hour.

Section Foreman Calderon stated that after having delivered track material at Aviation Drive crossing he was waiting with his four men for the passage of Train No. 71 before proceeding westward to his own section. He was standing in front of his motor car at the southeast corner of the crossing when he saw Train No. 76 approaching, about 700 feet distant, and then he saw a truck turn from San Fernando Road into Aviation Drive and thought the truck was going to stop. The truck continued, however, and he tried to stop it, standing in the center of the road about 6 feet south of the east-bound track in the path of the oncoming truck and calling to the driver that a train was coming, but he said the driver looked at him and laughed; he did not see the driver shift gears and thought the truck was moving at a speed of about 4 miles per hour. His section men also called to the truck driver and then all of them had to run to get out of the way of the wreckage, the truck striking his motor car and driving it southward about 38 feet, while some of the flying tools struck one of his men. Section Foreman Calderon stated that he heard the crossing whistle signal very clearly and was of the opinion that the driver heard it and also heard his warning to stop. He did not see any other trucks or automobiles at the crossing at that time.

Section Laborers Aranda, Castro, Gonzales and Alamiz were standing south of the crossing near the motor car when they saw the approaching train and also the truck. Laborer Aranda stated that the train was about 150 feet from the crossing and the truck about 25 feet from him when he called to the driver of the truck to stop. They all called to the driver to stop and two of the laborers pointed their hands toward the train, one of these two saying that the driver looked at them and laughed, but the truck started over the crossing without stopping at any time. Laborer Castro stated that the truck driver shifted gears as soon as he turned off from San Fernando Road, while Laborer Alamiz stated that the engine bell was ringing and that there were no other trucks or vehicles between San Fernando Road and the crossing.

Truck Driver Chaney stated that he was operating his truck east-bound on San Fernando Road and as he turned to the right on Aviation Drive he saw an automobile moving northward on Aviation Drive about half way between the tracks and San Fernando Road; he reduced his speed to allow this automobile to pass and then straightened his truck and proceeded toward the crossing without stopping. As the truck was crossing the tracks he shifted from high to second gear and about the same instant he saw one of the section men standing about 20 feet south of the crossing near the right side of the road, waving his arms. About the same time he

locked to the right and saw the approaching train moving at a speed of at least 60 miles per hour. The train then was so close to the crossing that he knew the truck would be hit if he did not hurry, although the truck already was moving as fast as it could in second gear. The train struck the truck back of the rear wheels and threw it around, the driver sitting in the truck until after it stopped. Driver Chaney further stated that as he made the turn into Aviation Drive he looked up the tracks to the right but did not see the train, being unable to see any distance from that point on account of the direction in which his truck was headed. He could not estimate the speed of his truck between San Fernando Road and the crossing, but said the truck was not moving very fast as he had reduced speed to make the turn and to allow the automobile to pass him. He also said that he saw a section man waving his arms up and down but did not hear any shouting or yelling and he was not sure at that time that the section man was waving at him to stop. The weather was clear, sun was shining and the cab of his truck is open on each side, but he thought that the noise of the motor prevented him from hearing the whistle of the train. In a subsequent interview with Driver Chaney, he made a rough sketch of Aviation Drive crossing and indicated that when he first saw the approaching train, at which time he shifted gears and had reached the east-bound track, the train was about 150 feet east of Verdugo Wash Bridge, or approximately 450 feet west of the crossing. Driver Chaney had been driving trucks intermittently since 1914, had been in the employ of the Consolidated Rock Products Company about 2 months, and had made six trips over this crossing on the day before the accident, this being his first trip over the crossing on the day of the accident. He had not been instructed by this company to stop at railroad crossings.

Police Officer Tucker stated that he was on San Fernando Road in his automobile, traveling northward, (westward according to time-table directions), and was approximately 600 feet from the crossing when his attention was attracted by the train whistle and on looking at the crossing he saw a truck about midway of the two tracks and the train was approximately 200 feet from the crossing. He did not notice any other vehicles turning off San Fernando Road at the time of the accident. Officer Tucker also said that he heard the train whistle four times and then start to whistle again, but paid no more attention to the whistling as he knew there would be an accident.

Marion Tanaka, employed at a floral shop on San Fernando Road, stated that she heard the crossing whistle signal sounded almost continuously as the train approached Aviation Drive crossing, and she observed that the train was traveling very fast.

F. S. Conger, employed at a Texaco service station in the vicinity of the crossing, stated that the truck was moving over the tracks at a very low rate of speed and at first he thought it would clear the train. He estimated the speed of the train to have been between 55 and 60 miles per hour, and remembered that the whistle was being sounded because it was unusually loud and sounded as if both engines were whistling at the same time.

According to Assistant Division Engineer Edwards, Aviation Drive came into existence by reason of an agreement with the Los Angeles City Park Department in order to serve as a private roadway for the park department, and had been used only to a limited extent until within the past 2 or 3 months, there having been more traffic over the crossing during the latter period on account of construction work incident to highway improvements. There had been no protection except a crossing warning sign, but automatic protection was being installed and it was anticipated that the entire project would be completed within 30 days or 6 weeks.

Discussion

There was abundant evidence that the crossing whistle signal was sounded by the engineman almost continuously as the train approached the crossing, and it also appeared that the automatic bell was ringing, while section men standing on the south side of the crossing attempted to warn the driver of the truck of the approaching train when he failed to stop at the crossing, some of the section men stating that the driver looked at them and laughed when they waved their hands and called to him to stop. Driver Chaney stated that while he saw one of the men waving his hands he was not sure that that man wanted him to stop; he was operating the truck at a low rate of speed, did not stop at the crossing, did not hear the engine whistle, probably on account of the noise made by the motor of his truck, and did not look to the right after having finished rounding the corner from San Fernando Road until the truck was on the tracks and he shifted from high to second gear, at which time it was too late to clear the crossing. The cab of the truck was open on each side and the driver could have had an unobstructed view of the approaching east-bound train for a sufficient distance to afford him ample opportunity to stop, yet the evidence indicates that he took no precautions whatever for the safe movement of his truck over the crossing.

This crossing was one over which there had been very little traffic but at the time of the accident highway improvements were being made and two crossing signals with second-train indicators were being installed at this point in order to provide protection for future traffic.

-8-

Conclusion

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

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,
Director.