

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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REPORT NO. 3717  
SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY  
IN RE ACCIDENT  
NEAR CARPINTERIA, CALIF., ON  
OCTOBER 26, 1956

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## SUMMARY

Date: October 26, 1956

Railroad: Southern Pacific

Location: Carpinteria, Calif.

Kind of accident: Collision

Equipment involved: Track motor-car : Freight train

Train number: : Extra 5698 East

Locomotive number: : Diesel-electric  
unit 5698

Consist: : 11 cars, caboose

Speeds: Standing : 50 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable, train orders, and automatic  
block-signal system

Track: Single; 4° curve; 0.30 percent  
ascending grade westward

Weather: Clear

Time: 9:30 a. m.

Casualties: 1 killed

Cause: Failure to take required precautions  
in operation of track motor-car

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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REPORT NO. 3717

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

SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY

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December 14, 1956

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Accident at Carpinteria, Calif., on October 26, 1956, caused  
by failure to take required precautions in the operation  
of a track motor-car.

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

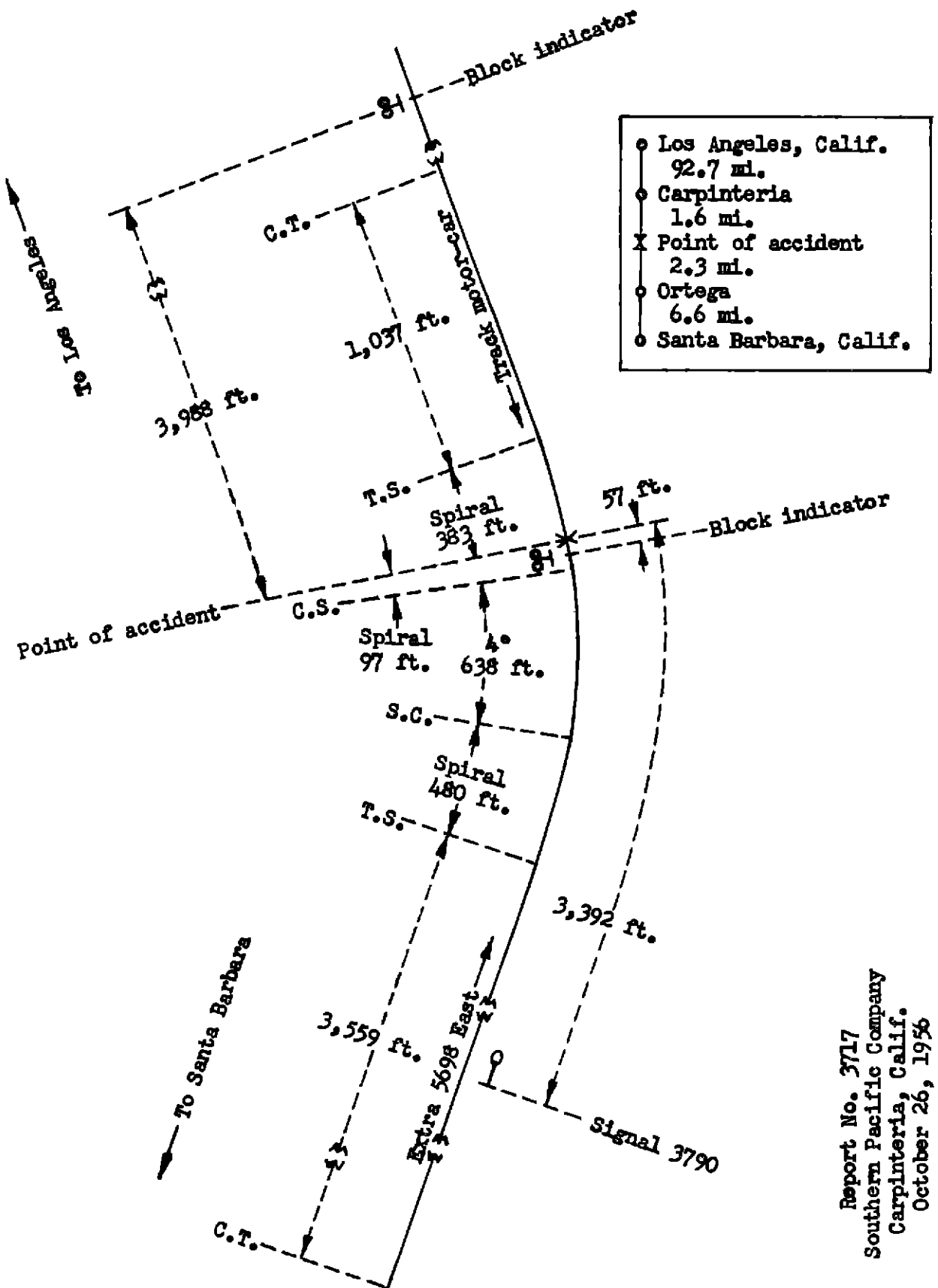
CLARKE, Commissioner:

On October 26, 1956, there was a collision between a  
track motor-car and a freight train on the line of the  
Southern Pacific Company near Carpinteria, Calif., which  
resulted in the death of one signal maintainer.

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



Report No. 3717  
 Southern Pacific Company  
 Carpinteria, Calif.  
 October 26, 1956

### Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Los Angeles Division extending between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, Calif., 103.2 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 94.3 miles west of Los Angeles and 1.6 miles west of the station at Carpinteria. From the east there is a tangent 1,037 feet in length and a spiral to the right 97 feet to the point of accident and 383 feet westward. From the west there are, in succession, a tangent 3,559 feet in length, a spiral 480 feet, a 4° curve to the left 638 feet, and the spiral on which the accident occurred. The grade is 0.30 percent ascending westward at the point of accident.

Automatic signal 3790, governing east-bound movements, is located 3,392 feet west of the point of accident.

Block indicators for the information of maintenance-of-way employees and the operators of track motor-cars are located, respectively, 3,988 feet east and 57 feet west of the point of accident. These indicators consist of small lower-quadrant semaphores enclosed in cases so located that they are visible from the track. The indicator located 57 feet west of the point of accident indicates Block-occupied when the main track is occupied at any point throughout a distance of 6.2 miles immediately west of the indicator.

This carrier's rules for the operation of track motor-cars read in part as follows:

1101. Track cars must be kept clear of main track for all trains unless line-up provides sufficient time on all trains to permit safe movement, or in an emergency adequate flag protection is provided.

In block system limits, when block signal or track occupancy indicator indicates approach of a train, track car must be immediately stopped and removed from track and kept off track unless it can be seen or it is known that it is safe to proceed.

\* \* \*

1104. \* \* \* whenever possible, a line-up of trains should be obtained before starting on a run, and approximately each two hours thereafter. \* \* \*

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The maximum authorized speeds are 50 miles per hour for freight trains and 25 miles per hour for track motor-cars of the type involved.

### Description of Accident

About 9:20 a. m. a track motor-car, occupied by a signal maintainer, departed west-bound from Carpinteria. It was stopped at a point 1.6 miles west of the station at Carpinteria, and the signal maintainer alighted. Several minutes later the car was struck by Extra 5698 East.

Extra 5698 East, an east-bound freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric unit 5698, 11 cars, and a caboose. This train departed from Santa Barbara at 9 a. m., according to the dispatcher's record of the movement of trains, and while moving at a speed of approximately 50 miles per hour it struck the track motor-car.

The track motor-car was demolished. Extra 5698 East stopped with the front end of the locomotive approximately 2,400 feet east of the point of collision.

The signal maintainer, who was attempting to remove the track motor-car from the track, was killed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 9:30 a. m.

The track motor-car was of the belt-drive type, was powered by a 5 to 8 horsepower engine, and was equipped with four-wheel brakes. It weighed 630 pounds and had seating capacity for four persons. It was insulated to prevent the shunting of track circuits.

The locomotive of Extra 5698 East was of the road-switcher type.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 21 trains.

### Discussion

On the day of the accident the train dispatcher issued a line-up of expected train movements to the operator at Santa Barbara at 6:40 a. m. This line-up was issued for the 2-hour period from 7 a. m. until 9 a. m. and read in part as follows:

## Eastbound

\* \* \*

Ex 5698 East called to leave Santa Barbara at 9 AM

\* \* \*

## Westbound

2/833 \* \* \* Ventura 840 AM, Santa Barbara 928 AM

\* \* \*

Ventura is 27.5 miles east of Santa Barbara. Between 7:40 a. m. and 8 a. m. the signal maintainer obtained a copy of this line-up. He then proceeded from Santa Barbara to Carpinteria on his track motor-car. He arrived at the latter point about 9 a. m. and removed the track motor-car from the track. The agent at Carpinteria said that immediately after Second 833, a west-bound freight train, passed, at 9:19 a. m., the signal maintainer replaced the car on the track and departed west-bound. He said that he spoke to the signal maintainer, but there was no mention of train movements. The signal maintainer stopped the car and alighted to talk with two persons who were standing at a motor-car set-off 1.6 miles west of Carpinteria. While he was talking he heard Extra 5698 East approaching. He was killed while attempting to remove the car from the track.

After Extra 5698 East departed from Santa Barbara it entered the siding at Ortega, 6.6 miles east of Santa Barbara, and met Second 833. It then re-entered the main track at a spring switch at the east end of the siding. As this train was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was approximately 50 miles per hour, as indicated by the tape of the speed-recording device. The fireman, a qualified engineer, was operating the locomotive. The enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment of the locomotive, and the conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. Because of curvature of the track and vegetation adjacent to the track, the view of a track motor-car standing at the point of accident from an approaching east-bound locomotive is considerably restricted. The engineer and the front brakeman said that the track motor-car first became visible to them at a distance which they thought was about 200 feet. At this time the fireman was sounding the grade-crossing whistle signal for a rail-highway grade crossing located 78 feet west of the point of accident. When the engineer and the brakeman saw the car they called a warning, and the fireman immediately made an emergency application of the brakes. The collision occurred before the speed of the train had been materially reduced.

The rules of this carrier provide that the operator of a track motor-car should, whenever possible, obtain a line-up of train movements before starting on a run and approximately each 2 hours thereafter. They also provide that when a block signal or track occupancy-indicator indicates the approach of a train, track cars must be removed from the track unless it can be seen or is known that it is safe to proceed. In the instant case one of the men who was talking with the signal maintainer before the accident occurred said that the block indicator west of the point of accident was visible from the point at which they were standing and that it indicated Block-occupied. It is probable that the signal maintainer passed the block indicator east of the point of accident and stopped at the point of accident while the indicators were indicating Block-occupied because of track occupancy by Second 833. Extra 5698 East entered the main track at Ortega immediately after Second 833 passed, and under these conditions the indicators would indicate Block-occupied continuously from the time Second 833 passed them until Extra 5698 East passed.

During the past 10 years the Commission has investigated 64 collisions, including the present case, in which track motor-cars were involved. These accidents resulted in the death of 90 persons and the injury of 185 persons.

#### Cause

This accident was caused by failure to take required precautions in the operation of a track motor-car.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this fourteenth day of December, 1956.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,  
Secretary.