

RAILROAD ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

Report No 3791

SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY

PASO ROBLES, CALIF

NOVEMBER 25, 1957

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

Washington

2

SUMMARY

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|--------------------|---|------------|
| DATE | November 25, 1957 | |
| RAILROAD | Southern Pacific | |
| LOCATION | Paso Robles, Calif | |
| KIND OF ACCIDENT | Collision | |
| EQUIPMENT INVOLVED | Passenger train | Motortruck |
| TRAIN NUMBER | 99 | |
| LOCOMOTIVE NUMBER | Diesel-electric units 6040, 5917 and 6042 | |
| CONSIST | 12 cars | |
| SPEEDS | 62 m p h | 5 m p h |
| OPERATION | Timetable, train orders, and automatic block signal system | |
| TRACK | Single, tangent, 0.50 percent descending grade westward | |
| HIGHWAY | Tangent, crosses track at angle of 90°; level | |
| WEATHER | Clear | |
| TIME | 2:00 p m | |
| CASUALTIES | 8 injured | |
| CAUSE | Motortruck occupying rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of approaching train | |

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO 3791

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

SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY

June 24, 1958

Accident at Paso Robles, Calif., on November 25, 1957, caused by a motortruck occupying a rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train

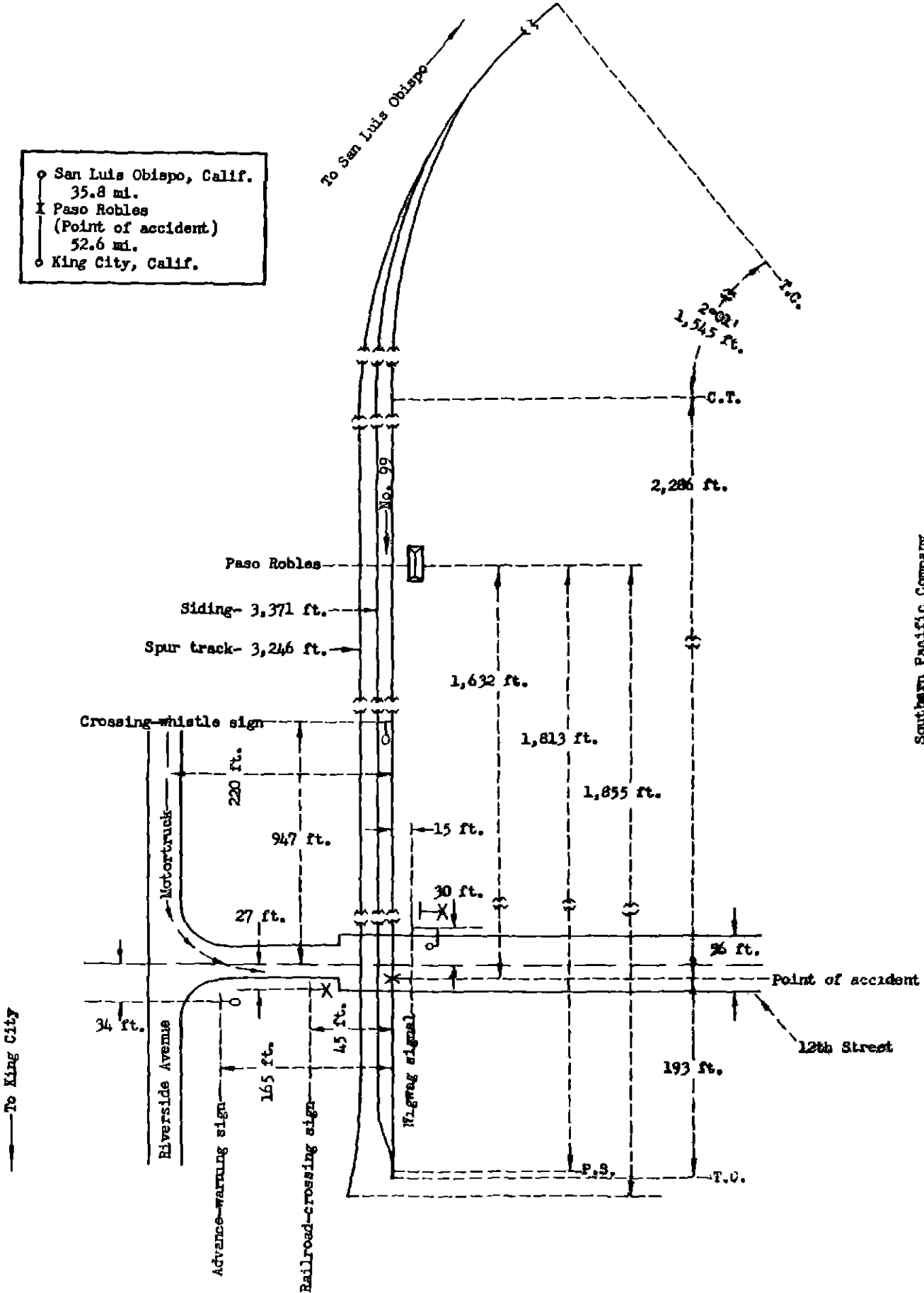
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

TUGGLE, Commissioner

On November 25, 1957, there was a collision between a passenger train on the line of the Southern Pacific Company and a motortruck at a rail-highway grade crossing at Paso Robles, Calif. which resulted in the injury of 3 passengers, 3 maintenance-of-way employees, and 2 train-service employees

¹ Under authority of section 7 (2) of the *Interstate Commerce Act* the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Tuggle for consideration and disposition

o San Luis Obispo, Calif.
 35.8 mi.
 | Paso Robles
 | (Point of accident)
 | 52.6 mi.
 o King City, Calif.



Southern Pacific Company
 November 25, 1937
 Paso Robles, Calif.

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Coast Division extending between San Luis Obispo and King City, Calif. 88.4 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. Timetable directions on the railroad are east and west, and these directions are used in this report. In the vicinity of the point of accident a westbound train by timetable direction moves toward the north by compass direction. At Paso Robles, Calif., 35.8 miles west of San Luis Obispo, a siding and a spur track 3,371 feet and 3,246 feet in length, respectively, parallel the main track. The centers of these tracks are located 13 feet and 26 feet, respectively, north of the center of the main track. The west switch of the siding and the west end of the spur track are located, respectively, 1,813 feet and 1,855 feet west of the station. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 1,632 feet west of the station where the tracks are crossed at grade by 12th Street. From the east there are, in succession, a 2°01' curve to the left 1,345 feet in length, and a tangent 2,286 feet to the point of accident and 192 feet westward. The grade for westbound trains is 0.50 percent descending at the point of accident.

In the vicinity of the point of accident Riverside Avenue parallels the railroad on the north. This highway is surfaced with bituminous material to a width of 25 feet. The centerline of the highway is approximately 220 feet north of the centerline of the main track. Twelfth Street extends southward from Riverside Avenue and intersects the tracks at an angle of 90 degrees. This street is surfaced with bituminous material to a width of 27 feet from Riverside Avenue throughout a distance of approximately 165 feet, and to a width of 56 feet southward from that location. Planking is laid along each side of each rail of the spur track, siding, and main track at the crossing. The portions of the street between the inside planking of these tracks is surfaced with bituminous material. Twelfth Street is tangent immediately north and south of the point of accident. From the north the grade is, successively, 4.8 percent ascending 170 feet to the north rail of the spur track, and level throughout the width of the crossing.

A circular railroad-crossing advance-warning sign is located 34 feet west of the centerline of the street and 165 feet north of the centerline of the main track. This sign is 2 feet in diameter. It bears a vertical line, a horizontal line, and the letters "RR" in black. The lines and letters are provided with reflector buttons. A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign is located 27 feet west of the centerline of the highway and 45 feet north of the centerline of the main track. This sign is mounted on a mast 9 feet above the level of the street. A similar sign is located in the southeast angle of the intersection. A railroad-crossing signal of the wigway type is located 30 feet east of the centerline of the street and 15 feet south of the centerline of the main track. The center of the banner of the device is located 13 feet 8 inches above the level of the street. The banner is 1 foot 9 inches in diameter. It bears a horizontal line, a vertical line, and a border in black on a white background and is provided with a hooded red light at its center. The warning aspect is displayed by the swinging of the banner and the illumination of the red light. A warning bell sounds while the signal is operating. The signal is actuated when a westbound train occupies any portion of the main track throughout a distance of 2,815 feet immediately east of the crossing. A crossing-whistle sign for westbound trains is located 947 feet east of the centerline of 12th Street.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

14 ENGINE WHISTLE SIGNALS

Note: The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds, "--" for longer sounds. * * *

* * *

SOUND

INDICATION

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(1) -- o ---

Approaching public crossings at grade,
* * * to be commenced sufficiently
in advance to afford ample warning,
but not less than one-fourth mile
before reaching a crossing, and pro-
longed or repeated until engine has
passed over the crossing

* * *

17 The headlight must be displayed to the front of every train day and night * * *

* * *

17-A When an engine is running by day, headlight must be displayed to the front in direc-
tion of movement, when such movement involves crossing of streets, roads, or highways at
grade

* * *

17-D Oscillating white light on engines so equipped * * * must be operated approaching
road crossings at grade both day and night under all conditions

* * *

30 The engine bell must be rung * * * while approaching public crossings at grade, begin-
ning sufficiently in advance to afford ample warning, but not less than one-fourth mile before
reaching such crossing and continuing until the engine has passed over the crossing, * * *

Motor vehicle laws of the State of California read in part as follows

576 Certain Vehicles Must Stop at All Railway Grade Crossings (a) The driver of any
motor vehicle * * * or of any motor tank truck, tank trailer or tank semitrailer, used in the
transportation of flammable liquids * * * as a cargo or part of a cargo, whether loaded or
empty, before crossing at grade any track or tracks of a railway * * * shall stop such vehicle
not less than 10 nor more than 50 feet from the nearest rail of such track and while so stopped
shall listen, and look in both directions along such track, for any approaching railway train,
interurban car or other vehicle using such rail before traversing such crossing, * * * Such
vehicle shall remain standing while any train is moving toward the crossing and is close
enough to constitute an immediate hazard

* * *

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains in the vicinity of the point of accident
is 65 miles per hour

Description of Accident

No 99, a westbound first-class passenger train, consisted of diesel-electric units 6040,
5917, and 6042, coupled in multiple-unit control, 1 baggage-chair car, 2 chair cars, 3 dining cars,
4 chair cars, 1 tavern car, and 1 observation car, in the order named. All cars were of lightweight

steel construction and were equipped with tightlock couplers. This train departed from San Luis Obispo at 12 51 p m , on time, passed Paso Robles, the last open office, at 1 58 p m , and while moving at a speed of 62 miles per hour, as indicated by the tape of the speed-recording device, it struck a motortruck at a point 1,632 feet west of the station at Paso Robles where the railroad is crossed at grade by 12th Street.

The vehicle involved consisted of a tractor semi-trailer, and a trailer owned by Miles and Sons Trucking Service, Merced, Calif. The driver, who was the sole occupant, held California chauffeur's license No B116408. The tractor was a 1957 Kenworth and bore California license X51957. It was powered by a diesel engine and was provided with a conventional cab and dual drive wheels. The semi-trailer was a 1950 Fruehauf tank type and bore California license No 932703. It was provided with dual wheels. The capacity of the semi-trailer was 3,700 gallons. The trailer was a 1950 Fruehauf tank type and bore California license No 932834. It was provided with dual wheels at the front and rear. The capacity of the trailer was 4,000 gallons. These units were equipped with air brakes. At the time of the accident the semi-trailer was loaded with 2,800 gallons of stove oil and the trailer was loaded with 3,575 gallons of diesel fuel oil. The overall length of the vehicle was 60 feet and the gross weight was 76,176 pounds. This vehicle proceeded westward on Riverside Avenue, entered 12th Street, entered the crossing at an estimated speed of 5 miles per hour and was struck by No 99.

No 99 struck the semi-trailer and an explosion occurred. Burning oil from the vehicle entered the control compartment and the engine compartment of the first diesel-electric unit and covered the north side of the second and third diesel-electric units, and the first to the fifth cars, inclusive. This train stopped with the front end of the locomotive 5,087 feet west of the crossing. No separations occurred between units of the train and none of the equipment was derailed. The first and second diesel-electric units were heavily damaged by fire. The third diesel-electric unit and the first to the fifth cars, inclusive, were slightly damaged by fire. Separation occurred between the units of the vehicle. The tractor stopped upright on 12th Street parallel to the tracks and 25 feet south of the main track. The semi-trailer was broken into two parts. One portion stopped 130 feet west of the crossing and 14 feet north of the main track, and the other portion stopped 173 feet west of the crossing and 9 feet north of the main track. The trailer stopped on its side on 12th Street 14 feet north of the main track. The semi-trailer was destroyed, and the tractor and trailer were heavily damaged.

The engineer and the fireman of No 99 were injured. The three maintenance-of-way employees who were injured were performing work in the vicinity of the point of accident.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 2 00 p m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement over the crossing was 15.4 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 9 00 a m December 3, 1957, 395 automobiles and 172 motortrucks passed over the crossing.

Discussion

At the time of the accident No 921, a westbound third-class freight train, was standing on the siding with the front end of the first diesel-electric unit approximately 370 feet east of 12th Street. The range of vision between a vehicle approaching the crossing from the north on 12th Street

and a train approaching from the east on the main track was restricted by No 921. From points 25 feet and 15 feet north of the main track No 99 could be seen by the driver of the motortruck involved in the accident throughout a distance of approximately 400 feet and 800 feet, respectively.

As No 99 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were in the control compartment of the first diesel-electric unit and were maintaining a lookout ahead. The conductor and the front brakeman were in the first car, and the flagman was in the rear car. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The headlight and the oscillating headlight were lighted. The engineer was sounding the grade-crossing whistle signal and the bell was ringing when the collision occurred. The enginemen observed the motortruck entering the crossing when the train was approximately 150 feet east of the crossing. The engineer immediately initiated an emergency brake application. He said that he kept the throttle in open position in order to prevent the possibility of the train stopping near burning oil. The first the members of the train crew became aware of anything being wrong was when the collision occurred.

The driver said that as the motortruck was approaching the point where the accident occurred he observed that the wigwag warning signal was functioning. He said he thought that it was being actuated by No 921. Witnesses said that the motortruck was not stopped before entering the crossing as required by the motor vehicle laws of the State of California, and that it was moving at a speed of approximately 5 miles per hour when it entered the crossing.

At the time the accident occurred the driver of the motortruck was 62 years of age and had been employed in that capacity by the motor carrier since January 6, 1949. From that date until the accident occurred he had not been involved in a chargeable accident.

Cause

This accident was caused by a motortruck occupying a rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D C , this twenty-fourth
day of June, 1958

By the Commission, Commissioner Tuggle

(SEAL)

HAROLD D McCOY,

Secretary