

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 3050
SOUTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR OLD TOWN, S. C., CN
DECEMBER 18, 1946

SUMMARY

Railroad:	Southern
Date:	December 18, 1946
Location:	Old Town, S. C.
Kind of accident:	Collision
Equipment involved:	Passenger train : School bus
Train number:	18 :
Engine number:	1361 :
Consist:	7 cars :
Estimated speeds:	45 m. p. h. : Unknown
Operation:	Timetable and train orders
Track:	Single; tangent; level
Highway:	Tangent; crosses track at right angles; level
Weather:	Misting
Time:	8:10 a. m.
Casualties:	12 killed; 10 injured
Cause:	Failure to operate a school bus approaching railroad crossing at grade in accordance with require- ments of law

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 3090

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

SOUTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY

January 27, 1947

Accident near Old Town, S. C., on December 18, 1946, caused
by failure to operate a school bus approaching a rail-
road crossing at grade in accordance with requirements
of law.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On December 18, 1946, there was a collision between a
passenger train on the Southern Railway and a school bus at
a highway grade crossing near Old Town, S. C., which resulted
in the death of 11 bus passengers and the bus driver, and the
injury of 10 bus passengers. This accident was investigated
in conjunction with a representative of the Public Service
Commission of South Carolina.

¹ Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Com-
merce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the
Commission to Commissioner Patterson for consideration and
disposition.

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Columbia Division extending between Greenville and Alston, S. C., 118.7 miles, a single track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred 87.22 miles east of Greenville and 3.02 miles east of the station at Old Town, where the railroad is crossed at grade by a county highway. From the west on the railroad there is a tangent 1,673 feet to the point of accident and 1,645 feet eastward. The grade is practically level.

The highway intersects the railroad at right angles, and is an unimproved road about 14 feet wide. From the north or the highway there is a compound curve to the right, the maximum curvature of which is approximately 20°, about 500 feet in length, which is followed by a tangent 100 feet to the crossing and about 300 feet southward. The grade for south-bound vehicles is, successively, practically level 500 feet, 3.0 percent ascending 50 feet and 6.0 percent ascending 50 feet to the crossing, then it is level over the crossing and some distance southward. The crossing is about 14 feet wide and is surfaced with a mixture of cinders, stone dust and soil.

An advance railroad-crossing sign is located 250 feet north of the crossing and about 5 feet west of the highway. This sign is a disc 24 inches in diameter and mounted on a mast 9 feet above the level of the highway. It bears a horizontal line and a vertical line intersecting at right angles at its center and the letters "R.R." in black on a white background. A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign is located to the right of the direction of south-bound traffic, 13 feet north of the center-line of the track and 13 feet west of the center-line of the highway. This sign is mounted on a mast 9 feet above the level of the highway, and bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black on a white background. A crossing-whistle sign for east-bound trains is located 1,515 feet west of the crossing.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

17. ENGINE WHISTLE SIGNALS

Note--The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "—" for longer sounds.

* * *

Sound

Indication

* * *

- (1) — — o — Approaching public crossings at grade. The signal to be repeated or the last sound prolonged until crossing is reached.

* * *

Section 1626-3, of the Motor Vehicle Laws of South Carolina, reads in part as follows:

* * *

(12) Stop before crossing railroad track.--The operator of any school bus shall, before crossing at a grade any track or tracks of any railroad, bring his vehicle to a full and complete stop within not less than (10) feet nor more than fifty (50) feet from the nearest rail of the track nearest to the front of such vehicle and shall after such stop ascertain if it is safe to proceed before crossing such track or tracks.

* * *

The maximum authorized speed for the train involved was 60 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 18, an east-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 1361, two express cars, one baggage-express car, one baggage mail car, one passenger-baggage car, one coach and one Pullman sleeping car, in the order named. The second car was of steel-underframe construction, and the remainder were of all-steel construction. This train departed from Greenwood, the last open office, 27.82 miles west of the point of accident, at 7:05 a. m., 1 hour 35 minutes late, passed Old Town and while moving at an estimated speed of 45 miles per hour it struck a school bus on a highway grade crossing 3.02 miles east of the station at Old Town.

The bus involved was owned and operated by a resident of Silver Street, S. J. It bore South Carolina license No. 197. The driver held South Carolina special chauffeur's license No. 22752. The bus was a 1935, 4-wheel, Chevrolet model, equipped with dual tires on the rear wheels, and mechanically operated foot and hand brakes. The body of the bus was of composite construction, which consisted of metal sides and top outside and plastic-wood lining inside. It weighed 5,380 pounds. The windshield and the side windows were so arranged

that the driver had unrestricted view ahead and to each side. This vehicle was occupied by the driver and 21 school children, and was moving southward on the highway at an unknown speed when it entered upon the crossing and was struck by No. 18.

The bus was demolished. The equipment of No. 18 was not derailed, and the train stopped with the front end of the engine 1,150 feet east of the crossing. The front of the engine was slightly damaged.

It was misting at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8:10 a. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement of trains over the crossing was 3.7. During the 24-hour period beginning at 4 p. m., December 20, 1943, 26 automobiles, 2 trucks, and 4 trains passed over the crossing.

Discussion

No. 18 was approaching the crossing at a speed of about 45 miles per hour in territory where the maximum authorized speed was 50 miles per hour. The whistle signal for the crossing was sounded in compliance with the rules, and the last blast of the whistle was being sounded as the engine entered upon the crossing. The fireman first saw the bus when it was moving southward on the highway about 15 feet north of the crossing. At that time the engine was about 100 feet west of the crossing. The fireman immediately called a warning to the engineer, who moved the brake valve to emergency position, but the collision occurred before the speed of the train was materially reduced. The brakes of No. 18 had been tested and had functioned properly en route.

The driver of the school bus was an experienced driver and was familiar with the route. Visibility was not impaired by weather conditions and the driver could have seen the approaching train throughout a considerable distance immediately west of the crossing. One of the surviving occupants of the bus said that the bus was not stopped short of the crossing. The laws of the state of South Carolina require school buses to stop within 50 feet but not less than 10 feet from the nearest railroad track and not to proceed until it is safe to do so. It could not be determined why the driver failed to take action to stop the bus short of the crossing, as he was killed in the accident.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to operate a school bus approaching a railroad crossing at grade in accordance with requirements of law.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-seventh day of January, 1947.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SFAL)

W. D. BARTLE,

Secretary.