

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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INVESTIGATION NO. 3269  
SPOKANE INTERNATIONAL RAILROAD COMPANY  
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT  
NEAR MEADOW CREEK, IDAHO, ON  
JULY 27, 1949

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SUMMARY

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Date: July 27, 1949

Railroad: Spokane International

Location: Meadow Creek, Idaho

Kind of accident: Rear-end collision

Trains involved: Freight : Passenger

Train numbers: Extra 126 East : 2

Engine numbers: 126 : 104

Consists: 27 cars, caboose : 9 cars

Estimated speeds: 10 m. p. h. : 25 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; 6° curve; 0.32 percent  
ascending grade eastward

Weather: Cloudy

Time: 5:01 a. m.

Casualties: 1 killed; 2 injured

Cause: Failure to provide adequate  
protection for preceding  
train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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INVESTIGATION NO. 3269

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

SPOKANE INTERNATIONAL RAILROAD COMPANY

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October 5, 1949

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Accident near Meadow Creek, Idaho, on July 27, 1949,  
caused by failure to provide adequate protection  
for preceding train.

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On July 27, 1949, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Spokane International Railroad near Meadow Creek, Idaho, which resulted in the death of one train-service employee and the injury of two train-service employees.

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Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce 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 railroad extending between U.P. Jct., Wash., and Eastport, Idaho, 139.5 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 on the main track at a point 128.6 miles east of U.P. Jct., and 3.6 miles east of the station at Meadow Creek, Idaho. From the west there are, in succession, a tangent 774 feet in length, a 4° curve to the right 983 feet, a tangent 691 feet, and a 6° curve to the left 1,018 feet to the point of accident and 255 feet eastward. The grade for east-bound trains varies between 0.25 percent and 0.50 percent ascending throughout a distance of 2.4 miles immediately west of the point of accident, and is 0.32 percent ascending at that point.

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

14. ENGINE WHISTLE SIGNALS.

The whistle must be sounded where required by rule  
\* \* \*

The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds: "—" for longer sounds. \* \* \*

Sound.	Indication.
* * *	
(c) — o o o	Flagman protect rear of train.
(d) — — — —	Flagman may return from west or south, as prescribed by Rule 99.
* * *	

35. The following signals will be used by flagmen:

Day signals--A red flag,  
Torpedoes and Fuses.

\* \* \*

73. Extra trains are inferior to regular trains.

86. Unless otherwise provided, an inferior train must be clear at the time a superior train in the same direction is due to leave the next station in the rear where time is shown.

91. Unless some form of block signals is used, trains in the same direction must keep not less than ten minutes apart, except in closing up at stations.

99. When a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection, placing two torpedoes, and when necessary, in addition, displaying lighted fuses. When recalled and safety to the train will permit, he may return.

When the conditions require, he will leave the torpedoes and a lighted fusee.

\* \* \*

When a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection. By night, or by day when the view is obscured, lighted fuses must be thrown off at proper intervals.

99 (A). When it is known by engineer that his train will be delayed, he must immediately whistle out flagman.

#### FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS.

##### B.

Directing a Train to Pass or Run Ahead of  
Another Train.

\* \* \*

(3.) Extra 594 east run ahead of No 6 M to B.

The first-named train will run ahead of the second-named train between the designated points.

\* \* \*

The maximum authorized speeds were 50 miles per hour for the passenger train and 40 miles per hour for the freight train.

### Description of Accident

Extra 126 East, an east-bound freight train, consisted of engine 126, 27 cars and a caboose. At Bonners Ferry, the last open office, 16.7 miles west of Meadow Creek, the crew received copies of train order No. 4 reading as follows:

Extra 126 east run ahead of number  
2 Bonners Ferry to Eastport.

This train departed from Bonners Ferry at 3 a. m. At 5:01 a. m., while it was moving on a 6° curve to the left at a speed of about 10 miles per hour, the rear end was struck by No. 2 at a point 3.6 miles east of the station at Meadow Creek.

No. 2, an east-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 104, one combination baggage-mail car, one coach, and seven refrigerator cars, in the order named. All cars were of steel underframe construction. The crew of this train received copies of train order No. 4 at Bonners Ferry. The train departed from Bonners Ferry at 3:55 a. m., on time, and while moving at a speed of about 25 miles per hour it struck the rear end of Extra 126 East.

The caboose of Extra 126 East, which was of wooden construction with a steel underframe, was demolished. The rear truck of the twenty-seventh car was derailed. This car remained upright and coupled to the front portion of the train, and stopped with the rear end 255 feet east of the point of accident and 10 feet south of the center-line of the track. It was somewhat damaged. The engine and tender of No. 2 were derailed to the right. There were no separations between the units of the train. The engine stopped upright, with the front end 125 feet east of the point of accident and 12 feet south of the center-line of the track. The pilot and the front end were damaged, and the engine truck was detached. The tender remained upright and in line with the engine. The first and second cars were slightly damaged.

The conductor of Extra 126 East was killed, and the flagman of Extra 126 East and the flagman of No. 2 were injured.

The weather was cloudy, and visibility was somewhat restricted by light mist and fog at the time of the accident, which occurred at 5:01 a. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in this territory was 5 trains.

### Discussion

Train order No. 4 authorized Extra 126 East to occupy the main track on the time of No. 2, a superior train, between Bonners Ferry and Eastport. However, this order did not relieve the crew of Extra 126 East from furnishing rear-end protection. After the crew of Extra 126 East received copies of this train order at Bonners Ferry, the engineer informed the conductor that he thought their train would be overtaken by No. 2 west of Eastport. The conductor replied that he would arrange to protect the rear of the train against No. 2.

Extra 126 East departed from Bonners Ferry at 3 a. m. The speed of the train was reduced to about 5 miles per hour on an ascending grade about 1 mile west of Meadow Creek. The flagman said that when the train approached Meadow Creek he prepared to provide flag protection and reminded the conductor that No. 2 should be close behind them. He said the conductor informed him that there was sufficient time for their train to proceed ahead of No. 2 and that flag protection was not necessary. The flagman did not question the conductor but inferred from the conversation that the conductor had received information at Bonners Ferry that No. 2 was late. The train was stopped at Meadow Creek about 4:37 a. m., where the tender was supplied with water, and it departed at 4:42 a. m., 3 minutes after No. 2 was due to leave that station. Flag protection was not provided at Meadow Creek. The engineer said that because he had been informed by the conductor the rear of the train would be protected against No. 2, he assumed that proper flag protection was provided when the speed of the train was reduced. He did not sound the engine-whistle signal for the flagman to protect the rear of the train at Meadow Creek, or for the flagman to return from the west when the train was ready to depart. After the train departed from Meadow Creek lighted fusees were not thrown off. As Extra 126 East was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 10 miles per hour



on the ascending grade. The enginemen and the front brakeman were on the engine, the conductor was in the caboose, and the flagman was on the rear platform of the caboose. The flagman said that he was apprehensive, and was listening and watching for the approach of No. 2, but he did not observe that train until it was about 300 feet distant from the rear of his train. He then warned the conductor, and jumped from the caboose immediately before the collision occurred. The front brakeman observed No. 2 as that train was closely approaching the caboose, and called a warning to the enginemen. The collision occurred immediately afterward.

As No. 2 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the headlight was lighted brightly and the speed was about 25 miles per hour. The engineer was maintaining a lookout ahead from his position on the engine, the fireman was on the deck of the engine, and the conductor, the front brakeman, and the flagman were in the second car of the train. The brakes of this train had been tested, and had functioned properly when used on route. The members of the crew had received copies of train order No. 4, and they were aware that Extra 126 East was authorized to occupy the main track on the time of their train. When the engine entered the curve on which the accident occurred, the engineer observed some cattle along the right of way. His attention momentarily was diverted from the track ahead while he requested the fireman to watch for cattle on the left side of the track. When he again looked ahead he saw the caboose of Extra 126 East a short distance from his engine. He immediately placed the brake valve in emergency position, but the collision occurred before the brake application became effective. The conductor observed Extra 126 East moving on the curve ahead of his train but the collision occurred a few seconds later and before he could open the conductor's valve.

In this territory trains are operated by timetable and train orders only. The only provision for spacing following trains is by the time-interval method enforced by operators at open stations, and by flagman's signals. The rules require that a following train must be spaced at least 10 minutes behind a preceding train. In this case the preceding train departed from Bonners Ferry, 20.3 miles west of the point where the accident occurred, 55 minutes before the following train departed from that station. There was no open office between Bonners Ferry and the point where the accident occurred. Train order No. 4 authorized Extra 126 East to occupy the main track on the time of No. 2 between Bonners Ferry and Eastport, but it did not modify

the requirement that rear-end protection must be furnished for Extra 126 East. The conductor of Extra 126 East was killed in the accident, and it could not be determined why he instructed the flagman that flag protection was not necessary. If an adequate block system had been in use, the crew of the following train would have received information that the preceding train was in the block immediately ahead.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the preceding train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this fifth day of October, 1949.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,

Secretary.