

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2562
THE SPOKANE, PORTLAND & SEATTLE RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT METOLIUS, OREG., ON
JANUARY 18, 1942

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SUMMARY

Railroad: Spokane, Portland & Seattle

Date: January 18, 1942

Location: Metolius, Oreg.

Kind of accident: Rear-end collision

Trains involved: G. N. freight : S. P. & S. freight

Train numbers: Extra 3113 West : Extra 533 West

Engine numbers: 3113-3120 : 533-3128

Consist: 46 cars, caboose : 17 cars, caboose

Speed: Standing : 25-35 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; tangent; 0.35 percent
descending grade westward

Weather: Foggy

Time: About 12:17 a. m.

Casualties: 2 killed; 3 injured

Cause: Accident caused by failure to
provide adequate flag protection
for preceding train

Recommendation: That the Spokane, Portland & Seattle
Railway Company establish an adequate
block system on the line involved in
this accident

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2562

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

THE SPOKANE, PORTLAND & SEATTLE RAILWAY COMPANY

March 4, 1942.

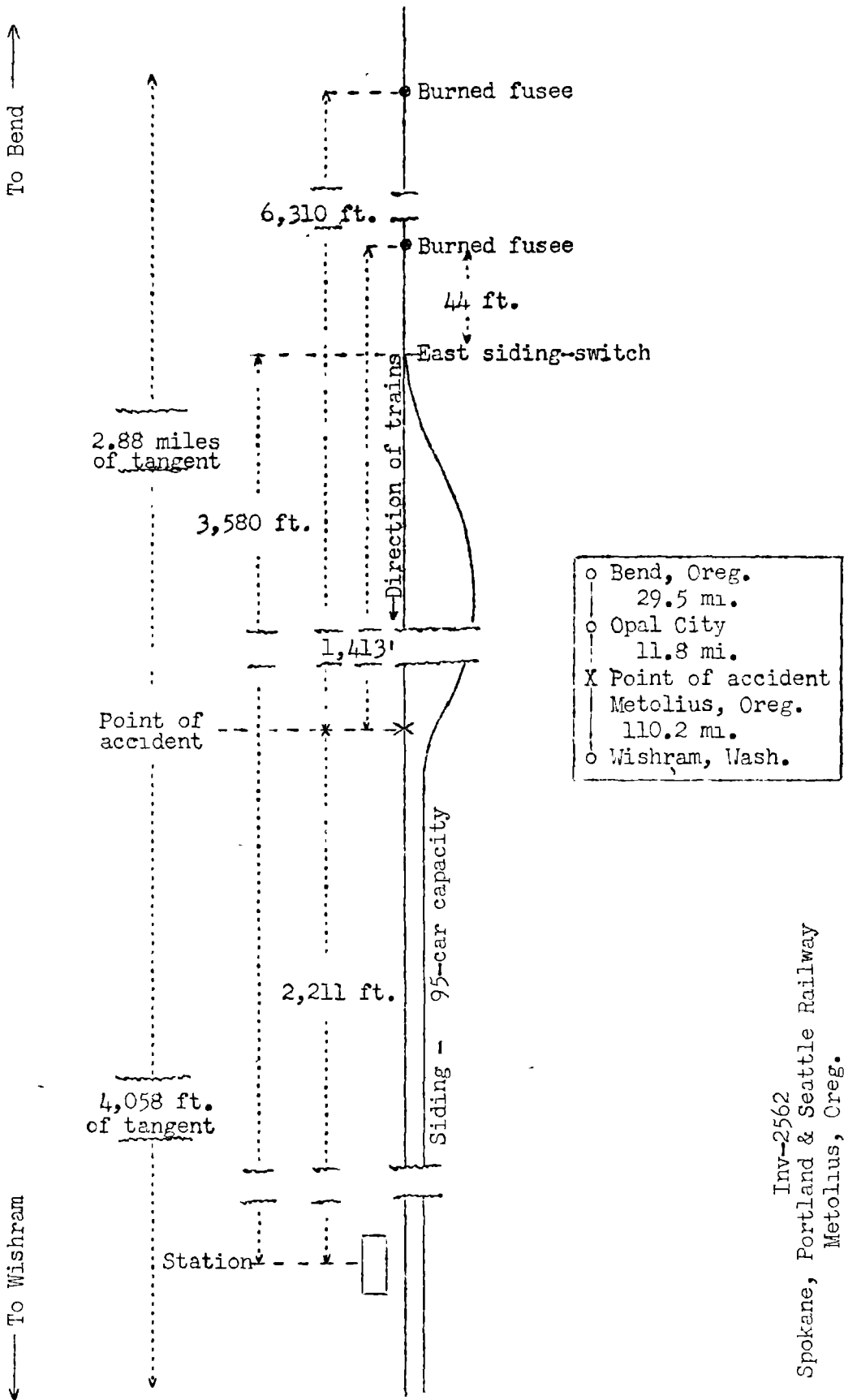
Accident at Metolius, Oreg., on January 18, 1942, caused
by failure to provide adequate flag protection for
preceding train.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On January 18, 1942, there was a rear-end collision between a Great Northern Railway freight train and a Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway freight train on the line of the latter-mentioned carrier at Metolius, Oreg., which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of three employees.

¹Under 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.



Inv-2562
 Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway
 Metolius, Oreg.
 January 18, 1942

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

In the territory involved in this accident trains of the Great Northern Railway, hereinafter referred to as the G. N., are operated over the line of the Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway, hereinafter referred to as the S. P. & S. This accident occurred on that part of the S. P. & S. designated as the Oregon Trunk Railway, which extends between Bend, Oreg., and Wishram, Wash., a distance of 151.5 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is 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 2,211 feet east of the station at Metolius. As the point of accident is approached from the east there is a tangent 2.88 miles to the point of accident and 4,058 feet beyond. The grade for west-bound trains varies between 0.32 and 0.72 percent descending throughout a distance of 2 miles immediately east of the station at Metolius and is 0.35 percent at the point of accident.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

35. The following signals will be used by flagmen:

* * *

Night signals--A red light,
Torpedoes and Fusees.

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 fusees. When recalled and safety to the train will permit, he may return.

* * *

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, * * * lighted fusees must be thrown off at proper intervals.

* * *

In the vicinity of the point of accident the maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 40 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 3113 West, a west-bound G. N. freight train, consisted at the time of the accident of engine 3113, 44 loaded and 2 empty cars, engine 3120 and a caboose, in the order named. This train departed from Bend, 41.3 miles east of Metolius and the last open office, at 10:35 p. m., January 17, according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, set off 17 cars at Opal City, 11.8 miles east of Metolius, departed at 11:50 p. m., according to statements of the crew, and stopped on the main track at Metolius at 12:12 a. m., with the rear end standing 2,211 feet east of the train-order signal. About 5 minutes later the rear end of this train was struck by Extra 533 West.

Extra 533 West, a west-bound S. P. & S. freight train, consisting of engine 533, engine 3128 and a caboose, departed from Bend at 11 p. m., January 17, according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains. At Opal City, 17 cars were added to the train and an air-brake test was made. The train departed from Opal City at 12:01 a. m., according to statements of the crew, with engine 533 at the front end and engine 3128 coupled immediately ahead of the caboose. While this train was moving at an estimated speed of 25 to 35 miles per hour it collided with the rear end of Extra 3113 West. There was no condition of engine 533 that distracted the attention of the crew or obscured their vision. The brakes of Extra 533 had functioned properly en route.

The caboose of Extra 3113 West was demolished. Engine 3120, which was coupled immediately ahead of the caboose of Extra 3113, was derailed and stopped upright and in line with the track, with its front end 123 feet west of the point of collision. The cab was demolished. The tender was demolished and stopped to the north of engine 3120 and parallel to it. The fuel oil became ignited and the rear two cars were destroyed by fire. Engine 533 of Extra 533 was derailed and stopped at right angles to the track, with its rear end on the main track and against the rear end of engine 3120. The smokebox of engine 533 and the cab were demolished. The tail casting and the trailer-truck center casting were broken. The tender was derailed and stopped practically upright on the roadbed, with its front end against the rear end of engine 533. The front truck of the first car in Extra 533 West was derailed. The eleventh car was considerably damaged.

At the time of the accident, which occurred about 12:17 a. m., there was a dense fog which restricted visibility to a distance of about 150 feet.

The employees killed were the fireman of engine 3120 of Extra 3113 West, and the front brakeman of Extra 533 West. The

employees injured were the engineer and the fireman of engine 533 and the swing brakeman of Extra 533 West.

Data

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement over the territory involved was 14.2 trains.

Discussion

The rules governing operation on the line involved provide that when a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train the flagman must, by night, throw off lighted fuses at proper intervals. 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. All surviving members of both crews involved understood these provisions.

Extra 3113 stopped at the train-order signal at Metolius at 12:12 a. m. and the engineer sounded the engine whistle signal for the flagman to protect the rear of the train. According to the statements of the conductor and the flagman, as their train was approaching Metolius the flagman dropped off a lighted 10-minute fusee at a point about 6,300 feet east of the point where the accident occurred. Because of dense fog this fusee disappeared from view when the rear of the train was about 250 feet distant. The flagman dropped off another lighted fusee at a point 1,413 feet east of the point where the accident occurred. The remains of a freshly burned fusee were found in the snow at this point. When Extra 3113 stopped at Metolius the flagman immediately proceeded to the rear with flagging signals. Walking was difficult because of 7 inches of snow which was crusted on top. He reached a point about 1,350 feet to the rear of his train after an interval of 2 minutes. When he had reached this point the engine whistle sounded the signal to recall the flagman. He then proceeded toward his train, but he did not place torpedoes as he considered the distance to be insufficient for a following train to stop short of the rear of his train. When the flagman was a short distance to the rear of the caboose, the conductor, who was standing beside engine 3120, which was coupled ahead of the caboose, instructed the engineer of engine 3120 to sound the engine whistle proceed signal. At this time the flagman heard Extra 533 approaching and started toward the rear to provide flag protection again; however, he had reached a point only about 700 feet to the rear of his train when the headlight of Extra 533 appeared in the fog. He gave stop signals with his red lantern. As the train passed him he observed fire flying from the brake shoes. The conductor said that the collision occurred at 12:17 a. m.

According to the statement of the engineer of the first engine of Extra 533, as his train was approaching Metolius the throttle was in drifting position, the headlight was lighted brightly, the speed was about 30 or 35 miles per hour, and the fireman and he were maintaining a lookout ahead. Dense fog restricted visibility. At a point about 2,000 feet west of the point of accident the engineer made a 6-pound brake-pipe reduction to control the speed of his train until he would be able to observe the indication displayed by the train-order signal. About 300 feet farther west he observed the flare of a lighted fusee in the snow and immediately placed the brake valve in emergency position. At this time he observed the flagman of Extra 3113 giving stop signals with a red lantern. The engineer said the distance was not sufficient to stop short of the train ahead.

The brakes of Extra 533 had been tested and functioned properly en route. The double-heading cock of engine 3128, which was coupled ahead of the caboose, was in closed position. The engineer of engine 3128 said that his throttle was in drifting position.

In the vicinity of the point of accident there is no restriction to prevent a following train from proceeding at the maximum authorized speed of 40 miles per hour. The rules require that flag protection be provided a sufficient distance for a following train to stop from a speed of 40 miles per hour short of a preceding train. Had adequate flag protection been provided this accident could have been averted.

On the line involved trains are operated by timetable and train orders only. If an adequate block system had been in use on this line, this accident would not have occurred.

Cause

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

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway Company establish an adequate block-signal system on the line involved in this accident.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this fourth day of March, 1942.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.