

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
ST. LOUIS-SAN FRANCISCO RAILWAY

PICKENSVILLE, ALA.

AUGUST 10, 1939

INVESTIGATION NO. 2373

SUMMARY

Inv-2373

Railroad: St. Louis-San Francisco
Date: August 10, 1939
Location: Pickensville, Ala.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Passenger : Passenger
Train numbers: 208 : Passenger Extra
1054 South
Engine numbers: 1014 : 1054
Consist: 4 cars : 9 cars
Speed: 15-25 m.p.h. : standing
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; 3° right curve; 0.30 percent
descending grade for north-bound trains
Weather: Clear
Time: 12:06 a.m.
Casualties: 35 injured
Cause: Failure to obey meet order

October 12, 1939.

To the Commission:

On August 10, 1939, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway at Pickensville, Ala., which resulted in the injury of 30 passengers, 1 mail clerk, 2 dining-car employees, and 2 train-service employees.

Location and Method of Operation

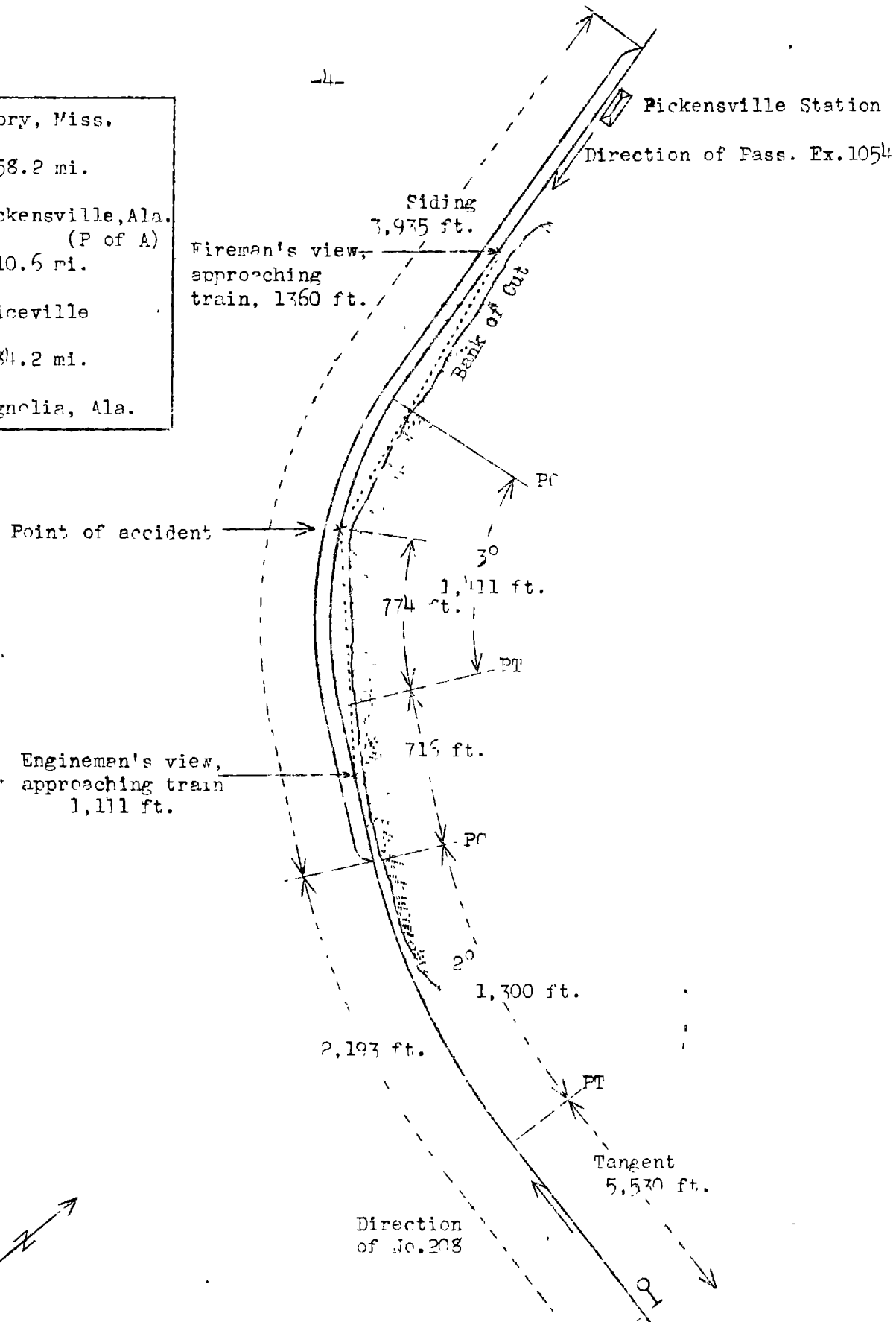
This accident occurred on that part of the Southern Division designated as the Columbus Sub-Division which extends between Amory, Miss., and Magnolia, Ala., a distance of 153 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block system being in use. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 1,741 feet south of the station at Pickensville. A siding 3,935 feet in length parallels the main track on the west; its south switch is located 3,203 feet south of the station at Pickensville and 1,462 feet south of the point of accident. Approaching from the south there is a tangent 5,530 feet in length followed by a 2° curve to the right 1,300 feet long, a tangent 716 feet long, and a 3° curve to the right 1,411 feet long. The accident occurred on this latter curve at a point 774 feet from its south end. Approaching from the north the track is tangent more than 2 miles followed by the 3° curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for north-bound trains varies between 0.3 and 0.42 percent descending a distance of 1,455 feet to the point of accident. The grade for south-bound trains varies between 0.30 and 0.5 percent ascending more than 2,000 feet to the point of accident. In this vicinity the track is laid in a side-hill cut, the east side of which rises to a maximum height of 9 feet and extends approximately 500 feet north and 300 feet south of the point of accident. The view to be had by an engineman of a north-bound train is restricted to 1,111 feet; the view to be had by a fireman of a south-bound train is restricted to 1,360 feet.

A station mile-board for north-bound trains is located 2,193 feet south of the south siding-switch at Pickensville.

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains is 55 miles per hour.

Rule 71 of the Rules of the Transportation Department reads in part:

o	Amory, Miss.
	58.2 mi.
⊗	Pickensville, Ala. (P of A)
	10.6 mi.
o	Aliceville
	84.2 mi.
o	Magnolia, Ala.



Station mile board

Inv. No. 2373
 St.L.-S.F. Ry
 Pickensville, Ala.
 August 10, 1939

"A train is superior to another train by right, class, or direction.

"Right is conferred by train order; class and direction by time table.

"Right is superior to class or direction."

Rule 90 reads in part:

"The engineman of each train will give signal 14(n) at least one mile before reaching a meeting or waiting point. When the train is to take siding at the meeting point, engineman will repeat signal 14(n) at least one-half mile before reaching the switch at which it must take siding. Should the engineman fail to give signal 14(n) as herein prescribed, the conductor must take immediate action to stop the train."

Rule 210 reads in part:

"When a "31" train order has been transmitted***. The copy for each engineman must be delivered to him personally by the conductor; the engineman will then read the order to the conductor and sign the conductor's copy of order before proceeding."

Rule 211B reads in part:

***Trainmen and fireman must read the orders and return them and should there be occasion to do so remind conductor or engineman of their contents."

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 12:06 a.m.

Description

No. 208, a north-bound passenger train, consisted of one baggage car, one combination mail-baggage car, one combination coach, and one coach-sleeper, in the order named, all of all-

steel construction, hauled by engine 1014, and was in charge of Conductor Shaw and Engineman Diemer. At Magnolia the crew received, among others, orders Nos. 54 and 77, Form 31, reading:

Order No. 54--

Eng. 1054 Run Passgr. Extra, leaving
Amory On Wednesday Aug. 9 as follows,
with right over All Trains.

Lv. Amory	10:30 p.m.
Aberdeen	10:50 p.m.
Hamilton	11:01 p.m.
Kolola Springs	11:10 p.m.
Columbus	11:25 p.m.
Forreston	11:40 p.m.
Pickensville	12:04 a.m.

Arr. Magnolia	2:30 a.m.

The underscored words of the above train order were printed in type; the other words were written in longhand.

Order No. 77--

Passgr. Exa 1054 South meet No. 208
Eng. 1014 at Pickensville. No. 207
Eng. 1012 has right over No. 208 Eng.
1014 Amory to Pickensville.

This train departed from Magnolia, 94.8 miles south of Pickensville, at 9:15 p.m., according to the train sheet, on time, departed from Aliceville, 10.6 miles south of Pickensville, at 11:52 p.m., 11 minutes late, passed the south siding-switch at Pickensville, where it was required to take siding, and struck Passenger Extra 1054 South while moving at a speed variously estimated between 15 and 25 miles per hour.

Passenger Extra 1054, a south-bound passenger train, consisted of one baggage car, three coaches, one diner, and four sleeping cars, in the order named, all of all-steel construction, hauled by engine 1054, and was in charge of Conductor Guyton and Engineman King. At Amory, 58.2 miles north of Pickensville, this crew received, among others, orders Nos. 54 and 77, previously quoted, and departed at 10:40 p.m., according to the train sheet. This train stopped on the main track at Pickensville at a point 1,462 feet north of the south siding-switch and immediately thereafter it was struck by No. 208.

Both engines remained upright and were not derailed. The front end of engine 1014 was badly damaged; the engine truck-frame was bent and broken, the main engine-frame broken in three places, the first pair of drivers raised about 2 feet above the rails, and the rear coupler on the tender broken. The front coupler of the first car was broken and the front end was caved in. The engine truck-frame and both cylinders of engine 1054 were broken; the smoke box was badly damaged, the tail-casting broken, the cab caved in, and the rear coupler on the tender broken. The train-service employees injured were the engineman and the fireman of No. 208.

Summary of Evidence

Engineman Diemer, of No. 208, stated that he had read and signed orders Nos. 54 and 77 in the office at Magnolia. Before departing, the conductor brought the orders to him at the engine. They both checked the orders against the clearance, discussed their provisions, and agreed that No. 208 was required to take siding at Pickensville for Passenger Extra 1054 South. He gave the orders to the fireman who read but did not return them to him. A terminal air-brake test was not made at Magnolia but a running test was made shortly after departure; the brakes functioned properly en route. At Aliceville there was a delay of 10 minutes because of taking water and adjusting a defective rod grease-cup. At that time the conductor sent the train porter to the engine with instructions to tell the engineman not to overlook heading in at Pickensville. When leaving Aliceville he told the fireman he believed the conductor was mistaken about No. 208 being required to take siding at Pickensville for Passenger Extra 1054. Both read the orders again and agreed that No. 208 should hold the main track at Pickensville. Approaching the station mile-board at Pickensville, at which time the speed was about 40 miles per hour, he sounded signal 14(n). Near the south siding-switch a brake application was made preparatory to making a station stop, resulting in the speed being reduced to about 20 miles per hour. He did not sound signal 14(n) a second time as it was his intention to hold the main track. As the train passed the south siding-switch he received a communicating stop signal and at the same time he saw the headlight of the approaching passenger extra. An emergency application of the brakes was made but it was too late to avert the accident. At the time of the impact the speed of No. 208 was about 15 miles per hour. After the accident he again read the orders and arrived at the conclusion that his confusion concerning the meet order with the passenger extra was because No. 208 frequently met No. 207 at Pickensville, in which cases No. 207 took siding, northward trains being superior by direction. He said that he had not

signed the orders at Magnolia in accordance with the provisions of the rule governing that procedure. The proper terminal air-brake test had not been made, but the violation of the rules covering this matter was customary practice.

Fireman Huff, of No. 208, stated that just at leaving time at Magnolia the engineman had given him orders Nos. 54 and 77 and being busy with other duties he was unable to read them for some time. After reading the orders somewhat sketchily he placed them in his pocket and did not return them to the engineman. He had been firing for engineman Diemer for some time. He said that when leaving Aliceville the engineman told him the conductor had sent the train porter over with instructions to hold the main track at Pickensville. He had not questioned this statement and he neither read the orders again nor discussed them with the engineman. He did not hear the train porter at Aliceville relay the conductor's instructions to the engineman and he did not hear the discussion of the orders by the conductor and the engineman at Magnolia. He thought that No. 208 had right on the main track at Pickensville, because in reading order No. 54 he had failed to see that part which read "with right over." Although No. 208 made a number of stops en route he was busy with other duties and did not read the order again, consequently he failed to correct the mistake in his understanding of it. Although the cab lights on engine 1014 were as good as those on other engines, yet they were so dim that he was unable to read while the engine was in motion. He was familiar with the special form on which order No. 54 was issued but could not explain his failure to understand the order in this instance. He had been examined on the rules of the transportation department and believed himself fully conversant with them. Being a qualified engineman, he had, when working as such, received and executed orders similar to order No. 54, and had had no difficulty in understanding them. His reason for believing that No. 208 had the right to hold the main track was due to misreading the order. After No. 208 passed the south siding-switch at Pickensville, the train-signal whistle was sounded. Looking across the curve he saw the headlight of Passenger Extra 1054, and thought it strange that it should be burning if they were on the siding. He did not call the engineman's attention to this because he thought the engineman was able to see conditions as the curve was in his favor for vision ahead. He understood Rule 211B and explained that as he was the last one to read the orders he always placed them in his pocket.

Conductor Shaw, of No. 208, stated he received orders Nos. 54 and 77 at Magnolia. He delivered them to Engineman Diemer and it was fully understood that No. 208 was required

to take siding at Pickensville for Passenger Extra 1054. He had worked with Engineman Diemer for some time; on this trip the engineman was normal in every respect. Orders Nos. 54 and 77 were shown to all members of the train crew and all understood them. At Aliceville the train porter was sent forward to remind the engineman not to overlook heading in at Pickensville. This was done simply as a matter of precaution because it was customary for No. 208 to hold the main track at that point when meeting No. 207; he would have followed this procedure with any engineman. When approaching Pickensville he was in the combination coach, which was an air-conditioned car, and because of it being closed he could not hear the whistle sounded. Being uncertain whether signal 14(n) had been sounded, he started for the vestibule but stopped to answer an inquiry of a passenger. After opening the vestibule door he was able to see that the train had passed the south siding-switch. The brakes became applied before he was able to pull the train-signal cord. The collision occurred shortly thereafter, at 12:06 a.m. He understood Rule 90 but his reason for not taking action to stop the train was that he was delayed in observing the location of the train.

Brakeman Dearing, of No. 208, stated that when leaving Magnolia, the conductor showed him orders Nos. 54 and 77, and it was understood No. 208 was required to take siding at Pickensville. Approaching Pickensville he was in the rear car and heard signal 14(n) sounded once. While listening for the signal to be repeated, he proceeded to the rear platform and saw No. 208 passing the south siding-switch. Endeavoring to stop the train, he pulled the emergency cord but the brakes had already been applied. The weather was clear and the speed was about 20 miles per hour at the time of collision, which occurred at 12:06 or 12:07 a.m.

Train Porter Lisenby, of No. 203, stated that he understood orders Nos. 54 and 77. At Aliceville, in compliance with the conductor's instructions, he had told the engineman not to forget to head in at Pickensville. When approaching Pickensville, having heard signal 14(n) sounded but once, he became aware that No. 208 was not stopping for the south siding-switch and he pulled the train-signal cord.

Engineman King, of Passenger Extra 1054, stated that a terminal air-brake test had been made at Amory and the brakes functioned properly en route. Orders Nos. 54 and 77 were received at Amory and their provisions were understood. When approaching Pickensville, he was aware of the probability of passing that station in advance of the time prescribed by order No. 54, therefore he reduced the speed of the train and passed

the north siding-switch at a speed of about 10 miles per hour. When midway of the siding he could see the headlight of No. 208 approaching. The fireman, being able to see more clearly because of the curvature, informed him that the opposing train was on the main track. He immediately applied the brakes, the train stopped within a short distance, and the accident occurred soon thereafter. Being blinded by the glare from the headlight of No. 208, he was unable to estimate the speed of that train.

Fireman Calhoun, of Passenger Extra 1054, stated that he understood orders Nos. 54 and 77. When approaching Pickensville he was seated on the left seat-box watching ahead. The train was moving slowly in compliance with the time shown on order No. 54. The curve was to the left but he could not see a great distance because of the high bank of the cut. The headlight of No. 208 could be seen, but it was only 2-1/2 pole spaces distant when it could be seen distinctly enough to determine that No. 208 was on the main track. He informed the engineman of this fact, the train was stopped, and was struck almost immediately by No. 208. It was his opinion that No. 208 was moving at a speed of 20 or 25 miles per hour. The accident occurred at 12:06 a.m., at which time the weather was clear.

Conductor Guyton, of Passenger Extra 1054, stated that orders Nos. 54 and 77 were received at Amory and their provisions were understood.

The statements of Brakeman Morgan and Train Porter Edwards, of Passenger Extra 1054, added nothing of importance.

Superintendent of Terminals Humphries stated that he knew that air-brake tests were not being conducted at Magnolia in accordance with the rules, the practice being to make a running test only. He had not observed the procedure of handling 31 Form orders but knew that it was the practice for conductors to take the orders to the enginemen who would then read them. It was his opinion that the members of the crew of No. 208 were capable and competent.

Discussion

The investigation disclosed that all members of the crew of Passenger Extra 1054 correctly understood the provisions of orders Nos. 54 and 77, which were issued in the prescribed forms and manner. According to the evidence, when the conductor and the engineman of No. 208 received these orders at Magnolia, which was 2 hours 51 minutes before the accident occurred, they understood that No. 208 was required to take siding at Pickensville for the passenger extra; also, the brakeman and the train

porter correctly understood the provisions of the orders. The fireman said that the engineman handed him the orders just as the train was leaving Magnolia. He read them somewhat sketchily and thought that his train had the right to hold the main track at Pickensville as he had overlooked the printed words "with right over" in order No. 54; he then put the orders in his pocket. When No. 208 was at Aliceville, the conductor sent the porter forward to tell the engineman not to forget to head in at Pickensville. The fireman said that he did not hear what the porter told the engineman but that the engineman informed him the porter had said to hold the main track at Pickensville. The engineman stated that shortly after leaving Aliceville he asked the fireman to return the orders to him, following which he and the fireman came to an agreement that the conductor was wrong with respect to heading in at Pickensville. On the other hand, the fireman stated that he did not at any time discuss the orders with the engineman and that the engineman did not ask to see the orders when leaving Aliceville.

The engineman thought his confusion was caused by the fact that Pickensville was the usual meeting point between Nos. 208 and 207 and that No. 207 took siding because of being inferior by direction. The fireman said that the lights in the engine cab were dim and it was difficult to read the orders when the train was in motion, consequently he waited until the train stopped to read the orders thoroughly, but at each stop he had so many other duties to perform that he was unable to perform the important duty of informing himself thoroughly concerning the orders affecting his train. Had the fireman obeyed the rule with respect to reading the orders it is probable this accident would not have occurred.

The conductor of No. 208 clearly understood that his train was to take siding at Pickensville; he had taken an extra precaution when he sent the porter forward to remind the engineman about taking siding. Had he continued to be equally alert up to the time of approaching Pickensville it is probable this accident would not have occurred; instead, he permitted a question by a passenger to divert his attention from the movement of his train, with the result that when he stationed himself at a vestibule door where he could observe the location of his train with respect to the switch it was too late to avert the accident. The brakeman heard the meeting-point whistle signal sounded once, but while waiting for it to be sounded the second time he neglected to ascertain the position of the train in relation to the switch. The porter maintained a lookout approaching the meeting point and pulled the train-signal cord but not in time to avert the accident.

The investigation disclosed that the orders were legible. Order No. 54 was issued on a special Form 31, which is used for schedule orders only. In the upper part of this form the printed words are intermingled with blank spaces. The printed words are in small type and after words are written in the blank spaces the printed words appear somewhat obscured. The fireman was the only one to say that he overlooked the words "with right over", which were printed. However, he said that he was familiar with this form of order and had handled several of them during times when he worked as an engineer.

The evidence was to the effect that at Magnolia the brakes on No. 208 were not tested in accordance with the rules and that the engineer of this train did not sign the orders at Magnolia in the manner prescribed by the rules. Apparently the violation of these rules was not directly involved in this accident; nevertheless, it indicates a lack of proper supervision.

Had a block system been in use on this line it is probable that this accident would have been averted.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order.

Respectfully submitted,

S. N. MILLS,

Director.