

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2542
THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA, ON
NOVEMBER 15, 1941

-2-

SUMMARY

Railroad: Union Pacific
Date: November 15, 1941
Location: Council Bluffs, Iowa
Kind of accident: Rear-end collision
Trains involved: C.B.& Q. freight : U.P. yard engine
: and cars
Train numbers: Extra 5112 East
Engine numbers: 5112 : 1936
Consist: 17 cars and :
caboose : 3 cars
Speed: 5-7 m.p.h. : 5-14 m.p.h.
Operation: Special rules
Track: Double; tangent; grade level
Weather: Clear
Time: About 1:58 a.m.
Casualties: 1 killed
Cause: Accident caused by failure properly
to provide flag protection for pre-
ceding train and by failure properly
to control speed of following yard
engine moving within yard limits

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2542

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

THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

January 10, 1942.

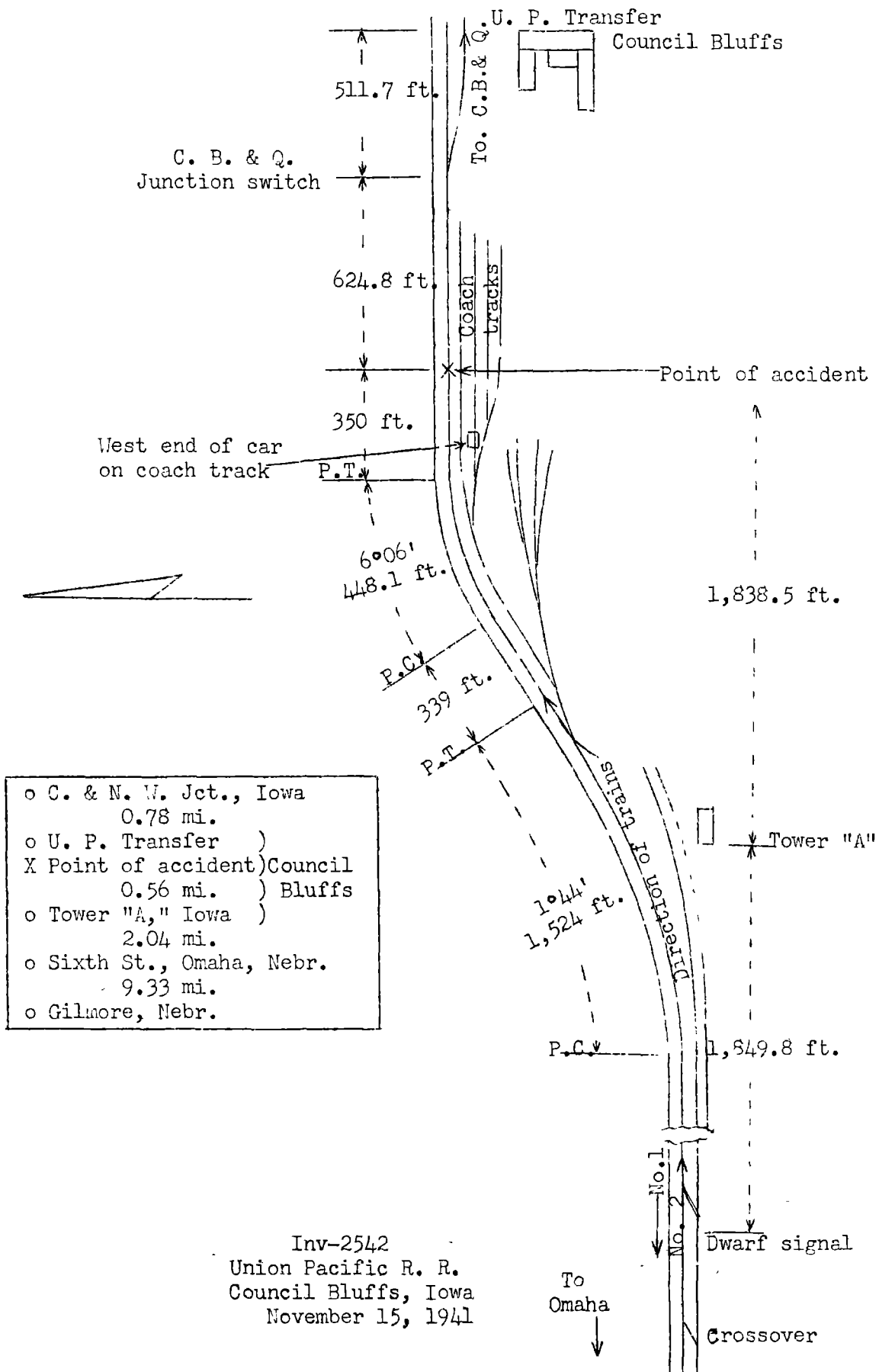
Accident at Council Bluffs, Iowa, on November 15, 1941, caused by failure properly to provide flag protection for preceding train and by failure properly to control speed of following yard engine moving within yard limits.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On November 15, 1941, there was a rear-end collision between a Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad freight train and a Union Pacific Railroad yard engine on the line of the latter-mentioned carrier at Council Bluffs, Iowa, which resulted in the death of one employee. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Iowa State Commerce Commission.

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.



Location of Accident and Method of Operation

Trains of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, hereinafter referred to as the C.B. & Q., are operated over the Union Pacific Railroad, hereinafter referred to as the U.P., between Sixth Street, Omaha, Nebr., and U.P. Transfer, Council Bluffs, Iowa, a distance of 2.6 miles. This accident occurred on that part of the Nebraska Division designated as the Bridge Subdivision, which extends between Gilmore, Nebr., and C. & N.W. Junction, Iowa, a distance of 12.71 miles. In the immediate vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated under special rules. There is no block system in use. The main tracks from north to south are No. 1, westward main, and No. 2, eastward main. A facing-point turnout to the right, designated as C.B. & Q. junction switch, is located on track No. 2 at a point 511.7 feet west of the station at Council Bluffs. The accident occurred within yard limits on track No. 2 at a point 624.8 feet west of this switch. As the point of accident is approached from the west there are, in succession, a 1°44' curve to the left 1,524 feet in length, a tangent 339 feet, a 6°06' curve to the right 448.1 feet, and a tangent 350 feet to the point of accident and about 1,000 feet beyond. At the point of accident the grade is level.

In the immediate vicinity of the point of accident five coach tracks parallel the main tracks on the south.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

99. When a train stops, except when clear of the main track, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals, a sufficient distance to insure full protection. * * *

* * *

If the flagman is recalled before reaching the required distance, he will, if necessary, place two torpedoes on the rail by day, and by night or during foggy or stormy weather display a lighted red fusee in addition, to protect his train while returning.

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 fusees must be thrown off at proper intervals.

* * *

Special rules read in part as follows:

93 (R). * * *

The rear of all trains and engines must be protected at all times on the tracks shown below:

Main tracks Nos. 1 and 2 between C. & N.W. Jct. at Council Bluffs and west end of Missouri River Bridge;

* * *

On Bridge Subdivision tracks, all trains and engines must move prepared to stop unless the track is seen or known to be clear, and must approach all junction points expecting to find trains entering or leaving Bridge Subdivision tracks.

In the vicinity of the point of accident the maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 25 miles per hour and for engines moving backward, 20 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 5112 East, an east-bound C.B.& Q. freight train, consisted of engine 5112, 14 loaded and 3 empty cars and a caboose. This train departed from Lincoln, Nebr., 57.4 miles west of the point of accident, at 9:40 p.m., entered the line of the U.P. at Sixth Street, Omaha, 2.4 miles west of the point of accident, at 1:41 a.m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, passed Tower A, Council Bluffs, 1,838.5 feet west of the point of accident and the last open office, at 1:52 a.m., and several minutes later, while it was entering the C.B.& Q. junction switch and moving at a speed estimated as 5 or 7 miles per hour, the rear end of this train was struck by U.P. yard engine 1936.

Yard engine 1936, in backward motion, was hauling 3 cars. This engine entered track No. 2 at a point about 4,000 feet west of C.B.& Q. junction switch, proceeded eastward and passed Tower A at 1:55 a.m., according to the station record of train movements, and while moving at an estimated speed of 5 to 14 miles per hour it collided with the rear end of C.B.& Q. Extra 5112 East. Before yard engine 1936 entered the main track all brake-pipe hose were coupled.

Because of cars standing on track No. 4 of the coach yard and track curvature, the view of the point of accident from the left cab window of an engine in backward motion was restricted to about 700 feet.

The caboose of the C.B.& Q. train was demolished. The first car ahead of the caboose telescoped the front end of the caboose and leaned toward the north. This car was badly damaged. The rear coupler and the rear footboard of U.P. engine 1936 were broken, and the rear headlight was demolished. The rear end-sheet of the tender was bent inward about 8 inches.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1:58 a.m.

The employee killed was the conductor of the C.B.& Q. train.

Discussion

The rules governing operation on the line involved provide that 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. If the flagman is recalled before he reaches the required distance to the rear, he must place two torpedoes, and, if it is night, leave a lighted red fusee. In addition, all trains and engines must proceed prepared to stop unless the way is seen or known to be clear, and must approach all junctions expecting to find trains entering or leaving the main track. All surviving members of both crews understood these requirements.

According to the engineer, Extra 5112 East stopped at C.B.& Q. junction switch about 1:55 a.m. Soon afterward the engineer sounded the engine whistle for the flagman to return to his train, and about 1 minute later the flagman gave a proceed lantern signal. The train proceeded and the engine had reached a point about 300 feet east of the switch and the speed was 5 to 7 miles per hour when the brakes became applied in emergency. The flagman said that after his train stopped he proceeded toward the rear and had reached a point about 320 feet west of the rear of his train when he was recalled. At that time he did not observe any train approaching on the eastward track, nor did he hear the exhaust of an engine. He returned to the caboose, gave a proceed signal, and boarded the caboose as it started to move. Both markers were lighted and displayed red toward the rear. After his train had proceeded about 150 feet the speed was about 6 miles per hour. From the rear platform he observed at a distance of about 350 feet the

rear headlight of engine 1936, which was moving at a speed of 20 or 25 miles per hour. The flagman immediately gave flagging signals with a red lantern and a white lantern but the signals were not acknowledged. He jumped from the caboose just before the collision occurred. The rules required him to place torpedoes and to leave a lighted red fusee but he did neither, because he thought it was not necessary. He said that in the territory involved it is not customary to display lighted red fusees since following trains and engines are required to proceed prepared to stop unless the way is seen or known to be clear. In his opinion, had he placed torpedoes 320 feet to the rear of his train, the distance would have been insufficient to furnish proper warning.

As yard engine 1936 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the rear headlight was lighted brightly, the speed was about 20 miles per hour, and the enginemen were maintaining a lookout from their respective sides of the cab. Because of the 6°06' curve to the left and the tender to the rear of the cab, the engineer's view of the track ahead was restricted to about 130 feet. When the engine was 600 feet west of the point where the accident occurred the engineer closed the throttle. At a point about 220 feet west of the point where the accident occurred the fireman observed simultaneously the caboose markers and the flagman on the rear platform. The fireman warned the engineer, who immediately placed the brake valve in emergency position and the reverse lever in position for forward motion, but the distance was not sufficient to stop short of the preceding train. The engineer did not see the flagman at any time prior to the accident. The fireman said that the flagman of the preceding train did not give stop signals with his lanterns but jumped from the caboose just before the collision occurred. The engineer of yard engine 1936 understood that he was required to operate his engine prepared to stop short of a preceding train; however, since trains are required to furnish flag protection it is customary in the territory involved for yard engines to be operated the same as on the night of the accident. The engineer said that it is customary for a preceding train to leave a lighted red fusee and that if a lighted fusee had been left in this instance the accident would have been averted. The terminal superintendent said that because trains and engines are required to operate prepared to stop short of a preceding train or engine, lighted red fusees are seldom used except during inclement weather.

The investigation of the accident disclosed that each crew placed dependence upon the rule affecting the operation of the other train, rather than upon the proper performance of their own duties. If the flagman of Extra 5112 had left a lighted red fusee, it is probable this accident would have

been averted. If yard engine 1936 had been operated prepared to stop short of a preceding train, this accident would have been averted. If previous to this accident supervisory officials had required obedience to the rules pertaining to operation in the territory involved, it is probable this accident would not have occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure properly to provide flag protection for the preceding train and by failure properly to control the speed of the following yard engine moving within yard limits.

Dated at Washington, D.C., this tenth day of January, 1942.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,

Secretary.