INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 3073

UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR SCHUYLER, NEBR., ON

FEBRUARY 14, 1947

SUMMARY

Railroad:	Union Pacific	
Date:	February 14, 1947	
Location:	Schuyler, Nebr.	
Kind of accident:	Rear-end collision	
Equipment involved:	Track motor-car	Baggage-mail-express train
Train number:		6
Engine number:		821
Consist:	Motor-car 1209	18 cars
Estimated speed:	Unknown	35 m. p. h.
Operation:	Signal indications	
Track:	Double; tangent; 0.25 percent descending grade eastward	
Weather:	Cloudy	
Time:	4:25 p. m.	
Casualties:	1 killed	
Cause:	Failure to provide adequate protection for movement of track motor-car	
Recommendation:	That the Union Pacific Railroad Company provide adequate block-signal or train-order protection for the movement of track motor-cars on its line	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 3073

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

UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

March 18, 1947

Accident near Schuyler, Nebr., on February 14, 1947, caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of a track motor-car.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On February 14, 1947, there was a rear-end collision between a track motor-car and a baggage-mail-express train on the Union Pacific Railroad near Schuyler, Nebr., which resulted in the death of one employee.

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[1] 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.

Inv. No. 3073
Union Pacific Railroad
Schuyler, Nebr.
Feoruary 14, 1947

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Nebraska Division extending between Grand Island, Nebr., and Council Bluffs, Iowa, 146.9 miles, a double-track line in the vicinity of the point of accident, over which trains moving with the current of traffic are operated by signal indications. The accident occurred on the eastward main track 80.16 miles east of Grand Island and 1.96 miles east of the station at Schuyler. The main tracks are tangent throughout a distance of 20.25 miles immediately west of the point of accident and 2.24 miles eastward. The grade is 0.25 percent descending eastward.

Rules governing the operation of track motor-cars read in part as follows:

99 (L). * * *

Copy of current time-table, and the following supply of signal equipment must be on each one-man car * * *

* * *

DOUBLE TRACK

DAYS * * *

5 red flags,
6 fusees,
Not less than 36 torpedoes.

1500. Track cars must be * * * in charge of employes who have been examined and qualified as track car operators.

* * *

1501. Before occupying main track with track cars, employes in charge of them must, if possible, obtain information from operator or train dispatcher in writing as to train movements. Such information, however, does not relieve employes from observing the rules for protection of track cars.

* * *

1504. Track cars must be run with caution at all times and must never be used when to do so would involve risk of accident.

The speed shown below must not be exceeded * * *

Power-propelled one-man cars....30 M.P.H.
* * *

* * *

In block signal territory, when in his judgment it can be safely done, track car operator may be governed by indication of block signals or indicators, but signals must not be entirely depended upon, and sharp lookout must be kept for trains, * * *

* * *

1516. * * *

Only insulated track cars may be used where there are track circuits.

The maximum authorized speed for the train involved was 80 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Track motor-car 1209 departed east-bound from Columbus, 17.76 miles west of the point of accident, about 3:35 p. m., passed Schuyler, the last open office, about 4 p. m., and while moving on the eastward main track at an unknown speed it was struck by No. 6.

No. 6, an east-bound first-class baggage-mail-express train, consisted of engine 821, 17 baggage, mail and express cars and 1 coach, in the order named. The fourth car was of steel-underframe construction, and the remainder of the cars were of all-steel construction. This train departed from Columbus at 4:05 p. m., on time, passed Schuyler at 4:22 p. m., 2 minutes late, and while moving on the eastward main track at an estimated speed of 35 miles per hour it struck track motor-car 1209.

Motor-car 1209 was considerably damaged.

The employee killed was a signal maintainer, who was the sole occupant of the motor-car.

It was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4:25 p. m.

According to data furnished by the railroad, motor-car 1209 was of the 4-wheel type, and was 6 feet 5-1/2 inches in length. It weighed 550 pounds, and was powered by an 8-horse-power-gasoline motor.

Discussion

The investigation disclosed that at 12:58 p. m., about 3 hours 27 minutes prior to the time the accident occurred, the train dispatcher issued by telephone to the operator at Columbus, a line-up of train movements, which included the information that No. 6 was on time. About 3:30 p. m. the operator gave a copy of the line-up to the signal maintainer. In addition, message instruction was given the signal maintainer to examine signal apparatus about 3 miles east of Schuyler. The signal maintainer was the sole occupant of the motor-car, which departed east-bound from Columbus about 3:35 p. m. The operator at Schuyler said that the motor-car passed that point about 4 p. m. The motor-car was moving eastward on the eastward main track when it was struck by No. 6 at a point 1.96 miles east of Schuyler.

As No. 6 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 70 miles per hour, in territory where the maximum authorized speed was 80 miles per hour. No train order restricting the movement of No. 6 with respect to the track motor-car involved had been issued, and the crew of this train was not informed that the motor-car was moving in this territory. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead, and the first that these employees knew of the movement of the motor-car was when they saw the motor-car about 3,000 feet distant. Then the engineer moved the throttle lever to closed position and made a 7-pound brake-pipe reduction, and a further reduction of 3 pounds was made at a point a short distance eastward. The engineer said that he sounded alarm signals on the engine whistle and, when the engine was about 1,000 feet west of the point where the collision occurred, he moved the brake valve to emergency position. The speed of No. 6 was about 35 miles per hour when the collision occurred. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly en route.

Track motor-cars move in this territory on written line-ups. Train crews are not given information about line-ups issued to motor-car operators. The rules governing the operation of track motor-cars provide that motor-car operators must maintain a lookout for moving trains. Motor-cars are insulated to prevent actuation of automatic block signals, The maximum authorized speed was 30 miles per hour for the motor-car and 80 miles per hour for the train. The operator of the motor-car was last examined on the rules on May 16, 1946. At the time of the accident, the motor-car was equipped with the required flagging signals. The copy of the line-up which the operator at Columbus gave to the signal maintainer was found on his person, and a copy of the current timetable was found in the vicinity of the point where the accident occurred. Since the signal maintainer was killed in the accident, it could not be determined what understanding he had of the rules, nor why he permitted the

motor-car to occupy the main track on the time of No. 6.

In addition to the present accident, during the past three years the Commission has investigated thirteen collisions between trains and track motor-cars. These accidents resulted in the death of 31 persons and the injury of 25, and were caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars. In the instant case, the members of the crew of the following train were not informed by train order as to the movement of the preceding motor-car, and flag protection was not provided for the motor-car. If adequate train-order protection had been provided for the movement of the motor-car this accident might have been prevented. If proper block protection had been provided, the members of the crew of the following train would have received definite information that the motor-car was occupying the block involved.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of a track motor-car.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Union Pacific Railroad Company provide adequate block signal or train-order protection for the movement of track motor-cars on its line.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this eighteenth day of March, 1947.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

W. P. BARTEL,

(SEAL)

Secretary.