

Inv-2215

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
WABASH RAILWAY

CATLIN, ILL.

OCTOBER 26, 1937.

INVESTIGATION NO. 2215

SUMMARY

Inv-2215

Railroad: Wabash
Date: October 26, 1937.
Location: Catlin, Ill.
Kind of accident: Rear-end collision
Trains involved: Freight : Passenger
Train numbers: No. 96 : No. 2
Engine numbers: 2800 : 670
Consist: 77 cars, caboose : 11 cars
Speed: Standing : 65 m.p.h.
Track: Tang nt; 0.05 percent grade
ascending east-bound.
Weather: Cloudy and foggy
Time: 10:52 p.m.
Casualties: 3 killed and 10 injured
Cause: Freight train not adequately pro-
tected by flag; passenger train not
operated in occupied block in
accordance with requirements of
caution card in manual block terri-
tory.

Inv-2215

November 24, 1937.

To the Commission:

On October 26, 1937, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the Wabash Railway near Catlin, Ill., which resulted in the death of one mail clerk and two employees, and the injury of one passenger, five mail clerks, one express messenger, one Pullman porter and two dining-car employees. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation.

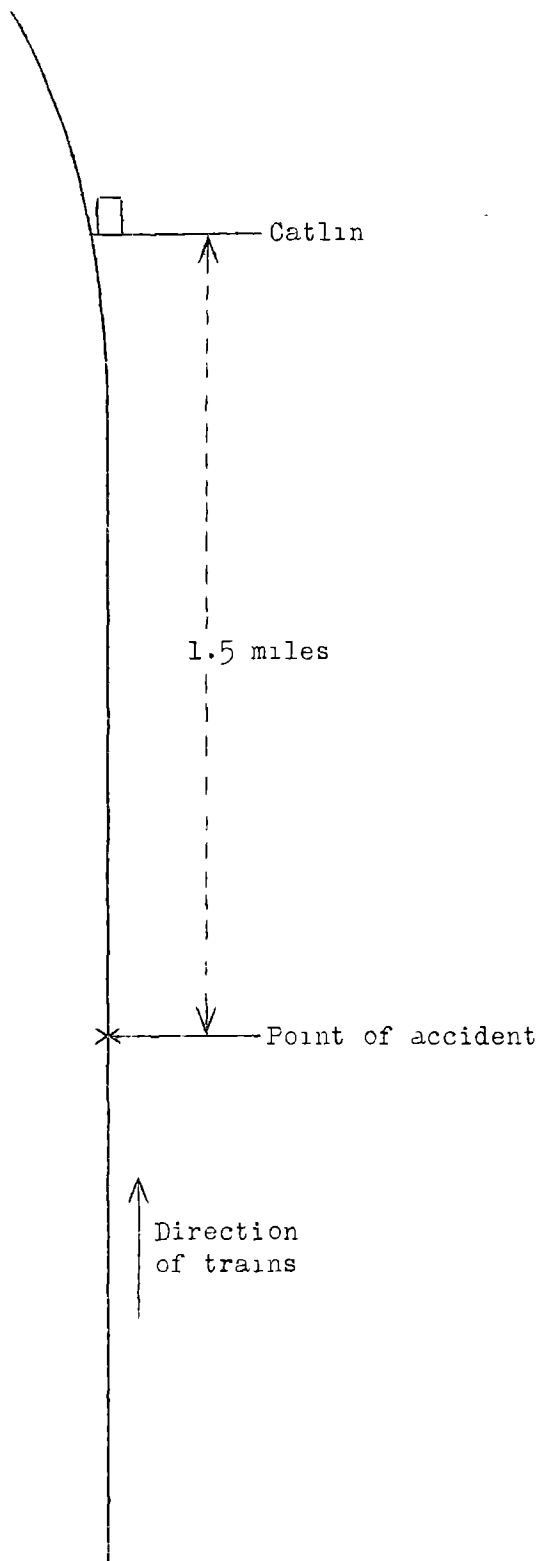
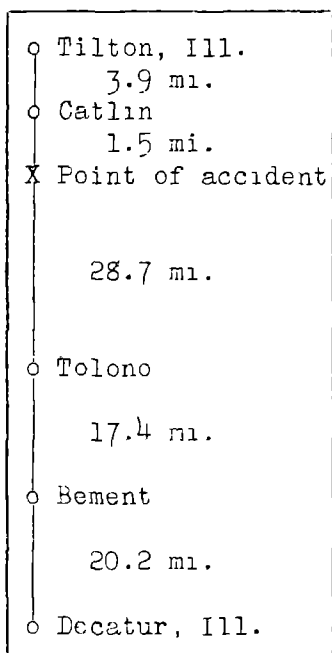
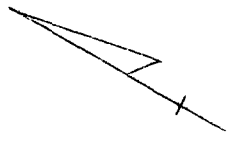
This accident occurred on the 9th District of the Decatur Division which extends between Decatur and Tilton, Ill., a distance of 71.7 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and a manual block-signal system. The point of collision is $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of the station at Catlin; approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for more than 2 miles. The grade for east-bound trains is practically level for more than 1 mile, being 0.05 percent ascending at the point of accident. The maximum speed permitted is 80 miles per hour for passenger trains and 50 miles per hour for freight trains.

Rule 318 (E) reads as follows: "Responsibility for colliding with trains in a block, when caution card is given, will rest with train receiving and moving under such restrictions, but this will in no way relieve conductor and engineman of train stopping within the block, from the observance of Train Rule 99".

Rule S-86 reads as follows: "Unless otherwise provided, an inferior train must clear the time of a superior train, in the same direction, not less than five minutes; but must be clear at the time a first-class train, in the same direction, is due to leave the next station in the rear where time is shown."

The caution card states that the block is not clear and requires the train receiving it to run cautiously between points specified therein.

The weather was cloudy and there was some fog in the vicinity of the point of accident. The accident occurred about 10:52 p.m.



Inv. No. 2215
 Wabash Railway
 Catlin, Ill.
 Oct. 26, 1937

Description

No. 96, an east-bound second-class freight train, consisted of 77 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2800, and was in charge of Conductor Jordan and Engineman Patterson. This train departed from Tolono, the last open telegraph office, 28.7 miles from the point of accident, at 9:59 p.m., according to the train sheet, 59 minutes late, and at about 10:38 p.m. stopped at a point about 1½ miles west of Catlin where it was standing when struck by No. 2.

No. 2, an east-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of one mail car, two baggage cars, one combination car, one chair car, one cafe-lounge car, four Pullman sleeping cars and business car No. 5, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 670, and was in charge of Conductor Schultz and Engineman Dapper. This train departed from Tolono at 10:25 p.m., according to the train sheet, 5 minutes late, and collided with the rear end of No. 96 while traveling at a speed estimated at about 65 miles per hour.

Engine 670 was derailed to the south and stopped headed southeast and listed to the north at an angle of about 45°, with the frame of the tender just west of the engine. Mail car 170 stopped on its left side parallel to the main track and about 100 feet east of the engine. Baggage cars 345 and 354 formed a triangle north of the track with the main track as a base, the former upright and the latter on its left side; these two cars were about opposite the engine. Both trucks of passenger car 605 and the rear truck of chair car 1392 were derailed. The caboose and the five rear cars of No. 96 were demolished and consumed by fire which broke out immediately after the collision.

The employees killed were the engineman and fireman of No. 2.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Patterson, of No. 96, stated that an air-brake test of the train was made at Decatur and all brakes were working. Just east of Bement the air brakes were applied in emergency from some cause unknown to him and the train was delayed about 15 minutes. About a mile west of Catlin another emergency application of the brakes occurred and the train came to a sudden stop; he immediately whistled out a flag and noted that the time was 10:38 p.m. The flagman, who had been on the engine from Decatur, and the head brakeman went back to see what was wrong; some time afterwards, he felt his train surge forward and he noted that the time was then 10:54 p.m. Between Decatur and a point a short distance west of the point of accident the weather was clear, but where he stopped it became foggy and there was a heavy fog at the time of accident; he was able to see the marker on the right side of the rear of his train of 77 cars but was unable to see the marker on the left side.

Fireman Lamme, of No. 96, corroborated the statements of Engineman Patterson with regard to events preceding the accident and the time of the accident. He stated that the fog was so dense that visibility was restricted to 5 or 10 car lengths; he agreed with his engineman that the right rear marker could be seen from the engine although the left rear marker could not.

Head Brakeman Potter, of No. 96, stated that when the train stopped west of Catlin he and the flagman, who were on the engine, went back to see what was wrong. It was very foggy so he stopped near the middle of the train while the flagman continued to the rear. A little later he received a go-ahead signal from the flagman and transmitted it to the engineman but apparently the engineman was unable to see his signal and he was on his way to the engine when the accident occurred. He gave the time of the collision as 10:52 p.m., and stated that from the middle of the train he was unable to see the rear marker.

The statement of Flagman Newcome, of No. 96, agreed with that of the head brakeman concerning events prior to the accident, except that he stated they could see the rear marker of their train from a point about 25 car lengths west of the caboose. He found a broken crossover pipe on the twelfth car ahead of the caboose; after cutting out the brake on that car he gave a proceed signal to the head brakeman and he then walked back about 6 car lengths; the headlight of No. 2 came into view, and it seemed quite close to the rear end but he was able to run another 5 car lengths and then run to the edge of the right-of-way before the accident occurred. He did not hear any whistle signals from the engine of No. 2 nor did he hear any torpedo explode; he thought the engine of No. 2 was working steam right up to the time of collision.

Conductor Jordan, of No. 96, stated that after his train had been stopped by the operator at Bement he removed a loose brake rod and they proceeded eastward. Just before reaching Catlin, at about 10:40 p.m., the train was stopped by an emergency application of the brakes with such force as to throw him to the floor. He was unhurt, however, and within 2 minutes he had secured a red and a white lantern and a supply of fuses and torpedoes and had started back to flag. He walked back rapidly and at a point about 10 car lengths west of the caboose he lighted a fuse and started to run; at a point about 35 car lengths back of the caboose he laid down one torpedo on the right rail and then continued running back until he had reached a point about 50 or 55 car lengths from the caboose. He could hear the engine of No. 2 working steam but could not see that train until the engine was about 30 feet from him. He gave stop signals with the lighted fuse but No. 2 passed him at a speed of 60 to 70 miles per hour.

After the train had passed he continued waving the fusee in the hope that some one at the rear of the train would see his signals; at the same time he was running eastward. During his return trip towards his caboose he did not meet the flagman of No. 2 but did meet the conductor of that train somewhere along the north side of No. 2; he thought it was then later than 10:55. As he was walking along the north side of the train with the conductor of No. 2 he tripped over some boards and broke the red globe of his red light, and he then discarded the frame of the lantern.

G. H. Sido, Chief Operating Officer of the Wabash Railway, stated that he was sleeping in business car No. 5 which was on the rear end of No. 2 and was awakened when the train stopped. In not more than 2 minutes he was at the rear end of the train and saw the flagman of No. 2 just about opposite the rear end of his car. He did not see anyone behind the train with a lighted fusee nor were there any other signs of flagging. He got off the train about 3 minutes after the accident and at that time there was no dense fog although it was hazy.

Conductor Schultz, of No. 2, stated that the air brakes were tested at Decatur and operated satisfactorily en route. They left Tolono at 10:25 p.m., 5 minutes late, with a caution card stating that No. 96 was between Tolono and Tilton. They passed Fairmount at 10:48 p.m., on time, and at that point he heard the engine whistle sounded, but he did not remember hearing it again. Just prior to the accident the train was moving at a speed of about 65 miles per hour and he was in the fourth car from the engine. When the collision occurred he was thrown to the floor but as he was not injured in any way he immediately arose and was on the ground in about 2 minutes. Conductor Jordan, of No. 96, who was there when he dismounted, informed him that the accident had occurred at 10:52 p.m. but Conductor Schultz did not then notice the time. At the time he got to the ground he observed that the air was hazy but there was no heavy fog. He stated that when his train is moving on a caution card he leaves the question of speed to the engineman; it would be impossible to make the time if the conductor were to slow the train down. He did not notice any evidence of a fusee burning outside of the coach as they approached the scene of the accident nor did he notice any application of the brakes just prior to the collision.

Flagman Frame, of No. 2, stated that he was in the second car from the rear at the time of the collision and was thrown down by the impact. He was only slightly injured and he immediately took flagging equipment and started out to flag, all within the space of about 3 minutes. As he passed the rear of his train he noted that the markers were burning, and from the position he took in giving protection to his train, about 4,000 feet to the rear of No. 2, he could sometimes see the markers and sometimes not; there seemed to be pockets of fog. On his way back to flag he did not meet any flagman from No. 96.

Operator Manus, who was on duty when No. 2 arrived at Tolono, stated that he delivered a clearance and a caution card to the fireman of that train as it passed, using a hoop to do so.

Discussion

The evidence discloses that No. 96 was stopped a short distance west of Catlin by an emergency application which originated in the train. Conductor Jordan stated that in the absence of the flagman at the rear of the train he assumed the duties of flagman and within a 2 minutes after the train had stopped he was on his way west to flag and had in his possession a red and a white lantern and a supply of fuses and torpedoes. Although he said he hurried as fast as he could and the evidence is to the effect that the freight train stopped about 14 minutes prior to the accident, Conductor Jordan said he was able to get back only 50 or 55 car lengths when the engine of No. 2 passed him, and that he then returned to the scene of the collision. The statement of Conductor Jordan is not in accordance with other evidence. Conductor Schultz of No. 2 stated that within 3 minutes after the collision he dismounted from the fourth car and immediately met Conductor Jordan. Flagman Frame of No. 2 stated that he was on his way back to flag within 3 minutes after the accident and did not meet any flagman from No. 96. Chief Operating Officer Sido who was at the rear end of the train within 2 minutes after the collision did not see any flagman or any evidence of flagging at that time. All of the employees involved stated that there was fog in the vicinity of the point of accident, but the degree of intensity of this fog is described as "hazy air", "dense fog" and "foggy in pockets" by different persons. Conductor Jordan said he lighted a fusee but no one else saw it although it is apparent the fog was not sufficiently dense to obscure it entirely. The speed of No. 2 was established as being about 65 miles per hour and the only brake application felt in the passenger train occurred almost immediately before the collision, probably when the engine-man saw markers on the caboose of No. 96. It is therefore apparent that adequate flag protection was not provided.

The manual block territory in which this accident occurred extends between Bement and Tilton, a distance of 51 miles. At right there is but one intermediate block station, located at Tolono, about 34 miles west of the scene of the accident. The manual block rules permit a train with a caution card to follow a train other than a passenger train into a block when necessary to avoid serious delay, to close up at meeting points, or for other equally good reasons, provided weather conditions are favorable, and curvature, grades and other track conditions warrant. However, with stations as far apart as these, it is impossible to know whether weather conditions throughout the block are favorable,

and the records of the Wabash show that on 24 days between September 27 and October 26, 1937, No. 2 moved over some portion or the entire length of the manual-block territory on caution cards. On 16 days during this period caution cards were issued to No. 2 at Tolono and on each of these days this train left Tolono from 3 minutes to 21 minutes late. On every occasion No. 2 made up time between Tolono and Tilton, the gains ranging from 1 minute to 15 minutes. The average schedule of this train between Tolono and Tilton is over 45 miles per hour, and this record and the facts in this case demonstrate that excessively high speeds are being made in this territory when moving under caution cards; apparently this is being done with the full knowledge of operating officers, as the practice is shown by the records of the company and the chief operating officer was on the passenger train involved in this accident. Safety of train operation which is intended to be provided by the block system is practically nullified when trains are permitted to be operated at full speed in an occupied block, as was the case in this instance.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by the failure of No. 2 to be operated in accordance with the requirements of a caution card in manual block territory, and the failure of the crew of No. 96 to provide adequate flag protection.

Recommendation

It is recommended that responsible operating officers promptly take necessary measures to correct the dangerous operating practices which were disclosed by this investigation.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON

Director.