

1902

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE WASHINGTON AND OLD DOMINION RAILWAY
NEAR JACKSON, VA., ON MARCH 10, 1934.

May 16, 1934.

To the Commission:

On March 10, 1934, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a work train on the Washington and Old Dominion Railway near Jackson, Va., which resulted in the injury of 8 passengers and 4 employees.

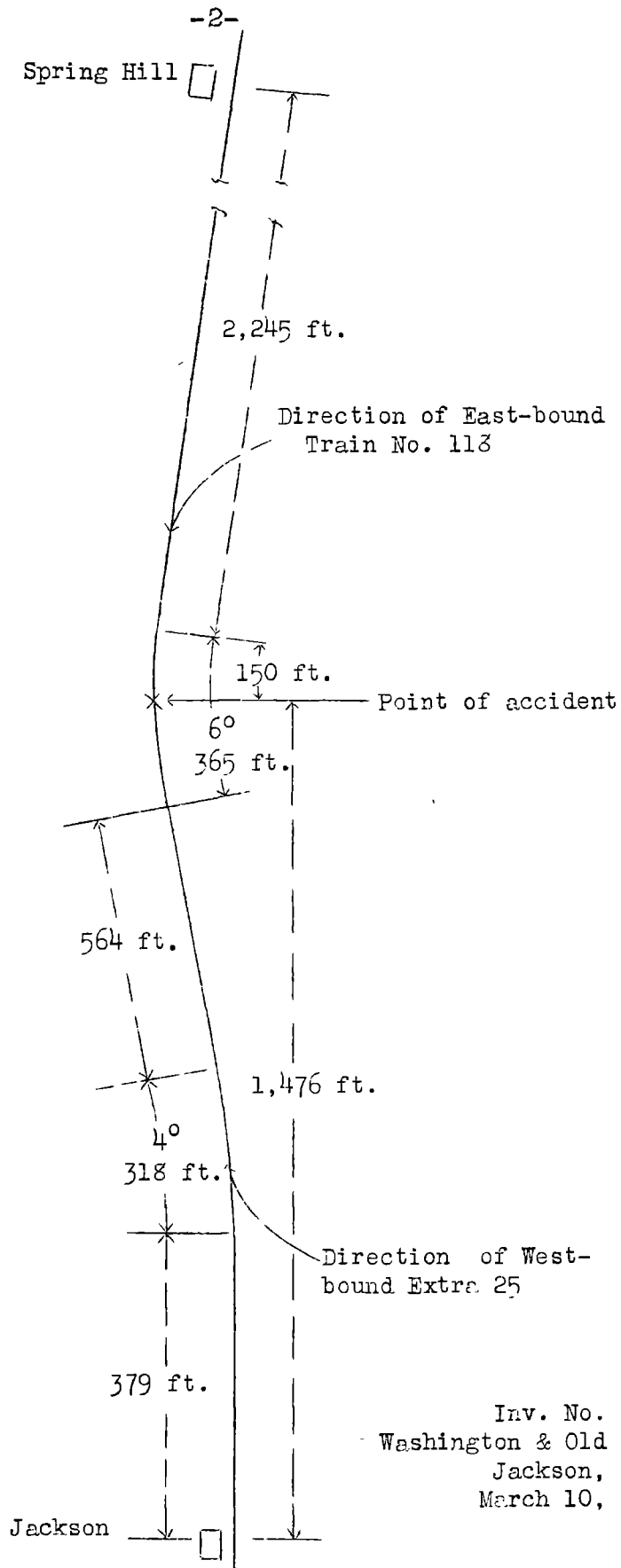
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Great Falls division, which extends between Rosslyn and Great Falls, Va., a distance of 13.72 miles. This is a double-track line between Rosslyn and Franklin Park, a distance of 4.83 miles, and between Franklin Park and Great Falls it is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. Trains are propelled by electric power from an overhead trolley system. The accident occurred at a point approximately 1/4 mile west of Jackson; approaching this point from the east, beginning at the station at Jackson, the track is tangent for a distance of 379 feet, followed by a 4° curve to the left 318 feet in length, tangent track for a distance of 564 feet, and then a 6° curve to the right 365 feet in length, the accident occurring on this latter curve at a point 150 feet from its western end. Approaching from the west, beginning at Spring Hill, the track is tangent for a distance of 2,245 feet, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. Beginning approximately 500 feet east of the point of accident, the grade is 3.43 percent descending for west-bound trains, this descending grade extending for a distance of 1,075 feet beyond the point of accident.

Due to the curve and to trees and poles on both sides of the track, the view had by trainmen is restricted to approximately 350 feet.

Snow was falling at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1:45 p.m.

● Great Falls, Va.	3.7 mi.
● Spring Hill	0.45 mi.
✕ Point of accident	0.28 mi.
● Jackson	0.18
● Hitaffer	2.11
● McLean	2.17
● Franklin Park	4.83
● Rosslyn, Va.	
● Washington, D.C.	



Inv. No. 1902
 Washington & Old Dominion Ry.
 Jackson, Va.
 March 10, 1934.

Description

West-bound linemen's motor car 25, of steel under-frame construction, in charge of Conductor Wood and Motorman Brown, departed from Rosslyn at 8 a.m., and at Franklin Park, approximately 4½ miles east of Jackson, the crew received train order 2, form 31, directing them to run extra from Franklin Park to Great Falls. Extra 25 left Franklin Park at 9:32 a.m., passed Jackson, and arrived at Spring Hill, 0.73 mile west of Jackson, at 10:52 a.m., according to the train sheet. This train then made one or more eastward movements in order to perform line work along the way and finally proceeded back as far as McLean, 3.02 miles east of Spring Hill, without additional authority. This car was then returning to Spring Hill, where it was intended to clear for Train No. 118, when it collided with that train while traveling at a low rate of speed.

East-bound passenger Train No. 118 consisted of motor car 83, of steel under-frame construction with composite steel and wooden superstructure, and was in charge of Conductor Bowers and Motorman Ruble. This train departed from Great Falls, 4.4 miles west of Jackson, at 1:30 p.m., according to the train sheet, on time, left Spring Hill at 1:41 p.m., according to the train sheet, on time, and collided with extra 25 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 15 and 25 miles per hour.

Neither car was derailed, but the front end of each car was considerably damaged, the vestibule of the passenger car being crushed. The employees injured were the motorman of each car, a lineman who was riding in the linemen's car, and a trackman who was riding in the passenger car.

Summary of evidence

Motorman Brown, of Extra 25, stated that his car was being used in general overhead line work; after receiving the running order at Franklin Park he proceeded to Spring Hill where two trains were met and work was performed. About 12:30 p.m. he left the siding at Spring Hill and proceeded eastward, under protection of a flagman, to a point ¼ mile west of Jackson where an hour was consumed in putting up trolley wire. Looking at his watch he noted that he had sufficient time to clear Train No. 118; he called the workmen from the top of the car and proceeded westward and had attained a speed of about 25 miles per hour when he saw the approaching train about 150 or 200 feet ahead, at which time it was snowing so hard he could see ahead only with difficulty. He immediately shut off power and applied the brakes in emergency and the car had practically stopped when the accident occurred. Motorman Brown stated that he had compared

his time with the standard clock at Rosslyn but he did not compare time with Conductor Wood. After the accident, however, he found that his watch had lost 13 or 14 minutes; he had failed to wind it on the previous night, and that was the reason for his failure to clear the time of Train No. 118.

Conductor Wood, of Extra 25, stated that they worked as usual up and down the line, clearing for trains at Spring Hill, and that he flagged around the curves as they made the eastward movements. After unloading some coal and meeting one train at Spring Hill they returned to Hitaffer, a short distance east of Jackson, then returned to Spring Hill, and later proceeded back as far as McLean, 3.02 miles east of Spring Hill. Then they returned to Jackson, then worked a short distance west of Jackson, and then started for Spring Hill in order to meet Train No. 118, and the first intimation he had of anything wrong was when the brakes were applied in emergency, at which time he was on his way to the rear of the car to handle the trolley and therefore did not see the approaching train. With reference to a report that Lineman Ford had applied the brakes, Conductor Wood stated that the motorman remained at the controls until the accident occurred, and he supposed the motorman was the one who applied the brakes; he estimated the speed of the car to have been about 10 miles per hour when the brakes were applied. Conductor Wood stated that while they held a straight running order, they could make reverse movements in order to perform their work, under flag protection. In one statement he said that he did not have his watch with him, having dropped it about a week previously, but that the rules required him to carry a watch, while in another statement he said that he never carried a watch. Several days later, however, Conductor Wood made a supplemental statement purporting to give the facts as to movements just prior to the accident. In this statement he said that after getting their pay checks they went back to McLean, arriving there about 12:30 p.m. Motorman Brown stopped the car on the main line at the station and Motorman Brown, Lineman Ford and Conductor Wood left the car and went to a nearby store where they cashed their checks and bought some groceries. They left McLean between 12:40 and 12:50 p.m., proceeding westward toward Spring Hill. Lineman Ford suggested they stop at Jackson to get some wine, and the car was stopped at Jackson Station opposite a private house, all three of them going to the house where they were given some wine to drink and Lineman Ford bought a quart of wine; on returning to the car they each had another drink and then proceeded toward Spring Hill, the accident occurring shortly thereafter, and he said that if they had not stopped to get the wine they would have had ample time to get into clear at Spring Hill for Train No. 118. Conductor Wood further stated that he did not believe Motorman Brown's watch was slow; they had cleared for two other trains that morning, and the first that he heard anything about the watch being slow was after he had gone to Spring Hill to re-

port the accident; he heard the motorman ask Conductor Bowers, of Train No. 118, to compare time with him and he thought they said that Brown's watch was about 12 minutes slow.

Lineman Ford, of Extra 25, stated that when at Jackson Station he remarked to Motorman Brown that it was time for Train No. 118, to which the motorman replied that they had 5 minutes and could make it; Lineman Ford, however, did not have a watch. They proceeded over the hill, with Lineman Ford standing behind the motorman, and he said he saw the approaching train when it was about 300 feet distant and warned the motorman, who appeared to be dazed. Lineman Ford said he then applied the brakes and reversed the control, and he thought the car at that time was traveling at a speed of about 15 or 20 miles per hour. He also stated that when making the reverse movements to perform the work no flag protection was provided, stating that they had made similar movements previously without authority or without furnishing flag protection.

Motorman Ruble, of Train No. 118, stated that approaching the point of accident he was operating his car at a speed of about 30 miles per hour and as soon as he saw the approaching car he applied his brakes in emergency, reducing the speed to about 15 or 20 miles per hour at the time of the accident. His car was equipped with a Westinghouse automatic air brake which functioned properly; it was snowing and the rails were wet, but while there was some snow on the window glass it did not interfere with his view to any great extent.

Conductor Bowers, of Train No. 118, thought the speed of their car was about 35 miles per hour when he heard the motorman call out a warning and on looking ahead he saw the other train about 100 feet distant. The motorman cut off the power and applied the brakes in emergency, the speed being reduced to about 25 miles per hour when the accident occurred. About half an hour after the accident he compared time with the motorman of the line^{car} and at that time the motorman's watch was about 19 minutes slow.

Train Dispatcher Feagan stated that train order 2, issued to Extra 25 at Franklin Park, authorized the movement of the line car westward only, and that the crew did not have authority under the rules to move eastward from Spring Hill without a further order from him, or permission to do so under flag protection. He was unaware that an eastward movement had been made by this car, and said it was used for general line work and was not considered a work train when operating in one general direction and performing line work en route. Only in cases where there is a day's work between two stations is a work order issued; most of the line work is done on a straight running order. He recalled no previous cases of unauthorized movements on single track except certain movements protected by flagmen, afterward explained to his satisfaction.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Extra 25 to clear the time of Train No. 118, a scheduled train, as provided by the rules.

Rule 162 of the rules and regulations of this railroad provides that all extra trains keep out of the way of regular scheduled trains, and clear their time at least 10 minutes, unless otherwise provided, and be governed by train orders with respect to opposing extra trains. There is such a discrepancy in the statements of the crew of Extra 25 that the reason for their failure to obey this rule cannot be stated with certainty, but the supplemental statement of Conductor Wood indicates that the crew were occupied in attending to their own personal affairs just prior to the accident and thus failed to notice that their time was too short to enable them to get into clear at Spring Hill for Train No. 118. They went back eastward to McLean, 3.02 miles east of Spring Hill, without authority, in order to cash pay checks and buy groceries, and on their return westward toward Spring Hill they stopped again, at Jackson, for personal reasons only, thus delaying them to the extent that they were unable to reach Spring Hill before the arrival of Train No. 118.

Rule 61 provides that watches that have been examined and certified to by a designated inspector must be used by dispatchers, enginemen, firemen, conductors, motormen, flagmen, yardmen, road masters, and line foreman, and the certificate must be renewed and filed with the trainmaster at intervals not greater than 3 months. Rule 62 provides that motormen, enginemen, conductors, flagmen and firemen must call for and receive standard time from a clock designated as a standard clock or from the train dispatcher before taking their runs, with which standard time they must at that time compare their watches, and must register their names on the daily registration sheet provided for that purpose, stating time at which comparison was made and noting any variations; this rule also provides that members of train crews must compare their watches with each other at intervals not to exceed 3 hours in length during the day's run. The investigation indicated, however, that Conductor Wood did not have a watch with him and at one point in his statements he said that he never carried a watch. While Motorman Brown stated that he failed to wind his own watch the previous night and that it was about 10 or 12 minutes slow at the time of the accident, although he claimed he compared time before going on duty.

Some of the evidence indicated that it was the custom with the line car to make reverse movements while operating on the authority of a straight running order, and the dispatcher said such movements could have been made with his permission and under

flag protection, but that no such permission was obtained in this case. While the motorman and conductor stated that flag protection was afforded in the case of the reverse movements made prior to starting westward again toward Spring Hill, Line-man Ford stated that no such protection was given.

There appears to have been gross negligence on the part of the employees in observing the rules and regulations; and it is essential to safe operation that operating officers of this railroad exercise closer supervision of their employees and see that the rules are properly enforced and obeyed.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.