

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD NEAR WHALEY, VA., ON JUNE 6, 1928.

July 26, 1928.

To the Commission.

On June 6, 1928, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad near Whaley, Va., resulting in the death of two employees and the injury of five passengers and three employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Norfolk District of the First Division, extending between Norfolk, Va., and Rocky Mount, N. C., a distance of 115.8 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The derailment occurred at what is known as Harrell's Siding; this siding is a spur track, 311 feet in length, which leads off the main track to the east at a point 2.5 miles north of Whaley. Approaching the siding from the north the main track is tangent for about 2 miles, while the grade at the point of accident is practically level.

The switch is a facing-point switch for southbound trains, with the switch stand located on the west side of the main track. The switch lamp, mounted above the targets, is about 5 feet above the ties and displays night indications of red when the switch is open and green when the switch is closed. The view is unobstructed. There is a Hayes derail located on the spur at a point about 155 feet south of the switch; a tool house is located just east of the spur and about 100 feet south of the switch, while there is a section house on the west side of the main track, directly opposite the tool house.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 7.05 p.m.

## Description

Southbound passenger train No. 41 consisted of one baggage car, two coaches and two Pullman cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 253, and was in charge of Conductor St. George and Engineman Morgan. The first two cars were of steel-underframe construction, while the other three cars were of all-steel construction. This train left Suffolk, 10.8 miles north of Whaley, at 6.54 p.m., one minute late, and was approaching Whaley at a speed estimated to have been between 45 and 50 miles per hour when it entered the open switch at Harrell's Siding and was derailed at the Hayes derail.

Engine 253 came to rest on its right side about 20 feet beyond the end of the spur; the tender cistern separated from the tender frame and telescoped the engine cab. All of the cars, with the exception of the last car, were derailed but they remained practically upright and parallel with the track. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman.

## Summary of evidence

None of the surviving members of the crew of train No. 41 was aware of anything wrong prior to the accident, at which time the speed of their train was between 45 and 50 miles per hour. Conductor St. George said that shortly after the accident he noticed the switch and saw that a green indication was displayed by the switch lamp. Later he examined the switch and found it locked for the main track, and at this time he requested Conductor Moore, who was deadheading on the train, to unlock and operate the switch, which was done, the switch being thrown back and forth and found to be working properly, with no indication that it had been run through or damaged in any way. Conductor St. George also said that the air brakes worked properly en route and that he did not feel any application of the brakes prior to the accident. Baggage-master Cockrell was of the opinion that it would have been difficult for Engineman Morgan to have seen the indication displayed by the switch lamp owing to the time of day, approaching dusk, and the further fact that the engine was headed toward the setting sun, saying that a red indication can be seen better when it is dark. He also said that there is a public road crossing in the immediate vicinity of the switch, over which there is considerable traffic, and was of the opinion that the engineman was busily engaged in watching out for the road crossing, for which the engine whistle signal was sounded, and that probably this situation caused the engineman not to see the switch indication displayed. Flagman Franklin was riding in the second car

from the rear when the accident occurred and said it took him from two to four minutes to get himself together, following the accident, and start back to flag. The entire train was south of the switch, clear of the points, and on his way back to flag he noticed that the switch was lined and locked for the main track. Conductor Howe, who was also deadheading on train No. 41, stated that he was riding in the first car at the time of the accident. Just as soon as he was able to regain his feet he looked out of the front door on the right side of the baggage car and saw a man in the act of throwing the switch back for the main track and he saw the indication of the switch lamp change from red to green, this being about one or two minutes after the occurrence of the accident.

The statements of members of the section crew, composed of Section Foreman A. L. Brinkley and Section Laborers Brinkley, Lilly and Wiggins, were to the effect that after completing the work of changing out a rail at Whaley, and after the departure from that point of north-bound train No. 48, which was at 4.23 p.m. according to the train sheet, the section motor car and push car were lifted over to the main track. Laborer Wiggins was then released from duty for the day and the motor car and push car followed train No. 48 northward; the motor car was south of the push car and not coupled thereto, being separated from it by a length of old rail, one end of which rested on each car. There were also two short pieces of rail on the push car. The Section Foreman and Laborers Brinkley and Lilly rode on the motor car and on reaching Harrell's Siding the motor car and push car were brought to a stop astraddle the switch and directly opposite the rail rack at that point. These employees all said that after the rail was unloaded at the rack both cars were lifted over to the spur track, moved southward on that track, and placed in the tool house. They steadfastly maintained that the switch was not opened in order to put the cars away, but that the cars were lifted over to the spur track.

Section Foreman Brinkley did not remember having looked at the position of the switch either before or after the cars were put away but said that it must have been closed or else the push car would not have gone by the switch points. To his knowledge no member of his crew, with the exception of himself, was in possession of a switch key. Section Foreman Brinkley also said that two men can house the motor car from the main track and one man can handle the push car, and that switches were not used for that purpose, the cars always being lifted over from one track to another unless they carried a heavy load. The first he knew of anything wrong was on hearing the crash caused by the accident,

he ran out of his house, located on the west side of the main track, about opposite the end of the spur, and on looking at the switch observed that a red indication was displayed. After rendering what assistance he could he went to examine the switch but at this time the switch was set for the main track and a green indication was displayed.

Laborer Brinkley said he was preparing supper in his house, located on the west side of the main track and directly opposite the tool house, nearer to the switch than his brother's house, when he heard the crash caused by the accident. He ran to the door and looked south toward the engine but could not see very much on account of the smoke and escaping steam. He then went northward toward the rear of the train and found the switch open, with a red indication displayed; the switch lock was lying on the ground, unlocked, close to the switch, and he picked up the lock, took hold of the switch lever, jerked it and it jumped into place, and after closing the switch he locked it and then went to the engine. The switch worked properly at this time. To his knowledge the switch had not been used by any train after the motor and push cars were housed and he thought that he was the first one to reach the switch after the accident. Laborer Brinkley did not notice the switch prior to the accident.

Laborer Lilly did not notice the position of the switch at any time and his other statements brought out nothing additional of importance. All of the members of the section crew stated that it was always the practice to lift the motor car and push car over from one track to another and not to use the main-track switches unless a heavy load was carried. The statements of these three men were conflicting as to who moved the motor car to the tool house and who moved the push car.

The last southbound train to pass the switch on the main track prior to the accident was train No. 91, at about 2.25 p.m., while the last northbound train to pass was train No. 48, at about 4.25 p.m. The spur track was clear of cars at the time of the accident, and no cars had been set off or picked up at that point for some time.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by an open switch.

While the testimony of the three section employees is conflicting as to exactly what transpired when the rail was unloaded at the rail rack, and as to the precise location of the motor car and push car in relation to the switch, they all maintained that these cars were lifted across from the main track to the spur in order to be