

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD AT LESTER, OHIO,
ON FEBRUARY 5, 1923.

March 7, 1923.

To the Commission:

On February 5, 1923, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad at Lester, Ohio, resulting in the death of one employee, and the injury of one employee. This accident was investigated in conjunction with representatives of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the C. L. & W. Sub-Division of the Akron Division, extending between Halloway and Lorain, Ohio, a distance of 123.6 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, with a manual block-signal system providing for an absolute block behind passenger trains. Under the rules, trains are required to keep at least five minutes apart, except in closing up at stations, while under special instructions in the time-table all trains within yard limits will not exceed schedule time and will be kept under the control of the engineman so that he may be able at all times to stop within range of vision; this is not intended to relieve enginemen and trainmen from properly protecting their engines and trains while occupying the main track in yard limits. Rule 93 provides in part that within yard limits the main track may be used, clearing the time of first-class trains and protecting against second-class trains. The accident occurred within yard limits, at a point approximately 1,353 feet west of the east yard limit board. Approaching this point from the east there are 4,485 feet of tangent, then a 30-minute curve to the right 1,755 feet in length, followed by a tangent extending to and beyond the point of accident nearly 400 feet distant. The grade is 0.5 per cent descending for westbound trains. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 6.45 a. m.

Description.

Westbound freight train extra 4161 consisted of 45 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 4161, and was in charge of Conductor Sears and Engineman Sheffield. At 6.34 a. m. this train came to a stop within yard limits at Lester, and after standing at this point approximately 21 minutes, without protection, the rear of the train was struck by extra 4073.

Westbound freight train extra 4073 consisted of 53 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 4073, on departing from Dover at 11.15 p. m., February 4th, and was in charge of Conductor Williamson and Engineman Thompson. This train passed Lake Junction, the last open office, 9.7 miles from Lester, at 6.27 a. m., and collided with the rear end of extra 4161 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 5 and 30 miles an hour.

Engine 4073 was damaged but not derailed. The caboose of extra 4161 was demolished, the debris taking fire, while three cars in this train were damaged, and another car was derailed. The employee killed was the flagman of extra 4161, who was in the caboose at the time of the accident.

Summary of evidence.

Engineman Thompson, of extra 4073, said he made a 7 or 8-pound brake-pipe reduction at the road crossing whistling post located approximately 3,500 feet east of Norwalk road, which is about 725 feet east of the yard-limit board, at which time the speed was about 25 or 28 miles an hour. After sounding the whistle for Norwalk road, and not seeing a flagman, or having encountered torpedoes or fusees, the brakes were released near the road crossing when the speed was about 18 miles an hour. Just after releasing the brakes, Engineman Thompson saw the red markers on the caboose of extra 4161, applied the air brakes in emergency, and sounded the whistle continuously until he, Fireman Galeaz, and Head brakeman Ross jumped, which was just before the accident occurred. Engineman Thompson admitted that the speed approaching Lester was such that he could not have brought the train to a stop at the yard limit board, nor did he operate his train within yard limits so as to be able to stop within range of vision, and that he was responsible for this accident to the extent that he did not approach yard limits at a lower rate of speed; however, he said it is customary for the flagman of the train occupying the main track within yard limits, at the point extra 4161 was standing on this occasion, to station himself just east of Norwalk road. He further stated that the

air brakes were working at the time of the accident,, which occurred while his train was traveling at a speed of 5 or 6 miles an hour. Fireman Galeaz stated that all the members of the engine crew saw the markers on the caboose of extra 4161 about the same time, and estimated this distance at about 12 or 15 car lengths. Head brakeman Ross estimated speed at the time he saw the markers on the caboose at 20 miles an hour, and at the time of the accident to have been about 10 miles an hour. Conductor Williamson estimated the speed at between 20 and 25 miles an hour at the time the air brakes were applied, while Flagman Pugh estimated the speed at the time of the accident to have been between 18 and 20 miles an hour.

On arrival of extra 4161 at Lester, Conductor Sears was riding on the engine, and heard Engineman Sheffield whistle out a flag. On getting off the engine the conductor looked back, and saw a white light which he mistook for Flagman Smith's lantern; then he lined the switches and ~~rod~~ the engine over to where some cars were placed on the storage track. After this he went into the telegraph office for his orders, and when he got back to his train he was notified of the accident. Conductor Sears stated flag protection is required within yard limits; that he had had Flagman Smith on numerous occasions and had always found him to be on the alert at all flagging points, also that at Smith Road, 3 miles east of Lester, he personally saw Flagman Smith back fully 50 car lengths. Engineman Sheffield stated that Flagman Smith had not been called in at Lester.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Smith, of extra 4161, properly to protect his train, and by the failure of Engineman Thompson, properly to control the speed of his train within yard limits.

No explanation can be offered for the failure of Flagman Smith to protect his train in accordance with the rules. Had Engineman Thompson properly controlled the speed of his train approaching Lester, so as to have been able to stop within yard limits in accordance with the rules, instead of depending on being flagged, or encountering torpedoes or fusees, in the event a train was occupying the main track within yard limits, this accident undoubtedly would have been averted.

All of the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted.

W. P. PORTLAND

Director.