

HE
1790
A319
L.V.97
no. 401-
450

U.S. Interstate Commerce Commission

Railroad accident investigation
Report K.V.97 no. 401-450.

401

Re investigation of an accident which occurred
on the Boston and Albany Railroad at West Springfield
Mass., December 22, 1916.

JUL 09 1976

On December 22, 1916, there was a rear-end collision
between an employees train and a draft of freight cars on the
Boston and Albany Railroad at West Springfield, Mass., which
resulted in the death of two employees and injury to three
employees.

The accident occurred at the east end of West Spring-
field yard and within yard limits. The line at this point
is double track extending east and west. The two main tracks
pass through the center of the yard, the westbound yard and
shops being located on the north, and the eastbound yard on
the south of the main line.

Interlocking signal station 42 is located at the east
end of West Springfield yard on the north side of the main
tracks. At this point the yard tracks converge into two leads,
the one on the north entering westbound track 1, and that on
the south entering eastbound track 2 at a point just east of
signal station 42. Just east of the east end of these leads,
and about 300 feet east of signal station 42, is a crossover
leading from track 1 to track 2.

Beginning at signal station 42, and proceeding east-
ward, there is a 1 degree 30 minute curve to the north 1400
feet in length, at the east end of this curve the tracks enter
the Connecticut River bridge, from which point the line is
practically tangent to Springfield passenger station about a
quarter of a mile east. The point where the collision occurred
is on the curve about 165 feet west of the west entrance of the
bridge. In this vicinity the track is elevated on an embank-
ment about 20 feet in height and there is a grade of .5% as-
cending eastward.

Eastbound switching draft, consisting of locomotive 916,
running backward pulling 17 cars, in charge of Engineman
Aldrich and Conductor Gashman, started to pull out of the
eastbound yard at West Springfield about 5:14 p. m. It entered
main track 2 just east of signal station 42 and proceeded
eastward en route to Summer Street yard, located east of
Springfield passenger station. The train stopped near the east
end of the bridge on account of a signal being in the stop
position by reason of passenger trains occupying the track at
the passenger station, the rear car of the draft, which was a steel
underframe box car, being just east of the entrance to the
bridge. The train had been standing in this position 10 or
15 minutes when it was struck by the employees train at about
5:20 p. m.

Eastbound employees train carrying about 300 employees of the West Springfield shop, en route to Springfield, consisted of locomotive 924 running backward hauling 4 coaches and was in charge of Engineman Reed and Conductor Basson. It left the shop track on the north side of the yard about 5:13 p. m. The train was brought to a stop at interlocking dwarf signal 40, located 340 feet west of signal station 42, and which governs the lead from the yard to main track 1, also the crossover from track 1 to track 2, the signal being in the stop position to permit the passage of through westbound passenger trains 1st and 2nd No. 13 on track 1. After the passage of these trains, signal 40 was cleared and the employees train proceeded out onto main track 1, through the crossover onto track 2, and while running at a speed of about 15 miles per hour collided with the rear of the freight draft.

At the time of the accident it was dark; the weather was cloudy and a high wind was blowing from the north.

The collision forced the rear car of the freight draft off of its center. The tank of engine 924 was pushed into the cab up against the boiler head, killing the fireman, fatally injuring another fireman who was riding on the engine at the time and seriously injuring Engineman Reed. The impact also crushed in the east end of the leading car of the employees train.

Flagman Harrington of the freight draft stated that when his train pulled out of the yard he got on the last car, having with him one white and two red lanterns, all burning brightly; one red lantern he hung on the second rung of the end ladder on the left corner of the car; the remaining red lantern and the white lantern he took on top of the car with him; the draft stopped with the rear of the last car standing about two car lengths west of the bridge; after the train had been standing 8 or 10 minutes, a gust of wind took the white lantern from the top of the car and carried it down the bank on the south; leaving both red lights he climbed down from the car and went down the bank to recover the white lantern; he recovered the lantern and had reached the top of the bank when he noticed the employees train coming through the crossover about 900 feet distant; at that time he thought it was going to stop, but as it approached its speed did not appear to slacken, he then took the red lantern from the car ladder - his white lantern being extinguished - and started to run toward the approaching train; he had reached a point two or three car lengths from the rear of the freight draft when the engine of the employees train passed him. He stated that as the locomotive passed him he shouted to the engineman who immediately made an

emergency application of the brake. He estimates the speed of the train to have been 15 or 20 miles per hour when the locomotive passed him. Flagman Harrington stated that as he came up the embankment he saw the red light burning on the top of the car and that the red lantern which he took from the car ladder was burning at the time he took it, but after the accident the red lantern which had been on top of the car was found at the foot of the bank extinguished, and the red lantern which he used to try to stop the employees train was also extinguished. He stated that it is possible that just prior to the accident the wind may have blown the red lantern from the top of the car and that in his frantic efforts to stop the approaching train he may have extinguished the red lantern which he carried. Flagman Harrington further stated that under the rules of the Boston and Albany Railroad, it was not necessary for him to go back to flag when the freight draft stopped with its rear end occupying the position which it did, and that it is not an unusual occurrence to find trains standing in this position without flag protection. About a week subsequent to the accident, Flagman Harrington made a further statement in which he admits that after he took the red lantern from the car ladder and had swung it twice in an attempt to stop the approaching train, the light went out.

Engineman Aldrich of the freight draft stated that as his train pulled out of the yard he looked back and saw a red and white light displayed from the top of the last car. He also stated that as this section of track is within yard limits and on account of the large number of movements made over it, it is not unusual for an engine or train to stop at any point and he always runs his train expecting to find the track occupied without protection.

Conductor Cashman of the freight draft stated that at the time of the accident he was on the engine; but that under the conditions he should properly have been at the rear of the draft.

Conductor Basson of the employees train stated that before leaving West Springfield shop the brakes were tested and found to be working properly. Approaching the point of accident he was riding on the rear car; the first intimation he received of the impending accident was the emergency application of the brakes followed closely by the collision. He stated that at the time the brakes were applied the train was running at a speed of 10 or 12 miles per hour which is the usual speed for that train.

Engineman Reed of the employees train was seriously injured in the accident and died some days later without making any statement.

Towersman Wilson on duty at signal station 42 stated that when the freight draft pulled out he noticed a red and

a white light on the top of the last car. He stated that when he cleared dwarf signal 40 for the employees train, it gave it the right to proceed at low speed. He further stated that on account of the density of traffic it is the usual practice to let the employees train follow closely any train that may happen to be ahead.

Special time-table rule 6, relating to yard limits reads in part as follows:

It will not be necessary for any engine or train occupying main tracks within such limits to be protected, except when on the time of a first class train. Second class and extra trains within such limits must run at a speed that will admit of stopping within the vision of the engineman. When location or weather conditions are such as will not afford a clear view, full protection is required.

Investigation discloses that the trains involved in this accident were within yard limits and were subject to the above rule, and that the engineman of an approaching train had an unobstructed view for over 1,000 feet and therefore flag protection was not required.

The fact that the red lantern was not fastened on the top of the car, and that a highwind prevailed at the time, which had already blown the flagman's white lantern from the top of the car, seems to warrant the conclusion that the red light was not displayed from the top of the rear car of the draft, as the employees' train approached. It was also finally admitted by Flagman Harrington that the red lantern which he took from the car ladder was extinguished almost immediately. Under these conditions, Engineman Reed of the employees' train evidently had no warning of the obstruction of the main track, until the flagman shouted to him too late to prevent the collision.

Strict compliance with special time-card rule No. 6, however, required that Engineman Reed run his train within these yard limits so as to stop within his range of vision and had he done so, it is believed, this accident would not have occurred.

Under the conditions existing, according to Conductor Cashman's own statement, he should have been on the rear of the draft and had he been in that position the possibility of the rear of the draft being left without danger signals to mark its position, would have been eliminated.

All of the employees involved in this accident were experienced railroad men. At the time of the accident Conductor Cashman and Flagman Harrington had been on duty 11 hours and 30 minutes, and Engineman Reed had been on duty 12 hours.