

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE CHICAGO
& NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY AT PECATONICA, ILL., ON DECEMBER
2, 1929.

February 23, 1930.

To the Commission:

On December 2, 1929, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Chicago & North Western Railway at Pecatonica, Ill., resulting in the injury of three live stock attendants.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on subdivision 3 of the Galena Division, extending between west Chicago, and Freeport, Ill., a distance of 90.9 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, and manual block operation is in effect between Rockford and Freeport, Ill., located 14.5 miles east and 13.6 miles west of Pecatonica, respectively, from 6.30 a.m. to 4.15 p.m., except Sundays, at the time of this accident the block system was not in effect. The accident occurred at a point 38 feet east of the depot at Pecatonica, approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for more than one mile, followed by a $1^{\circ} 55'$ curve to the right 2,123 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 606 feet from its western end. The grade for eastbound trains is 0.195 per cent ascending at the point of accident. There is a passing track on the south side of the main track, the passing track is 1,326 feet in length and its east switch is located 945 feet east of the depot. Several other tracks lead off the passing track, which was unoccupied at the time of the accident.

Under the rules when a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection, placing two torpedoes, and when necessary, in addition, displaying lighted fuses. When recalled and safety to the train will permit, he may return. The rules also provide that all third-class trains must approach and pass all stations, sidings, fuel and water stations at restricted speed expecting to find trains within the switches or taking coal or water, and will be prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear. Trains occupying main track at such

points will protect against all trains where the view is obscured by fog, storms or track curvature, or other causes requiring additional safeguards.

Owing to the depot and a water tank located 260 feet west of the depot being on the inside of the curve, the view of the left marker of a caboose standing at the point of collision is restricted to a distance of 643 feet from the engineman's side of the cab of an eastbound engine, while a clear view of both markers can be had for a distance of 560 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred between 6.10 and 6.15 p.m.

Description

Eastbound freight train extra 1154, on arrival at Pocatonia at 5.30 p.m., according to the train sheet, consisted of three cars of stock and a caboose, hauled by engine 1154, and was in charge of Conductor Wahl and Engineman Dyer. The train was left standing on the main track with the rear end of the caboose just east of the depot, while the engine was cut off and proceeded to the stock chutes, located south of the main track, in order to pick up some cars, while standing at this point the caboose was struck by train No. 738.

Eastbound third-class freight train No. 738 consisted of 13 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1376, and was in charge of Conductor Schluetter and Engineman Shriver. This train left Freeport at 5.40 p.m., according to the train sheet, 10 minutes late, and struck the rear end of extra 1154 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 5 and 20 miles per hour.

The caboose of extra 1154 was telescoped by engine 1376 a distance of about 12 feet, the forward end of the caboose being driven about 5 feet into the stock car ahead of it; the caboose and three stock cars were driven ahead a distance of about 200 feet by the force of the impact.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Wahl, of extra 1154, stated that he instructed the head brakeman to protect Main Street Crossing, located about 225 feet east of the depot at Pocatonia, and that he took the flagman along to assist in switching operations and to help load stock, leaving the caboose and

three cars standing on the main track unprotected, although the markers were burning properly. After the caboose and three cars had been standing on the main track about 50 or 55 minutes the collision occurred. Conductor Wahl admitted that he had not afforded proper protection to the rear end of this train as required, saying that he had a time-table in his possession and was fully aware of train No. 738, but that his engineman was not familiar with the work and as a result the moves made were slow, more time being consumed in performing the work than he had anticipated, he did not realize how much time had elapsed, and thought it was not yet 6 p.m. when the collision occurred. He stated he had intended to provide protection from that time on if his own train had not departed from Pecatonica prior to that time. Conductor Wahl further stated that had the caboose and three cars been placed on the passing track, when he saw that the stock was not loaded, the accident would have been avoided. Head Brakeman Guillouy was unaware of anything wrong prior to the accident.

Engineman Shriver, of train No. 738, stated that the speed of his train was about 15 miles per hour on passing the west switch of the passing track and that approaching the depot he had the air brakes applied in full service, intending to bring his own train to a stop with the caboose at the depot in order to see if there was a car of milk to be moved. On account of the curve his headlight did not shine upon the caboose ahead, and he was at the water tank before he got a good view of both markers, he moved the brake valve handle to the emergency position, and estimated the speed of his train to have been reduced to about 5 miles per hour at the time of the collision. The air brakes worked properly, but he did not think that an emergency effect was obtained owing to the previous service application. Engineman Shriver thought the reason for the caboose and three cars being driven ahead about 200 feet by the force of the impact, although he estimated the speed of his own train to have been 5 miles per hour at the time of the collision, was because the caboose and cars had been standing so long that the brakes probably leaked off. Statements of Fireman McKeown corroborated those of Engineman Shriver, Conductor Schluetter was riding in the caboose and estimated the speed of his train to have been about 15 miles per hour at the time of the collision.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Wahl, of extra 1154, to see to it that proper protection was afforded to that portion of his train left standing on the main track, and by the failure of Engineman Shriver, of train No. 738, properly to control the speed of his train approaching the depot at Pecatonica,

Conductor Wahl should have provided for flag protection or should have left the caboose and three cars standing on the passing track, which was unoccupied, instead of leaving them on the main track, when the engine was cut off and proceeded to the stock chutes. By so doing the accident would have been avoided. As it was more time was consumed in making the switching movements than he anticipated or realized, the caboose and cars being left standing on the main track about 50 or 55 minutes. Conductor Wahl acknowledged his failure to provide proper protection as required.

Engineman Shriver should have approached the depot under full control, especially so when his view across the inside of the curve was obstructed by the depot and water tank, and then the accident could have been averted. While he estimated the speed of his train to have been 5 miles per hour at the time of the collision, the distance the caboose and three cars were driven ahead on the slightly ascending grade by the force of the impact, indicated that the speed was probably in excess of his estimate.

Conductor Wahl entered the service on July 3, 1919, Engineman Shriver entered on September 15, 1901, and was promoted to engineman on January 1, 1907. At the time of the accident none of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

V. P. BORLAND,

Director.