INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE CHICAGO JUNCTION RAILWAY IN CHICAGO, ILL., ON DECEMBER 30, 1924.

January 22, 1925.

To the Commission

On December 30, 1924, there was a rear-end collision between a transfer train and a freight train, both being trains of the Illinois Central Railroad, on the tracks of the Chicago Junction Railway in Chicago, Ill., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation

The Chicago Junction Railway is a switching railway serving the Union Stock Yards and a great many other industries in and around the city of Chicago. There are no passenger trains nor any fast freight service, while the tracks known as main tracks are practically running tracks on which traffic moves according to directions specified in the rules The trains of a great many railroads are constantly using the Chicago Junction tracks, while all of the many switches are hand thrown, switchtenders being stationed at the more important points. For these reasons there is no timetable, train orders are not used, nor is there a block-signal system of any kind, the operation of trains being governed by a rule which states that the entire system is within yard limits and that all trains are to move under complete control expecting to find tracks occupied, switches open, or the way otherwise obstructed, the responsibility in case of an accident resting with the approaching train.

The accident occurred at a point where the tracks of the Chicago Junction Railway pass under those of the Chicago & Western Indiana and Pennsylvania Railroads at 40th Street and Stewart Avenue., There are six tracks on this bridge and inasmuch as there are no openings in it with the exception of one about a foot wide in the center, it prevents smoke and steam from rising freely from the Chicago Junction tracks, thus

obscuring the view to a considerable extent. Approaching this point on the Chicago Junction tracks from the east, on 40th street, beginning at a point just west of Wentworth Avenue or about 1,400 feet from the point of accident, the tracks of the Chicago Elevated Railway are carried over those of the Chicago Junction Railway. This elevated structure does not prevent smoke and steam from rising freely although it does cut off some of the daylight tending to make it difficult to see ahead in dark and foggy weather The tracks of the Chicago Junction Railway are tangent from Wentworth Avenue to the point of accident. The grade within this distance is descending, varying from 1.14 to 1.41 per cent, while after passing under the bridge at Stewart Avenue the grade is 1.42 per cent ascending for a distance of about 1,400 feet. The weather was somewhat foggy and hazy at the time of the accident, which occurred at 4.40 a.m.

Description

The transfer train consisted of 30 cars and a caboose, hauled by Illinois Central engine 1570, and was in charge of Conductor Mischo and Engineman Logan, It left Fordham Yard at 3 15 a m , westbound, entered upon the tracks of the Chicago Junction Railway at 43rd Street at 3.45 a m , and finally reached 40th Street, proceeded under the Stewart Avenue bridge and stopped with the head end of the train at 40th and Union Streets at about 4.30 a m., the rear of the train then being under the Stewart Avenue bridge, and it was still standing at this point when it was struck by extra 1578.

Westbound freight train 1578 consisted of 29 cars and a caboose, hauled by Illinois Central engine 1578, and was in charge of Conductor Sachs and Engineman Doll. It left Burnside, which is about 1/2 mile from Fordham Yard, at 4 a m., passed to the Chicago Junction tracks at 43rd Street at 4 25 a m , and while moving at a speed of about 5 miles an hour collided with the rear of the transfer train at Stewart Avenue.

The caboose and rear car of the transfer train were demolished while the rear truck of the adjoining car was derailed Engine 1578 was not derailed and sustained only slight damage The employee killed was the conductor of the transfer train.

Summary of evidence

At the time of the accident only the conductor and flagman of the transfer train were in the caboose and in view of the fact that the conductor was killed and the flagman seriously injured no statement could be

obtained as to what transpired at the rear of the train between the time it stopped and the time at which the accident occurred. The engineman of this train said he was closely following another train and that when he reached Union Street he received a stop signal from the switchtender located at that point and shortly afterwards, just as the switchtender had given him a signal to proceed, he felt a heavy jar from the rear which moved his train ahead a distance of 6 to 8 feet, this being his first knowledge of the occurrence of the accident. No additional facts of importance were obtained from the fireman, or from the head brakeman who was also riding on the engine. The statements of these employees indicated that the view under the Stewart Avenue bridge was more or less obscured at the time their engine passed under it.

Engineman Doll, of extra 1578, said he had nearly stopped at Wentworth Avenue when the switchtender at that point gave him a proceed signal, he allowed his train to increase speed on the descending grade approaching Stewart Avenue and then applied the air brakes, reducing the speed to about 4 miles an hour. At about this time he encountered a train moving eastward, the engine of which was working steam very hard causing a lot of gas and smoke. When this cleared away he found that he could see 3 or 4 car lengths ahead and consequently released the brakes, at which time the speed of his train was about 3 or 4 miles an hour. He said it was at about this time that the helper engine on the rear of the eastbound train passed under the bridge causing more gas and smoke to obscure his view and that suddenly he saw a red light ahead, the collision occurring almost immediately. Engineman Doll said the air brakes on his train were working properly, that he was experienced in the operation of [illegible] trains in this territory and that although he did not know there was a train immediately ahead of him he fully understood that flag protection was not required on the part of the crew of any such train. The fireman and also the head brakeman were looking out of the cab windows on the left side of the engine, but neither of them saw the rear of the transfer train prior to the collision, their statements indicating that their view was entirely obscured by smoke, steam and the hazy weather conditions.

The statements of the conductor and flagman brought out nothing additional of importance except that Flagman Williams made the statement that after the accident occurred he started ahead on the left side and met the engine of the eastbound train nearly opposite his caboose. Inasmuch as the eastbound train was composed of about 55 cars while extra 1578 had only 29 cars and a caboose, this statement by the flagman would indicate

that the helper engine on the eastbound train had not passed the point of accident at the time it occurred, which is directly contrary to what was stated by Engineman Doll.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Doll, of extra 1578, to operate his train under proper control within yard limits.

Under the rules no flag protection is required in this territory and all trains are to be operated under such control that they can be stopped in time to avert an accident, the responsibility for the occurence of an accident resting with the approaching train At the particular point where the accident occurred, under the Stewart Avenue bridge, smoke, steam and fog do not rise freely, while it is at the bottom of two sharply descending grades. Engineman Doll was familiar with the conditions and when he found that his view was being obscured to such a great extent it was incumbent on him to so reduce the speed of his train that he could stop it within his limited range of vision. Neither the testimony nor the condition of the wreckage, when considered in connection with the fact that the train was on a heavy descending grade at the time of the accident, indicates that the speed could have been much more than estimated by the engineman, and his failure seems to have been due to the fact that when confronted with an extreme condition he did not operate his train accordingly.

The employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of the transfer train had been on duty from 5 to 5½ hours after about 15½ hours off duty. The crew of extra 1578 had been on duty nearly 2 hours previous to which, with the exception of the head brakeman, they had been off duty from 18 hours to 3 days, this brakeman had been off duty 3 hours preceded by 8 hours on duty and 16 hours off duty.

Respectfully submitted,

W P. BORLAND,

Director