

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
 INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
 THE CHICAGO, ROCK ISLAND & PACIFIC RAILWAY
 AT SELDEN, KANSAS, ON MAY 18, 1923.

June 9, 1923.

To the Commission:

On May 18, 1923, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Chicago-Rock Island & Pacific Railway at Selden, Kansas, which resulted in the death of one employee and injury of two passengers.

Location and Method of Operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Nebraska-Colo-rado Division extending between Phillipsburg and Goodland, Kansas a distance of 139.9 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The point of accident was 550 feet west of the east passing-track switch at Selden. Approaching this point the track is tangent in each direction for more than 1 mile, while the grade is undulating, being 0.2 per cent descending for westbound trains at the point of accident. The weather was foggy at the time of the accident, which occurred at 4.42 a. m.

Description

Eastbound passenger train No. 6 consisted of one mail car, one baggage car, one combination car, one chair car, and six Pullman sleeping cars, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 978, and was in charge of Conductor Leyden and Engineer Ryan. At Goodland the crew in charge received a copy of train order No. 4, providing in part for a meet with train No. 39 at Selden. Train No. 6 left Goodland, which is 63.6 miles from Selden, at 3.12 a. m., seven minutes late, and arrived at Selden at 4.33 a. m., three minutes after its scheduled departing time. A middle order was received at this point, together with a block restrictions card showing that there were no restrictions after the arrival of train No. 39. Train No. 6 then pulled ahead on the main track toward the east passing-track switch, stopped to await the arrival of train No. 39, and while standing at this point was struck by that train.

Westbound passenger train No. 39 consisted of three express cars, one mail car, one combination car, one chair car, one dining car, and two Pullman sleeping cars, hauled by engine 950, and was in charge of Conductor Curwin and Engineman Boyle. The second car was of wooden construction, the first and third of steel-underframe construction, and the others of all-steel construction. At Phillipsburg the crew received a copy of train order No. 4, previously referred to, departed from that point at 2.25 a.m. on time, reduced speed approaching Selden, passed the switch at which it should have headed in on the passing track, and collided with train No. 6 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 10 miles an hour.

Both engines were slightly damaged, but remained upright, with only one pair of wheels under engine 950 derailed. The second car in train No. 39 was demolished, while several cars in both trains were slightly damaged. The employee killed was the fireman of train No. 6.

Summary of Evidence.

Engineman Boyle, of train No. 39, said the fog was so thick approaching Selden as to interfere very materially with his view, that he was unable to see road crossings and frequently sounded the whistle as an alarm, and he said he was operating his train by his watch. At 4.40 a.m. he sounded the station whistle for Selden and then sounded the meeting point whistle signal, shut off steam and made an application of the air brakes. While running at a speed of about 25 miles an hour his engine passed the switch at which his train should have entered the passing track, and he said he at once applied the air brakes in emergency. Soon afterwards he saw the headlight on the engine of train No. 6 and sounded a back-up signal. Engineman Boyle said the air brakes on his train were operating properly and that there were no defects which could have contributed to the accident which, he said, was due to his being lost in the fog. He further stated that the instructions were that each crew would open the switch it intended to use, and that he would not have the right to anticipate finding a switch open in readiness for his train to enter a passing track. His statements concerning the operation of his train were practically corroborated by those of Fireman Copeland.

Engineman Ryan, of train No. 6, said he did not see the headlight on the engine of train No. 39 until after it had passed the switch, and that he then tried to back his train out of the way. He estimated the range of vision at Selden to have been about 150 feet, and said that while his train was en route to Selden, he had at times had some difficulty in determining his location. Conductor Leyden estimated that his train had been standing about one minute when it was struck by train No. 39.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Boyle, of train No. 39, properly to obey a train order establishing a meeting point.

Engineman Boyle should have so operated his train as to be able to stop and head in at the east passing-track switch at Selden. He became lost in the fog, however, and instead of so reducing the speed of his train as to make sure of operating it in safety, he proceeded without knowing definitely his location, the result being that when his engine reached the switch, the speed was too great to enable him to stop in time to avert the accident.

Engineman Boyle was employed as an engine wiper in 1874 and had been an engineman since 1880. None of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director.