

~~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 NEAR WHEATLEY,  
ARK., ON JANUARY 5, 1926.

March 19, 1926.

To the Commission

On January 5, 1926, there was a rear-end collision between a Cotton Belt freight train and a Rock Island freight train on the tracks of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway near Wheatley, Ark., resulting in the death of one employee, and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on Sub-Division 52, Arkansas-Louisiana Division, extending between Memphis, Tenn., and Little Rock, Ark., a distance of 132.9 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, no block-signal system being in use. The point of accident was 1,592 feet east of the east passing-track switch, or approximately  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles east of the station at Wheatley, approaching this point from the east the track is tangent and practically level for more than 18 miles. Following movements are spaced 10 minutes apart, except in closing up at stations, or at meeting and passing points. The passing track, 4,801.6 feet in length, parallels the main track on the south, the west switch of this passing track is 197.4 feet east of the station.

There was a dense fog at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 1.25 a. m.

Description

Westbound Rock Island freight train No. 997 consisted of 48 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1738, and was in charge of Conductor Zellers and Engineman Bailey. This train passed Goodwin, 5.5 miles east of Wheatley and the last open office, at 1.12 a. m., according to the train sheet, one hour and five minutes late. While passing this point the crew picked up copy of train

order No. 1, Form 19, reading in part as follows.

"Extra CB 571 East meet  
No 997 Eng 1738 and  
No 695 Eng CB 555 at Wheatley\*\*\*".

The train reached Wheatley and was heading in at the east switch of the passing track, moving at a speed estimated to have been between 5 and 8 miles an hour, when the rear end of the train was struck by Cotton Belt train No. 695.

Westbound Cotton Belt freight train No. 695 consisted of 35 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 555, and was in charge of Conductor Hutson and Engineman Jennings. This train passed Goodwin at 1.18 a. m., according to the operator, 3 hours and 20 minutes late, at which point the crew picked up copy of train order No. 1, previously quoted, together with a clearance card, which stated that train No. 997 had passed at 1.12 a. m. and which also contained instructions for train No. 695 not to leave Goodwin before 1.22 a. m. The crew of train No. 695, however, did not comply with the clearance-card instructions but proceeded westward and on reaching a point 1,592 feet east of the east switch of the passing track at Wheatley their train collided with the rear end of train No. 997 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 12 and 30 miles an hour.

The caboose of train No. 997 was demolished, while four other cars in this train were derailed and damaged. Engine 555 was derailed to the left and came to rest leaning toward the south, its head end being about 300 feet west of the point of collision, neither the tender nor any of the cars in train No. 695 were derailed. The employee killed was a special agent, who was riding in the caboose of train No. 997.

#### Summary of evidence

Conductor Zellers, of train No. 997, stated that his train came to a stop at Wheatley at 1.23 a. m., then backed up about one car-length, after which it started forward again, and was entering the passing track at a speed of about 5 or 6 miles an hour when the collision occurred, at 1.25 a. m. He was standing on the rear platform of the caboose and the first he knew of anything wrong was on seeing the headlight of train No. 695 appear through the fog; he thought it was moving at a speed of 30 miles an hour when the accident occurred. Conductor Zellers said the engineman of his own train did not whistle out a flag until after the accident had occurred, that no fusees had been thrown off prior to the accident, that his flagman did not start back to flag until after the train started to head in on the passing track, and that the flagman had

gotten back about four or five car-lengths when the headlight of train No. 695 appeared. Conductor Zellers further stated that he did not instruct his flagman to throw off fuses when his train began to slow down as it approached Wheatley, because he did not think it was necessary and also because he had no reason to believe that train No. 695 would follow his train to Wheatley ahead of train No. 111, a first-class westbound train due at Goodwin at 1.26 a. m. and at Wheatley at 1.32 a. m. He also said it was not his practice to send a flagman back to protect while his train was pulling into a passing track unless a following first-class train was due out of the next station in the rear, and while he thought his train would have been into clear at Wheatley at the time train No. 111 was due out of Goodwin, according to the time-table schedule, yet he admitted that his train should have been into clear at 1.22 a. m., 10 minutes in advance of the scheduled time of train No. 111 at Wheatley, or else have been protected by flag. The statements of Flagman Crownover, who had been examined as a conductor, practically corroborated those of Conductor Zellers, except that at the time his train stopped at Wheatley he was of the opinion there was time enough to go to Brinkley, 4.7 miles west of Wheatley, ahead of train No. 111, and he said he would have thrown off fuses had he known his train was going to enter the passing track at Wheatley. He also said it was his understanding of the rules that in this instance he was only required to protect against train No. 111 after 1.26 a. m., the time that train was scheduled to pass Goodwin.

Engineman Bailey said that on account of the fog he ran by the east passing-track switch a distance of about one car-length, after which he backed up to clear the switch and then headed in on the passing track, the engine and about 10 cars being on the passing track when the accident occurred. He also said that he sounded the whistle signal for the flagman to protect the train but did not remember when this signal was sounded, Fireman Calhoun said the signal was sounded after the train started to enter the passing track, while Head Brakeman Gray said it was sounded before the train backed up to clear the switch.

Engineman Jennings, of train No. 695, stated that his engine passed the station at Goodwin at 1.16 a. m., and that the operator handed on a copy of train order No. 1 together with a clearance card which required his train to wait until 1.22 a. m. before proceeding. He intended to head in at the east passing-track switch, located about 8 or 10 car-lengths west of the train-order signal, but

on receiving a proceed signal from some one and on seeing an eastbound extra occupying the eastern end of the passing track he continued westward, intending to pull by and back in at the west switch. Then he realized that there was not enough room to back into clear with the other train standing on the passing track and decided he could go to Wheatley and clear the leaving time of train No. 111 at Goodwin. He said he passed the west switch of the passing track at 1.18 a. m. without having made a stop, and that his train was approaching Wheatley, drifting at a speed of about 20 miles an hour, when he saw the markers on the rear of the caboose of train No. 997, apparently about four car-lengths distant, he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency and got down into the gangway preparatory to getting off, and it was at this time that he saw a man on the rear end of the caboose with a burning fusee but he did not see any one between his engine and the caboose. Engineman Jennings further stated that when he departed from Goodwin at 1.18 a. m. he knew that train No. 111 was due out of Palestine, the next station in the rear, at 1.17 a. m., and that he should have been into clear at Goodwin at 1.17 a. m. or else have been protected by flag; he also admitted that he violated the clearance-card instructions by leaving Goodwin before 1.22 a. m. but thought it would be safer to go to Wheatley, and let the conductor throw off fusees en route, than it would be to pull by and back in on the passing track at Goodwin. It also appeared from his statements that he knew that train No. 997 was just ahead but he expected that they would protect themselves by throwing off fusees.

The statements of Fireman Hopkins and Head Brakeman Blevins brought out nothing additional of importance except that the fireman said he did not see a red fusee but that he did see someone on the caboose platform with a white lantern, while the head brakeman said that just after the caboose markers came in sight he saw some one light a fusee.

Conductor Hutson, of train No. 695, stated that his train passed the station at Goodwin at 1.16 a. m. and that the operator handed on a copy of train order No. 1, together with a clearance card which directed his train to remain at Goodwin until 1.22 a. m. He contemplated backing in at the west switch and said he endeavored to stop his train by giving the engineman a stop signal with a red fusee, but seeing that there was not enough room on the passing track, and that the engineman was not going to stop, he threw off the fusee in the immediate vicinity of the caboose of the train which was then standing on the passing track. Conductor Hutson took no action toward bringing the train to a stop by means of

the conductor's emergency valve, saying he thought less delay and better protection would be afforded by proceeding to Wheatley and heading in at the east switch of the passing track at that point, and he admitted that he violated the clearance-card instructions not to leave Goodwin before 1.22 a. m.

Flagman Kelly had been left at a previous station, and Middle Brakeman Redden, who was acting as flagman, stated that after his train passed the station at Goodwin the conductor told him to be ready to flag when they backed in at the west switch of the passing track for train No. 111, and when about half way between the east and west switches the conductor endeavored without success to transmit a stop signal to the engineman by waving a red fusee, and then threw off the fusee near the west switch of the passing track. Flagman Kelly had been picked up by train No. 111 and was riding on the engine of that train; he said that at Goodwin train No. 111 was stopped by a burning fusee, opposite the caboose of the eastbound freight train which was standing on the passing track.

Operator Pope, on duty at Goodwin at the time of the accident, stated that train No. 997 actually passed his station at 1.12 a. m., and that train No. 695 passed at 1.18 a. m., but when reporting the trains to the dispatcher he gave their respective times as 1.08 and 1.18 a. m., respectively, in order that the records would show the trains as having been spaced 10 minutes apart, and then informed the dispatcher that he had given the wrong time on train No. 997. The clearance card he delivered with train order No. 1 to the crew of train No. 695, however, contained the information that train No. 997 passed Goodwin at 1.12 a. m. and instructed them not to leave before 1.22 a. m. He handed on the train order and clearance card to the head and rear ends of train No. 695 as it passed the station, so that the train could pull by and back in at the west switch for train No. 111.

Dispatcher Flowers stated that Operator Pope first reported train No. 997 as passing Goodwin at 1.08 a. m.; later he reported train No. 695 as arriving at 1.12 a. m. and train No. 111 as passing at 1.26 a. m., and at the time he reported train No. 695 the operator said he thought that that train had dropped off a flag and backed in on the passing track. After learning of the accident, at about 2.25 a. m., he talked with Operator Pope, inquiring of the operator as to whether or not the correct time had been given on these trains and if not to give the exact time on each train, and at this time the operator informed him that trains Nos. 997, 695, and 111 had passed Goodwin at 1.12, 1.18, and 1.28 a. m., respectively. In the meantime, when Operator Pope first reported train No. 111

the dispatcher assured that train No. 695 would follow that train and made the entry on his train sheet to show train No. 695 as departing from Goodwin at 1.40 a. m.; as a result of his subsequent conversation with the operator, however, he changed his records to show train No. 997 as having passed Goodwin at 1.12 a. m., train No. 695 as having arrived at 1.18 a. m., and train No. 111 as having passed at 1.28 a. m.

### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Zellers and Flagman Crownover, of train No. 997, to afford proper flag protection, and by the failure of Engineman Jennings and Conductor Hutson, of train No. 695, to remain at Goodwin until the time specified in the clearance card.

Conductor Zellers said he had no reason to believe that train No. 695 would follow his train to Wheatley ahead of train No. 111 and that it had not been his practice to afford protection when heading into a passing track unless a following first-class train was due out of the preceding station. He admitted, however, that his train should have been clear of the main track at Wheatley at 1.28 a. m., 10 minutes in advance of train No. 111, or else have been protected by flag. Flagman Crownover said he thought his train had time enough to go to Brinkley, 4.7 miles west of Wheatley, for train No. 111, and that had he known his train was going to enter the passing track at Wheatley he would have thrown off fuses. Had either of these employees thrown off fuses when their train reduced speed preparatory to heading in on the passing track, the accident probably would have been averted.

Engineman Jennings and Conductor Hutson said their train passed the west switch of the passing track at Goodwin at about 1.18 a. m., in spite of the fact that the clearance card instructed them not to leave Goodwin before 1.22 a. m. Engineman Jennings said he did not think there was room enough for his train on the passing track at Goodwin, owing to the fact that an eastbound extra was then occupying the passing track, also that, instead of backing in at the west switch, it would be safer on account of the fog, to go to Wheatley and be in to clear at that point by the time at which train No. 111 was due at Goodwin. Conductor Hutson said it was his intention to back in at the west switch of the passing track at Goodwin and let train No. 111 pass, and that he endeavored to stop his train by giving the engineman a stop signal with a lighted red fusee while approaching the west switch at Goodwin. When he definitely determined that the engineman was not going to stop, however, instead of applying the air brakes from the rear of the train he decided that his train could reach Wheatley with less delay and be

afforded better protection than by backing in at Goodwin. Had train No. 695 remained at Goodwin until the time specified in the clearance card, 1.22 a. m., the crew undoubtedly would not have proceeded until after train No. 111 had passed, in which event the accident would not have occurred.

Had an adequate block-signal system been in use on this line, this accident probably would not have occurred; an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

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. BORLAND  
Director.