

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
DETROIT UNITED LINES AT SUNNY, MICH., ON AUGUST 19, 1925.

December 24, 1925.

To the Commission:

On August 19, 1925, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a work train on the Detroit United Lines at Sunny, Mich., resulting in the death of 1 passenger, and the injury of 16 passengers and 1 employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Flint Division extending between Hawken and Flint, Mich., a distance of 38.57 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 accident occurred on the spur track at Sunny, 175 feet north of the switch; approaching this point from the south there is a $6^{\circ} 37'$ curve to the left 561 feet in length, followed by 1,603.4 feet of tangent, the switch leading to the spur being located on this tangent at a point 821.7 feet from its southern end. The grade for northbound trains is level for about 1,200 feet and then 1.41 per cent descending for 875 feet to the point of accident.

The spur at Sunny is a stub-end track 783 feet in length, paralleling the main track on the west. The switch is a facing-point switch for northbound trains and the switch stand is equipped with a standard 10 feet 3 inches above the switch ties; the switch lamp is burning at all times. The banner is of the semaphore type, 46 inches in length, 6 inches in width at the point where it is attached to the mast and tapering to 8 inches in width at the ends, painted red, and is plainly visible for more than 1,600 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 3.31 p.m.

Description

Work extra 7761 consisted of motor car 7761, in charge of Conductor Kent and Motorman Mead. This train departed from Goodrich, 3.01 miles north of Sunny, with instructions to work extra between Goodrich and Sunny, after performing work between these points work extra 7761 proceeded to Sunny to clear train No. 207 and backed in on the spur at that point, but the crew

failed to close the switch, and while standing at this point the train was struck by train No. 207.

Northbound passenger train No. 207, consisted of motor car 7068 in charge of Conductor Hutchins and Motorman Ford. This train departed from Ortonville, 2.44 miles south of Sunny, at 3.26 p.m., on time, entered the switch leading to Sunny spur and collided with work extra 7761 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 20 miles an hour.

Neither car was derailed, but work extra 7761 was driven backward a distance of 250 feet by the force of the impact, and the south platform of the work car overrode and penetrated the head end of the passenger car destroying the vestibule and entering the smoking compartment a distance of about 1 foot.

Summary of evidence

Line Foreman Kent, of work extra 7761, on this particular day was also acting as conductor. He stated that on the arrival of his train at Sunny spur he opened the switch and at that time noticed a defective ground wire on the switch stand. The work extra was backed in on the spur track and brought to a stop about opposite the switch stand while he repaired the defective ground wire, after which he boarded the car and it was backed into clear on the spur. Line Foreman Kent admitted that it was his duty to close the switch and that he failed to do so, giving as his reason for overlooking this duty the fact that the ground wire was on his mind and after repairing it he entirely overlooked the switch. He said he then began cleaning out the car and the first he knew of anything wrong was on seeing train No. 207 approaching on the spur about 25 or 30 feet distant, moving at a speed of about 20 miles an hour, the accident occurring immediately afterwards. Line Foreman Kent further stated that it required about one or two minutes to repair the defective ground wire, and that the work extra had been standing on the spur about six or seven minutes prior to the collision. The statements of Motorman Mead corroborated in substance those of Line Foreman Kent, he also stated that he never noticed that the switch had been left open, and that after backing the car into clear he got off, went across a nearby highway and was about 400 feet from the car when the accident occurred.

Motorman Ford, of train No. 207, stated that he first saw the line car when his own car had reached the beginning of the descending grade, traveling at a speed of about 50 miles an hour, he then saw the stop indication displayed by the switch target and also the open switch and at once applied the air brakes, shouted a warning of danger to the passengers, and when about a pole length distant from the work extra he reversed the motor, jumping just before the collision occurred, at which time he estimated the speed to have been about 20 miles an hour. He also said that there was nothing to obstruct

his view of the switch target and that the air brakes on his car worked properly. Motorman Ford admitted that he was supposed to operate under control when passing over switches, and he recalled having read a bulletin in this connection, under date of October 30, 1923.

Conductor Hutchins, of train No. 207, stated that he was near the rear of his car and the first he knew of anything wrong was when the air brakes were applied in emergency, when about 700 feet from the switch, following which, about 100 feet beyond, the motor was reversed. He immediately endeavored to reach the rear end of the car to ascertain the trouble, but could make no progress against the force created by the slackening of the speed. The car entered the switch and collided with the line car at a speed estimated by him to have been about 20 miles an hour.

Conductor Carlton, who was deadheading on train No. 207, riding in the smoking compartment, stated that the first he knew of anything wrong was when the air brakes were applied in emergency when the car was about 300 feet from Sunny Spur, at which time he said it was traveling at a speed of about 40 or 50 miles an hour. Conductor Carlton further stated that Motorman Ford shouted a warning of danger prior to reaching the switch, but as there was a passenger standing at the front door Conductor Carlton did not see the work extra until it was only 20 feet distant.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to close the switch leading to the spur, for which Conductor Kent and Motorman Mead, of work extra 7761 are responsible; a contributing cause was the failure of Motorman Ford, of train No. 207, to maintain a proper lookout and approach the switch under control as required.

Conductor Kent and Motorman Mead, of the work extra admitted their responsibility in failing to close the switch after the defective ground wire on the switch stand had been repaired and their car had been backed in on the spur track.

A test showed that Motorman Ford, of the passenger train, could have plainly seen the position of the switch target for a distance of more than 1,600 feet; had he been maintaining a proper lookout and controlled the speed of his car accordingly when approaching the switch, he would easily have been able to stop before reaching the open switch.

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 the employees involved were experienced men, but the record of Motorman Ford was not good. None of the em-

ployees had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director.