

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
DETROIT, JACKSON & CHICAGO RAILWAY, DETROIT UNITED
LINES, AT AUSTIN, MICH., ON MARCH 11, 1928.

March 28, 1928.

To the Commission:

On March 11, 1928, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Detroit, Jackson & Chicago Railway, Detroit United Lines, at Austin, Mich., resulting in the death of 1 passenger, and the injury of 24 passengers and 1 employee.

Location and method of operation

The Detroit, Jackson & Chicago Railway is an electric line extending between Detroit and Jackson, Mich., a distance of 78.46 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 at a point about 875 feet east of the east switch of Austin siding, approaching the point of accident from the west the track is tangent for 1,413 feet and then there is a 3° reverse curve with a total length of 280 feet, followed by 2,600 feet of tangent, the accident occurring on this tangent at a point about 87 feet from its western end. The grade for eastbound trains is practically level for a distance of about 500 feet east of the east switch of Austin siding, then it is 3.3 per cent descending for 300 feet, followed by 75 feet of 4 per cent ascending grade to the point of accident, and for about 225 feet beyond that point.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 12.03 p.m.

Description

Westbound passenger train second No. 161 consisted of motor 7092, of steel-underframe construction, and was in charge of Conductor Oelke and Motorman Seitz. At Bender, 11.53 miles east of Austin, the crew received a copy of order No. 24, containing instructions to meet train No. 158, car 7063, at Austin. Train second No. 161

left Bender at 11.41 a.m., 13 minutes late, and was approaching Austin when it collided with train No. 158 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 4 miles per hour.

Eastbound passenger train No. 158 consisted of motor 7063, of wooden construction, and was in charge of Conductor Bauer and Motorman Burrows. At Cook, 1.89 miles west of Austin, train first No. 161 was met, as per time-table schedule. At this point the crew of train No. 158 received a copy of train order No. 25, directing that train to meet train second No. 161, car 7092, at Austin. Train No. 158 left Cook at 11.59 a.m., two minutes late, passed Austin without stopping and collided with train second No. 161 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 15 and 25 miles per hour.

Neither motor was derailed, but motor 7092 telescoped motor 7063 a distance of about 15 feet, the front ends of both cars being destroyed.

Summary of evidence

Motorman Burrows, of train No. 158, stated that his train met the first section of train No. 161 at Cook. Signals were properly exchanged, and the dispatcher was then called by telephone and an order received to meet train second No. 161 at Austin, this order was personally repeated by him to the dispatcher. After leaving Cook, Conductor Bauer rode in the motorman's vestibule but Motorman Burrows did not remember what conversation took place between them. Motorman Burrows said that his train had passed the east switch at Austin before he realized that a mistake had been made, and that train second No. 161 was about 500 feet distant when he first saw it, Conductor Bauer also shouted a warning of danger, the accident occurring shortly afterwards. Motorman Burrows estimated the speed of his train to have been about 15 miles per hour at the time of the accident. It further appeared from his statements that to the best of his knowledge the air brakes and motor on his car worked properly en route, and he said that he intended to fulfill the meet order and admitted that the accident was caused by failure to do so.

Conductor Bauer, of train No. 158, stated that after meeting the first section of train No. 161 at Cook, and exchanging signals he wrote out the order received from the dispatcher to meet the second section at Austin. When leaving Cook he talked with the motorman about the second section of train No. 161 for a minute or so and then stepped back out of the vestibule. He said he thought that the motorman said something and went back

into the vestibule with his switch key in his hand for the purpose of opening the west switch at Austin siding. He then realized that his train was passing Austin and shouted to the motorman, "hold her", at the same time starting back through the car with the intention of having the car back up, and he said he had reached the rear door when the accident occurred, at which time the speed was not over 25 miles per hour. He did not know whether the power was shut off, the motor reversed, or whether an emergency air-brake application was made prior to the accident. Conductor Bauer said that when he realized his location he knew that at the rate of speed at which his train was traveling it could not be stopped before passing the east switch, and his idea was to have the car back up, having no thought of an accident. Conductor Bauer had not forgotten the meeting point and he was of the opinion that he had made every effort possible within the time at his disposal to have the motorman bring the car to a stop, he did not, however, know whether the motorman understood what was meant when he said "hold her" and said that he should have been more specific in this respect. Conductor Bauer admitted that had he paid more attention to the location of the train when it was approaching Austin he would have had plenty of time in which to have taken action toward bringing the train to a stop.

The statements of Motorman Seitz and Conductor Oelke, of train second No. 161, were to the effect that on approaching Austin they noticed train No. 158, first between the switches of the siding and then it passed the east switch and they were of the opinion that it was going to back in at the east switch, but instead of so doing it continued on the main track and down the hill. Motorman Seitz then reversed the motor and he estimated that the speed of his train had been reduced to about 4 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order, for which Motorman Burrows and Conductor Bauer are responsible.

Motorman Burrows acknowledged his part of the responsibility for the accident, saying that his train had passed the east switch at Austin before he realized that a mistake had been made. Conductor Bauer maintained that he had not forgotten the meeting point and was of the opinion that he made every effort possible within the time at his disposal to have his car brought to a stop; he admitted, however, that had he paid more attention to the location of his train when it was

approaching Austin he would have had ample time in which to have taken action toward bringing his train to a stop. The order in question was received within four minutes of the time of the accident and had either of these employees been paying proper attention to their duties this 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.

Motorman Burrows entered the service of this railway March 7, 1923, on June 3, 1926, he was suspended for overrunning his orders. Conductor Bauer entered the service February 24, 1910, on March 2, 1914, he was removed from service for overrunning orders, being reinstated on September 16, 1914. At the time of the accident Motorman Burrows had been on duty 21 minutes and Conductor Bauer 5 hours and 53 minutes, prior to which they had been off duty for 12 hours. The conductor and motorman of train second No. 161 had been on duty 1 hour and 43 minutes, prior to which they had been off duty 16 hours and 35 minutes, and 18 hours and 15 minutes, respectively.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director.