

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE EASTERN MICHIGAN RAILWAY AT ORTONVILLE, MICH.,
ON JUNE 2, 1929.

September 30, 1929.

To the Commission

On June 2, 1929, there was a collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Eastern Michigan Railway at Ortonville, Mich., which resulted in the injury of 60 passengers and 1 employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Flint Division, which extends between Flint and Detroit, Mich., a distance of 63.09 miles, and in the vicinity of the point of accident is a single-track electric line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. At Ortonville there is a spur track known as the "stock track," paralleling the main track on the west. The switch is a facing-point switch for northbound trains and leads off the main track to the left at a point 1,100 feet north of the station. The accident occurred on the stock track at a point 201.5 feet north of the switch; approaching the switch from the south, beginning at the station, the track is tangent for a distance of 296.1 feet, followed by a $4^{\circ} 45'$ curve to the left 754.4 feet in length, from which point the track is tangent to the switch, a distance of 50 feet, and for some distance beyond that point. The grade is practically level at the point of accident.

The switch stand at the stock-track switch is located on the east or right side of the main track. The target is 7 feet 6 inches above the head-block ties and has blades 14 inches wide and $31\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, which display a red indication when the switch is open and green when it is closed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 5.09 a.m.

Description

Northbound freight train extra 2000 consisted of six cars loaded with gravel, hauled by motor 2000, and was in charge of Conductor Miller and Motorman Peters. This train left Oxford, 9.99 miles south of Ortonville, at 4.10 p.m., passed the station at Ortonville at about 5.03 p.m., entered the stock track and was brought to a stop, but before the switch could be closed the rear end of the train was struck by train No. 19.

Northbound passenger train No. 19 consisted of motor 7534, and was in charge of Conductor Dunn and Motorman Barron. This train departed from Rochester, 23.18 miles south of Ortonville, at 4.25 p.m., on time, departed from Ortonville at about 5.08 p.m., one minute late, entered the open switch leading to the stock track and collided with extra 2000 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 15 and 25 miles per hour.

Motor 7534 was not derailed but its forward end was telescoped for a distance of about $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet and all of the seats were torn loose. The rear car in extra 2000 had its rear truck derailed and was slightly damaged. The employee injured was the motorman of train No. 19.

Summary of evidence

Motorman Peters, of extra 2000, stated that his train passed the station at Ortonville at 5.04 p.m., and at that time he told the conductor to get off and protect until he could get into clear on the stock track for train No. 19. After opening the switch of that track he moved the train in on the spur and brought it to a stop with its rear end about one car-length beyond the clearance point. He then got off and started back to close the switch but when still about one car-length north of the rear end of his train he observed train No. 19 approaching, about 200 or 250 feet from the switch. He hurried towards the switch but as the approaching train was traveling at a high rate of speed he realized he could not reach the switch before the train arrived at that point so he threw up both hands as a warning. He estimated the speed of train No. 19 at the time it entered the siding at 25 miles per hour, although the motor was reversed, and he thought this had reduced the speed to about 15 miles per hour at the time of the accident. He also said that a clear view of a train standing on the stock track could be had from an approaching northbound train for a distance of about 200 feet and that the position of the switch could be plainly seen for a distance of between 400 and 500 feet, further view is obstructed by some buildings, trees and poles on the inside of the curve.

Conductor Miller, of extra 2000, stated that his train passed Brandon, 2.7 miles south of Ortonville and the last switch south of the latter point, at 4.53 p.m., and consumed 10 minutes in running to Ortonville although it usually requires only about six minutes. As the rules required that his train clear the time of the superior train five minutes it was decided that he should get off at the station and provide flag protection until his train could enter the stock track. When train No. 19 arrived at the station he informed the motorman of that train that his own train would clear at the stock track and that it had had about time enough to get into clear but that the motorman should watch out for it, which instructions were acknowledged by the motorman. Conductor Miller then entered the telephone booth and called the dispatcher for an order to meet another train and was still in the booth when he heard the impact of the collision. He said that he usually acts as motorman and that in his opinion a train should not be operated at a speed of more than 20 miles per hour in order to bring it to a stop short of the stock-track switch, as there are trees and poles obstructing a clear view of the switch.

Motorman Barron, of train No. 19, stated that while his train was standing at Ortonville station he was notified by Conductor Miller of the gravel train that that train would clear at the stock track and that it had had about time enough in which to clear. His own train proceeded from the station at moderate speed, as he was expecting to find the gravel train on the main track, but when the latter train came into view he observed that it was in the clear although he failed to notice that the switch was open until it was too late to stop, although he reversed the motor in an effort to do so.

Conductor Dunn, of train No. 19, stated that his train departed from Ortonville about on time and as it was leaving he noticed Conductor Miller pass around the rear end of the car carrying a flag, which indicated to him that the gravel train was clearing near that point. He was standing near the rear door as his car approached the point of accident and just before reaching the stock-track switch the motor of his car was reversed, upon looking back he noticed that the car had entered the siding, the collision occurring immediately afterwards. Conductor Dunn said he noticed no unusual speed after departing from the station and thought the train had attained a speed of 20 or 25 miles per hour at the time the motor was reversed, which action did not reduce the speed to any extent as it caused the wheels to slide; he did not feel any air-brake application prior to the time the motor was reversed.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Motorman Barron, of train No. 19, properly to control the speed of his train approaching a passing point.

The rules provide that all trains must approach a meeting or passing point under full control, and must not attempt to pass until the switch is seen to be right and the train to be met or passed is clear of the main track. According to the evidence, Motorman Barron had been notified by Conductor Miller that the latter's train would clear at the stock track, and he had this fact in mind at the time his train approached the passing point, but while he saw the gravel train in the clear he failed to notice that the switch was open until it was too late to prevent the accident. Although his view of the switch was restricted, there is no reason why he could not have stopped his train from a moderate rate of speed had he noticed the open switch when it came within his range of vision.

The employees involved were experienced men and at the time of the accident they had not been on duty contrary to any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.