

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE FORT WAYNE-LIMA RAILROAD NEAR MIDDLEPOINT, OHIO, ON AUGUST 21, 1923.

December 5, 1929.

To the Commission:

On August 21, 1929, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Fort Wayne-Lima Railroad, operated by the Indiana Service Corporation, near Middlepoint, Ohio, which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of five employees.

Location and method of operation

This railroad is an electric line which extends between Fort Wayne, Ind., and Lima, Ohio, a distance of 64.7 miles, and 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 half way between France Siding and Gamble Siding, which are located 1 mile and 2.7 miles, respectively, west of Middlepoint. Approaching the point of accident from the east the track is tangent for a distance of 3,260.8 feet, followed by a  $0^{\circ} 8'$  curve to the right 400 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 124 feet from its western end, approaching from the west there is a  $0^{\circ} 15'$  curve to the left 393.4 feet in length, tangent track for a distance of 806.1 feet, and then the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for westbound trains is generally ascending for a distance of 2,000 feet, reaching a maximum of 0.48 per cent at the point of accident and extending for a distance of 150 feet beyond; it is then generally descending for a distance of 2,400 feet, the maximum descending grade being .46 per cent.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4.28 a.m.

Description

Westbound freight train extra 763 consisted of seven cars, hauled by motor 763, and was in charge of Conductor Brown and Motorman Mitchell. At Lima this train received train order No. 10, directing it to run extra from Grand Avenue to Fort Wayne, and to report to the dispatcher at France Siding. This train departed from Lima, 31.4 miles east of France Siding, at 3.39 a.m., passed France Siding without stopping, and collided with extra 853 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been from 25 to 40 miles per hour.

Eastbound freight train extra 853 consisted of four empty side-dump cars, of all-steel construction, hauled by motor 853, and was in charge of Conductor Johnson and Motorman DeWitt. This train departed from Fort Wayne at 2.55 a.m. and at Conroy, 24.1 miles from Fort Wayne, received an order to meet extra 763 at Gamble Siding, which is located 12.5 miles beyond that point. On arriving at Gamble Siding, the crew received train order No. 15 providing for a meet with extra 763 west at France Siding instead of Gamble Siding, which order was made complete at 4.26 a.m. Extra 853 started for France Siding, an additional distance of 1.7 miles, and although the reflection of the headlight of extra 763 was visible for a distance of about 2 miles, yet the location of extra 763 was not definitely decided as being west of France Siding until the two trains were about 1,000 feet apart. Extra 853 was brought to a stop before the collision occurred.

Both motor cars were demolished and two box cars in extra 763 were considerably damaged. The employee killed was the motorman of extra 763, while those injured were the conductor and brakeman of extra 763 and the motorman, conductor and brakeman of extra 853.

#### Summary of evidence

Conductor Brown, of extra 763, stated that when he received train order No. 10, requiring his train to report at France Siding, he repeated it to the dispatcher and then gave it to the motorman, who read it aloud to him. He then informed the brakeman of its contents. Conductor Brown was thoroughly familiar with the location of the telephone, about 500 feet east of the east switch at France Siding, which was a facing-point switch for his train, but on approaching this siding he was dozing and did not awaken until just an instant before the collision occurred. He was riding in the front end of the motor and when he looked up and saw the approaching train he called to the motorman, but he did not know whether or not the motorman was also asleep. A brake test had been made at Lima and the brakes worked properly en route, but they were not applied prior to the collision. Conductor Brown further stated that he was in good physical condition and did not feel tired when he went on duty at 10.30 p.m. on August 20.

Brakeman Court, of extra 763, stated that at the time of the accident he was sitting in the motor car, examining bills and reports for the purpose of learning the work for a conductor's position, and while he is fairly well acquainted with the sidings and telephone booths on that division, he was not paying any attention as to the location of his train. The conductor had said something to him about reporting at France or Cewe, the latter station being west of Gamble, but he was not sure which place was meant and did

not concern himself about the matter, and it also appeared that while he usually reads the orders himself, yet in this instance he made no effort to obtain information as to the contents of the orders. He stated that there was considerable noise in the car, which made it difficult to hear any conversation between the motorman and conductor, although he heard them at times, but he did not hear any sounds of conversation after they passed Middlepoint. Brakenen Court estimated the speed of their train at the time of the accident to have been between 25 and 30 miles per hour.

Motorman DeWitt, of extra 853, stated that after leaving Gamble Siding, where he received an order providing a meet with extra 763 at France Siding, his train attained a speed between 20 and 25 miles per hour, and when he discovered that extra 763 had passed France Siding, he shut off the controller and applied the air brakes, the train being brought to a stop before the collision occurred. He estimated the speed of the opposing train to have been between 35 and 40 miles per hour.

Conductor Johnson, of extra 853, thought that the arc light of extra 763 was visible for a distance of about 2 miles, and he said that as soon as the motorman realized that the opposing extra had passed France Siding, he commenced to reduce speed, Conductor Johnson estimating the distance between the two trains at that time to have been 1,000 feet. The conductor also stated that he turned off the headlight on his own car just before the accident occurred, at this latter time his own train had about come to a stop, while he estimated the speed of the opposing train to have been about 40 miles per hour. The statements of Brakenen Harrison brought out nothing additional of importance, except that it had been the custom of the conductor to advise him of the orders they received, and in this case he had been informed by Conductor Johnson relative to the orders governing their movement and thoroughly understood them.

Train Dispatcher Young, located at Fort Wayne, stated that when extra trains leave their terminals they are given the order to run extra over the whole division, and if impossible to issue positive meet orders, he issues a positive order to report from certain sidings named in the order, which he did in this instance, and he said that this system is thoroughly understood by all concerned. Such an order restricts a movement beyond the designated point just as much as if a meet order had been issued.

Trainmaster Lentz stated that motor 763 was geared for a speed of 37½ miles per hour, and his examination of the car after the accident showed the controller in full multiple position and the brake valve in full release, and there was no evidence of sand having been used prior to the collision.

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Motorman Mitchell and Conductor Brown, of extra 763, to stop their train at a siding specified by train order, and obtain further orders before proceeding beyond that point.

The investigation disclosed that the crew of extra 763 received train order No. 10, directing them to run as an extra train, and to report at France Siding, orders of this type being used on this line as a matter of practice. It appeared, however, that on approaching France Siding, Conductor Brown was asleep and that he did not awaken until just before the collision occurred. The reason for the failure of Motorman Mitchell to bring his train to a stop at France Siding is unknown, as he was killed as a result of the accident, but it would appear that he also was asleep or he would have known when he passed France Siding and also would have seen the headlight on the approaching train. An examination of the car after the occurrence of the accident showed that the brakes had not been applied, nor had the sanders been used.

The evidence also disclosed that while Conductor Brown had told Brakeman Court of the contents of the order, the brakeman was unable to state whether they were to report to the dispatcher at France or at Cave. Had he obtained the correct information relative to this order, and had he not been so occupied in learning the clerical duties of a conductor that he failed to pay attention to the operation of his train, he would have been in a position to check up with the motorman and conductor when he saw that the train was not going to stop at France Siding.

All of the employees involved were experienced men with the exception of Brakeman Court, who entered the service of this railroad on July 11, 1929, and Brakeman Harrison, who entered the service on August 12, 1929, and none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law, Motorman Mitchell, of extra 763, had been on duty 7 hours at the time of the accident, after having been off duty 15 hours, and Conductor Brown had been on duty 6 hours, after having been off duty 15 hours.

Respectfully submitted,  
W. P. BORLAND,  
Director.