INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE HOCKING VALLEY RAILWAY AT CUMMINGS, OHIO, ON AUGUST 26, 1928.

November 30, 1928.

To the Commission:

On August 26, 1928, there was a side collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the Hocking Valley Railway at Cummings, Ohio, resulting in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 12 passengers, 3 persons carried under contract and 1 employee. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Ohio Commission of Public Utilities.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Toledo Division, extending between Toledo and Columbus, Ohio, a distance of 123 miles, in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred within yard limits at Cummings, at the north switch of a siding known as the second track; this siding parallels the main track on the east and extends between Cummings and LeMoyne, which station is 3.5 miles south of Cummings, and is used by all north-bound freight trains. Approaching the point of accident from either direction the track is tangent for about 1 mile, while the grade is practically level.

The clearance post governing northbound movements on the siding is located 878 feet inside of the south yard-limit board and 160 feet south of the point of frog of the north switch of the siding. There is a train-order board located just outside of the telegraph office, 118 feet north of the point of the frog. This office and all the fixed signals, including a manual-block signal located 266 feet north of the train-order signal, are located on the engineman's side of a north-bound train.

There was a very dense fog at the time of the accident, which occurred between 4.58 and 5 a.m.

Description

Northbound freight train first No. 67 consisted of 88 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 139, and was in charge of Conductor Weldon and Engineman Ept. This train entered the siding at LeMoyne and on arrival at Cummings, at about 4.56 a.m., it was not brought to a stop until the engine had fouled the main track. While standing at this point it was struck by train No. 30.

Southbound passenger train No. 30 consisted of one express car, one combination mail and baggage car, one coach, and two Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 92, and was in charge of Conductor White and Engineman Spaeth. The first three cars were of steel-underframe construction and the last two cars were of all steel construction. This train departed from Walbridge, the last open office, 3.1 miles north of Cummings, at 4.55 a.m., according to the train sheet, 23 minutes late, and collided with train first No. 67 at Cummings while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 25 and 50 miles per hour.

Engine 139, together with its tender, was derailed to the east but remained upright, coupled to the train. Engine 92 was derailed to the west and came to rest on its right side, opposite engine 139; the tender of engine 92 had its cistern torn from the frame. The first car in train No. 30 was destroyed while the forward end of the second car was slightly damaged. The employee killed was the fireman of train No. 30.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Ept, of train first No. 67, stated that he had encountered only a light fog until he reached an overhead bridge located about 5,000 feet south of the point of accident, but from that point northward the fog was very dense. The speed was between 8 and 10 miles per hour after passing the bridge, with the headlight burning brightly. Engineman Ept used the independent engine brake and kept a sharp lookout for the yard-limit board, but owing to the dense fog he did not locate it nor was he able to see the clearance post. He knew, however, that he was nearing the extreme north end of the siding and therefore made about a 20-pound brake-pipe reduction; after traveling about two car-lengths farther he saw a

coal shed which is located almost opposite the north switch and, definitely realizing that his train was going to foul the main track, he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, bringing the train to a stop with the left cylinder and front of the pilot beam of the engine fouling the main track. As soon as the stop was made, at 4.56 a.m., according to the engineman, he told Head Brakeman Robson to flag train No. 30; by this time the head brakeman who had been riding on the engine, was on the ground. Although the engine was properly equipped with flagging equipment, including fusees, torpedoes and red lantern, the engineman noticed that Head Brakeman Robson at first started away with only a white lantern and then returned and requested a red fusee. In the meantime Engineman Ept made two attempts to back the freight train into clear but was unable to do so. Engineman Ept then heard the engineman of train No. 30 sound the whistle for a nearby road crossing and told Fireman Akers to jump, while Head Brakeman Robson started running toward that train, too late to stop it. Engineman Ept fixed the time of the accident as 4.58 a.m. Engineman Ept further stated that the fog was so dense that he could not see the indication disolayed by the north switch lamp of the siding even after he had brought his train to a stop, although it was only 100 feet distant, nor could he see the other fixed signals, and he said he did not see the reflection of the headlight of train No. 30 until the engine of that train was about opposite the telegraph office. After the accident Engineman Ept proceeded to the telegraph office and then went north of the train-order signal and also the block signal and observed that at that time both of those signals were displaying stop indications. Engineman Ept acknowledged that he should have brought the train to a stop when he failed to locate the yard-limit board within the proper time after passing the overhead bridge.

Fireman Akers and Head Brakeman Robson, of train first No. 67, gave testimony practically similar to that of Engineman Ept as to the dense fog, visibility, speed of their train on the siding etc. After passing under the overhead bridge Fireman Akers started to knock down coal and did not know his exact location until the air brakes were applied and the train brought to a stop with the engine fouling the main track. He heard the engineman inform the head brakeman as to the situation and tell him to flag train No. 30; afterwards the head brakeman asked for a red fusee and the fireman was in the act of getting one from inside the seat box when the engineman shouted a warning of danger and the fireman jumped, with the fusee in his hand. Head Brakeman Robson said that he stood in the gangway on the right side of the engine maintaining a

lookout and although the head light was burning brightly he did not see the yard-limit board or any other fixed signal until the engine was passing the clearance post, which he saw and informed the engineman accordingly. Head Brakeman Robson said that he then got off the engine before it came to a full stop, taking his lantern with him, although there was a lighted red lantern in the cab with a torpedo attached to it, and was instructed by the engineman to flag train No. 30. On meeting Operator Turner at the telegraph office, the operator telling him that train No. 30 was out of Valbridge and that he had better flag, at the same time volunteering to do the flagging, Head Brakeman Robson went back to the engine cab and requested a red fusee. While waiting for the fusee the head brakeman heard the engine whistle sounded on train No. 30 and he then ran toward the approaching train and waved stop signals with his lantern, but he was only 10 feet north of his own engine when he had to get off the track. He thought the speed of train No. 30 when it passed him was about 50 miles per hour The head brakeman's statements as to the time of the accident, and also as to the positions of the train-order and block signals after the accident, agreed with those of Engineman Ept. Head Brakeman Robson knew that train No. 30 was due and also that his train had fouled the main track and said that under the existing conditions he should have provided himself with proper flagging equipment before leaving the engine in his endeavor to flag train No. 30.

The statements of Conductor Weldon and Flagman Bateman brought out nothing additional of importance.

Operator Turner, stationed at Cummings, stated that he observed the headlight of train first No. 67 as it appeared through the fog on its arrival at Cummings and realized that the engine was going to foul the main track before it was brought to a stop. He immediately changed the indication displayed by the block signal from proceed to stop for train No. 30 and then gave back-up signals to the crew of train first No. 67. Seeing that his back-up signals accomplished no purpose he called Assistant Yardmaster Gearhart by telephone, the yardmaster's office being located a little more than 1 mile north of the telegraph office, and requested him to flag train No. 30.

Just after Operator Turner hung up the telephone receiver Assistant Yardmaster Gerhart telephoned back and said he had been unable to get any response to his stop signals and Operator Turner then changed the indication displayed by the train-order signal from proceed to stop and as an additional precaution, owing to the dense fog, he picked up his white lantern and started out to flag train No. 30. Just as he got to the door of the office he met Head Brakeman Robson and he said he told the head brakeman to flag train No. 30, the head brakeman, however, started back to his own engine for proper flagging equipment and consequently Operator Turner ran toward the approaching train, waving stop signals with the lighted white lantern, and he said that he got as far as the road crossing, or about 300 feet from his office, and was on the fireman' side of the track when the engine of train No. 30 passed him. Operator Turner did not know the exact time at which train first No. 67 arrived, on account of being excited, but said it was about 4.56 or 4.57 a.m. and that it was about two minutes later when the accident occurred. Operator Turner further stated that the only flagging equipment in the telegraph office at Cummings consisted of white lanterns; that there was no red lantern in the office but that some red globes were in the locker, also that on this occasion the only effectual flagging signal would have been a fusee. Operator Turner was not aware the rules require that signalmen have proper appliances for hand signalling ready for immediate use.

Engineman Spaeth, of train No. 30, stated that there was some fog after leaving Walbridge and then it cleared up, but on reaching the yardmaster's office, located a little more than 1 mile north of the telegraph office at Cummings, at which time the speed of his train was about 45 miles per hour, a wall of fog was encountered. It grew very dense as the train neared Cummings and the speed was reduced; the air brakes then were released and the road crossing signal was sounded for the road crossing just north of the telegraph office. Engineman Spaeth said that on nearing the block signal the speed was between 30 and 35 miles per hour and that he told Fireman Kramer "now be sure and get the block" and the fireman called "clear block", Engineman Spaeth also looked for the indication displayed by the block signal but said he could not see it owing to the fog, he did see the train-order signal, however, when it was about two car-lengths distant, and he said that it was displaying a green or proceed indication. At about this time the fireman shouted "flag" and Engineman Spaeth at once made an emergency air brake application, the collision occurring immediately

distance of 3.1 miles, in less than four minutes, this opinion was confirmed by subsequent tests. It was also his opinion that under conditions similar to those that existed at the time of the accident, and with the train traveling at a speed of 35 miles per hour, it could not have been brought to a stop between the manual block-signal and the clearance post at Cummings in the event it was observed that a stop indication was displayed by that signal.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Ept, of train first No. 67, to bring his train to a stop on the siding before it fouled the main track.

Engineman Ept said the fog was very dense and that although he maintained a sharp lookout, with the headlight burning brightly and the speed of the train only 8 or 10 miles per hour, yet he could not locate the yard-limit board or the clearance post. He knew, however, that he was nearing the extreme north end of the siding and consequently made a service air brake application, immediately afterwards he definitely realized that the train was going to foul the main track and therefore applied the air brakes in emergency. He then made two attempts to back the train into clear but was unable to do so. Engineman Ept acknowledged that when he failed to locate the yard-limit board after passing under the overhead bridge he should have brought the train to a stop. Had this been done the accident would not have occurred.

Head Brakeman Robson got off to flag train No. 30 before his own train came to a full stop, taking only his lantern with him. After proceeding a short distance he returned to the engine in order to secure a red fusee but before he received the fusee from the fireman he heard the whistle of train No. 30 and ran towards it waving stop signals with his lantern; he stepped away from the track just before the collision occurred and said that at that time he was only 10 feet north of his own engine. Had Brakeman Robson provided himself with proper flagging equipment before starting away from his own engine it is possible he could have prevented the accident or at least have enabled the engineman of train No. 30 to reduce speed to a very material extent. Fireman Akers, instead

of assisting in maintaining a sharp lookout, began to knock down coal after passing under the overhead bridge and was unaware of his exact location until after the engine had been brought to a stop fouling the main track. Fireman Akers, as well as the head brakeman, failed to do all that could have been done when a situation arose calling for such action upon the part of all concerned.

The testimony is conflicting as to just what indications were displayed by the block signal and the train-order signal when train No. 30 approached and passed them, however, under the existing conditions and taking into consideration the rate of speed at which that train was traveling, it is extremely doubtful whether it could have been brought to a stop in time to have prevented the accident even were those signals displaying stop indications. Had Engineman Spaeth controlled the speed of his train approaching the block signal at Cummings, prepared to stop short of the signal in case it were in the stop position, the accident would not have occurred.

The investigation developed the fact that the operator's office at Cummings was not properly equipped with appliances ready for immediate use for hand signaling, as required by the rules. This situation, which appears to have existed for some time, is one which should be corrected at once.

The employees involved were experienced men, and 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.