

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD NEAR WOOSUNG, Ill., ON
JANUARY 23, 1930.

March 12, 1930

To the Commission:

On January 23, 1930, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Illinois Central Railroad near Woosung, Ill., resulting in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 13 passengers, 2 mail clerks, and 4 employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Amboy District of the Wisconsin Division, extending between Freeport and Clinton, Ill., a distance of 161.8 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 approximately 720 feet south of the south switch of the passing track at Woosung; the passing track is 4,604 feet in length and parallels the main track on the west. Approaching the point of accident from the south the track is tangent for more than 2 miles, followed by a 1° curve to the right 3,250 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point approximately 2,310 feet from its southern end, approaching from the north the track is tangent for more than 1 mile, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for northbound trains at the point of accident is 0.3 per cent ascending.

A view of the point of collision could be had from the engine cabs of the opposing trains, across the inside of the curve, for a distance of about $3/4$ mile.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at a time variously estimated to have been between 7.53 and 7.58 a.m.

Description

Southbound passenger train No. 129 consisted of one mail and baggage car, one baggage and express car and one coach, in the order named, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 1043, and was in charge of Conductor Curran and Engineman Edwards. While passing East Junction, 27.5 miles north of Woosung, at 7.05 a.m., according to the train sheet, two minutes late, a copy of train order No. 20, Form 19, was received, reading as follows:

"No 129 Eng 1043 Wait at Woosung until 7.55 am for First 178 Eng 2901".

Train No. 129 left Polo, the last open office, 6.1 miles north of Woosung, at 7.45 a.m., seven minutes late, and on arrival at Woosung a stop was made in order to take aboard one passenger, the depot being located near the north switch of the passing track. Train No. 129 departed from the depot at about 7.56 a.m., according to Conductor Curran, nine minutes late, passed the south switch, and collided with train first No. 178 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 30 miles per hour.

Northbound freight train first No. 178, at the time of the accident, consisted of 39 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2901, and was in charge of Conductor Donnelly and Engineman Derwent. At Amboy, 19.1 miles south of Woosung, a copy of train order No. 20, Form 19, previously quoted, was received. Train first No. 178 left Amboy at 6.15 a.m., according to the train sheet, left Dixon, the last open office, 7.4 miles south of Woosung, at 7.24 a.m., according to the train sheet, and was approaching Woosung when it collided with train No. 129 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 6 and 8 miles per hour.

Both engines were locked together and considerably damaged, but remained upright; the tender of engine 1043 and the first car in the passenger train were derailed, the car coming to rest in line with and on the roadbed, leaning to the east. The fourth car

in the freight train came to rest on top of the gondola car ahead of it. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 129, while the employees injured were the conductor, baggagemen, and flagman of that train, and a signal maintainer riding thereon.

Summary of evidence

Fireman Ewing, of train No. 129, stated that he was thoroughly familiar with the contents of train order No. 20. At a point about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Woosung they were flagged on account of a bad joint and the train was brought to a full stop, the train then proceeded over the bad spot at a speed of about 10 miles per hour, and the fireman said that on leaving that point he looked at his watch and it was then 7.52 a.m. A stop was made at the passenger platform at Woosung, long enough to take aboard one passenger and the mail, Conductor Curran gave a proceed signal, and the train departed. Fireman Ewing put in a fire, then got up and opened the side window, estimating the speed of his train to have been about 30 miles per hour on passing the south switch. When the engine was past the switch, Fireman Ewing saw train first No. 178 across the inside of the curve, about 1,000 feet distant, shouted a warning of danger and Engineman Edwards applied the air brakes in emergency, the fireman jumping immediately before the collision occurred. Fireman Ewing stated that when his train came to a stop as a result of the collision, he was at the north end of the first car, he got up as quickly as possible after falling, and on looking at his watch it was 7.57.40 a.m. He did not think that he could have seen the opposing freight train any sooner, because of the fact that his side window had been closed, it being very cold, several degrees below zero, and there being a little steam and smoke coming from his own engine, which seemed to lift after getting over the switch.

Conductor Curran, of train No. 129, stated that he compared his watch at the dispatcher's office at 6.40 a.m. the morning of the accident, and that at 6.52 a.m. he compared time with Engineman Edwards, there being only three seconds difference between his own watch and the engineman's. Conductor Curran also stated that it was 7.52 a.m. when his train passed over the point north of Woosung where a rail was broken at a joint. The train next stoppied at Woosung, and when it was ready to depart, Conductor Curran remarked to Flagman Rowand that their time was up and

that train first No. 178 did not make it, his watch then reading 7.55.50, and at this time he gave a proceed signal and the train departed. Conductor Curran was collecting the fare from the passenger who just boarded the train when he felt the air brakes apply, about the time the train was going over the south switch, at which time the speed was about 45 miles per hour. Conductor Curran placed the time of the collision as about 7.58 a.m. and said that he did not give train first No. 178 a thought after departing from the platform at Woosung. He also stated that as a rule the same order is issued every day. Statements of Flagman Rowand developed nothing additional of importance.

Engineman Derwent, of train first No. 178, stated that it was 7.53 a.m. when he approached the mile board at Woosung, that he saw train No. 129 when his own train was about one-half mile south of the south switch, moving at a speed of about 30 miles per hour, and he made an air-brake application in preparation for the stop in order to head in at the south switch. He watched train No. 129 as it also approached the switch from the opposite direction and at first there was no question in his own mind but what that train would be brought to a stop on the main track, clear of the switch. On definitely realizing that it was not going to stop, however, Engineman Derwent applied the air brakes in emergency, sounded the whistle, and jumped when the engines were about six or eight car-lengths apart. Engineman Derwent further stated that before departing from Clinton, 133.4 miles south of Woosung, he had compared his watch with the clock at the round-house and there was no difference in time of any consequence, that he was thoroughly familiar with the contents of train order No. 20 and that as his train left Dixon at 7.20 a.m., he figured he had 35 minutes in which to go to Woosung for train No. 129, not allowing for clearing the superior train by five minutes. On leaving Dixon his train made a run for the hill, but the water in engine raised and started to foam, making it necessary to ease off on the throttle. Conductor Donnelly was riding on the engine, as was also Head Brakeman Donovan and Fireman Haley; Engineman Derwent remarked to the conductor that on account of the water foaming, it was going to make their time very short and

unless the water stopped foaming it would be necessary to make a back-up movement to Dixon. The engine stopped foaming, however, and when around the curve north of North Dixon, which station is located 1.5 miles north of Dixon, Engineman Derwent remarked to Conductor Donnelly that they had plenty of time to take the train up the hill the way the engine was then handling, but if it developed that the time was too short, they could cut off the engine and take a flag to Woosung. After about half of the train was over the hill, with the engine south of Lowell Park Road crossing, which is about 10,000 feet south of the south switch at Woosung, the engineman remarked that they had seven minutes left before train No. 129 was due to leave the south switch under the requirements of the wait order, and that by using all of that time they could just make the switch, at this time everybody on the engine compared watches. According to the rules, his own train only had two minutes but the engineman said that he used all of the time shown in the wait order, as had been done time and time again, it being his understanding that wait orders were issued with the intention of having the inferior train use all of the time shown, and that the superior train would be looking out for the inferior train, as to time-table schedules, however, he would not think of using all of the time shown, it being necessary to clear the time of such trains five minutes. Engineman Derwent said that it was a case of letting his anxiety to get over the road outweigh his better judgment, and that he did not figure he was taking any chance whatever, nor did he believe it possible that two trains could have gotten together under such conditions in broad daylight.

The statements of Conductor Donnelly, Fireman Haley, and Head Brakeman Donovan, all of whom were riding on the engine of train first No. 178 generally corroborated the statements of the engineman and developed nothing additional of importance. Flagman McLarnon was riding in the caboose; he stated that when approaching Woosung he was very concerned about the short time. He was in the cupola and saw his own engine as it was approaching a whistle post, located about 10,450 feet south of the south switch, and he estimated the speed of the train as about 25 or 30 miles per hour, at that time, it was then 7.52.40 a.m.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by train first No. 178 being operated against an opposing superior train on short time, for which Conductor Donnelly and Engineman Derwent are responsible.

Under the rules, an inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains, and failing to clear the main track by the time required by rule, must be protected as prescribed by rule 98; also, at meeting points between trains of different classes, the inferior train must take siding and clear the superior train not less than five minutes. The provisions of these rules were not complied with. A discrepancy exists in the statements of the employees involved as to the exact time at which this accident occurred. It is clearly established, however, that the conductor and engineman of train first No. 178 took a chance and endeavored to make Woosung before the departure of train No. 129 from that point, when they did not have sufficient time to reach that point and clear as required by rule. Conductor Donnelly, who was riding on the engine, compared watches with Engineman Derwent when in the immediate vicinity of Lovell Park Road crossing, located about 10,000 feet south of the south switch, and according to their statements it was 7.48 a.m. and there still remained seven minutes before the expiration of the time shown in the wait order; on the other hand, Flagman McLarnon, who was riding in the caboose cupola, looking ahead, said it was nearly 7.53 a.m., which estimate would mean that the accident occurred about the time fixed by the conductor of the passenger train, which was 7.58 a.m. In either event, however, the statements of Conductor Donnelly and Engineman Derwent make it clear that the best they expected to do was to reach the switch by 7.55 a.m., depending on the crew of the superior train to see them coming and wait in the clear, instead of bringing their own train to a stop and sending a flag ahead, regardless of the slight delay that would have been occasioned by such action. The danger of running on short time has been pointed out in previous accident investigation reports; the rules were sufficient for the purpose, and they should have been obeyed.

While the evidence indicates that train No. 129 did not pass the south switch until after the expiration of the time shown in the wait order, nevertheless, in the interest of safety and according to the dictates of good judgment, the fireman of train No. 129 at least could have looked across the inside of the curve when leaving Woosung, especially when a view of an approaching train could have been had for a long distance; such action on his part might have been the means of preventing the accident.

Conductor Donnelly entered the service as brakeman on September 4, 1904, and was promoted to conductor on July 22, 1909, Engineman Derwent entered the service as fireman on February 2, 1909, and was promoted to engineman on November 5, 1913. Engineman Edwards entered the service as fireman on August 1, 1882, and was promoted to engineman on August 8, 1887; Fireman Ewing entered the service as fireman on October 19, 1913, and was promoted to engineman on October 30, 1919. At the time of the accident the crew of train first No. 178 had been on duty **about 13 hours**, while the crew of train No. 129 had been on duty less than 2 hours, prior to which both crews had been off duty 12 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W.P. BORLAND,

Director.