

**Report of the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances
covering investigation of an accident on the
Kansas City Southern Ry., on September 26, 1912**

October 22, 1912.

To the Commission:

On September 26, 1912, there was a head-end collision on the Kansas City Southern Railway near Air Line Junction, Mo., resulting in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 2 employees.

After investigation, I beg to submit the following report.

The trains involved in this collision were train No. 7, known as the Air Line, a combination passenger, shop, and switch train, operating between Kansas City and Independence, Mo., a distance of 11 miles, and making five or six round trips daily; and transfer No. 96, operating between East Kansas City and Sugar Creek, Mo., using the tracks of the Air Line Division from Air Line Junction to Sugar Creek, a distance of five miles.

This division is a single-track line and is not equipped with any form of block signals. Trains are operated under the timetable and train order system, orders being transmitted by means of the telephone.

Train No. 7 consisted of an engine, a combination car and a coach, and was in charge of Conductor Courtway and Engineer Barker. This train left Air Line Junction at 6:30 a. m., the two passenger cars being pushed ahead of the engine with the baggage compartment of the combination car at the head end

of the train. Conductor Courtway of this train had received an order by telephone from Dispatcher Phillips to meet transfer No. 96 at Benton Park, three miles south of Air Line Junction.

Transfer No. 96 at the time of the accident consisted of an engine and ten loaded oil tank cars, and was in charge of Conductor Perron and Engineman Bonham. At 6:15 a. m., Conductor Perron notified the dispatcher by telephone that transfer No. 96 was ready to proceed from Sugar Creek Junction to East Kansas City, but that engine No. 96 was nearly out of fuel oil and could not handle the full train which then consisted of 32 cars. Dispatcher Phillips gave Conductor Perron an order by telephone to meet train No. 7 at Benton Park, and then put him into communication with the yardmaster at East Kansas City, who, when informed of the shortage of fuel oil, directed Conductor Perron to bring in as much of the train as could be handled. Transfer No. 96 left Sugar Creek Junction at about 6:20 a. m., with ten oil tank cars, passed Benton Park, and at 6:35 a. m. collided with train No. 7 about half a mile south of Air Line Junction.

The collision occurred on the south end of Big Blue River Bridge, on a section of straight track 270 feet in length. Approaching this point from the north, there is a four-degree curve 1300 feet in length and an ascending grade of about 0.4 per cent; and approaching from the south there is a four-degree curve 1170 feet in length and an ascending grade of about 0.5

per cent. A dense fog prevailed at the time of the collision. The two passenger cars of train No. 7 were being pushed ahead of the engine, and the engine of transfer No. 96 was running backward.

Conductor Courtway of train No. 7 stated that he and his brakeman were riding inside the baggage car, and no one was on the front platform; he was looking out the door in the end of the car but did not have time to apply the brakes after he saw transfer No. 96. He estimated the speed of train No. 7 to be 12 or 15 miles per hour. He stated that he had been running this train for ten years under the present method of operation.

Engineman Barker of train No. 7 stated that the weather was very foggy and he could see only about three car lengths; he could not see the track ahead on account of the cars being pushed ahead of the engine. He stated that he had never received any orders directing the movement of trains on this line except verbally from the conductor or brakeman.

Engineman Bonham of transfer No. 96 stated that at Sugar Creek Junction the engine was coupled on to a string of ten cars; Conductor Ferron came up on the engine and said, "We will go in with what we have; the Air Line waits for us at the Junction." After leaving Sugar Creek Junction the conductor and engineman talked about train No. 7, and Conductor Ferron said, "We will hurry in to the Junction so that the Air Line will get out as soon as possible." Engineman Bonham stated that his train was running 10 or 12 miles an hour at the time of the accident.

This accident was caused by a misunderstanding of orders by Conductor Ferron of transfer No. 96. Conductor Ferron was killed in the accident.

All of the employees involved in this accident were experienced men, and none of them was on duty contrary to the provisions of the hours of service law.

The investigation of this accident disclosed violations of a number of the operating rules, apparently with the full knowledge of the officers of the company.

Rule No. 103 of the rules of the transportation department in force on the Kansas City Southern Railway reads as follows:

Messages or orders respecting the movement of trains or the condition of the track or bridges must be in writing.

On this division rule No. 103 is entirely disregarded. No record is kept of train orders or other instructions; the dispatcher telephones orders to the train conductor, who verbally communicates the orders to the engineman and the other members of the train crew. About twenty trains are operated over this division daily, and no written copies of orders governing the movement of these trains are made.

Timetable rules Nos. 4 and 5 render void timetable rights and require the use of clearance cards on this division, but no clearance cards are used.

Dispatcher Phillips stated that he had been employed for twenty months as a telephone dispatcher and during that time he had kept no copies of orders and had not issued any clearance cards.

Timetable rule No. 12 reads as follows:

Trains will be registered at Kansas City, Air Line Junction, Belt Junction, Grandview, Sugar Creek Junction and Independence by the Conductor, or other person in charge, but first class trains when not running in sections may be registered at Air Line Junction by ticket handed to the Operator. K. O. S. freight trains will also be registered at East Kansas City Yard office by the Conductor

The train register records maintained on this division are very unreliable. The only trains registered at Sugar Creek Junction are passenger trains, running in both directions. At Air Line Junction passenger trains are registered, but only when running in one direction, and this record is not complete. Out of a total of ten daily passenger trains, on some days only one, two or three trains are registered and for some days the register is entirely blank. Frequently when the regular conductor is off duty his name appears for several trips on that day, the name of the conductor actually in charge appearing for a later trip. In some cases the name "Joe" appears as the conductor's signature. Freight trains are not registered at Air Line Junction and an average of less than one freight train out of ten is registered at Sugar Creek Junction and then only when it is impossible to get into communication with the dispatcher.

The operator at Walnut Street who dispatches trains on this division also acts as switch tender, crossing watchman, and telephone exchange operator, and he receives switching orders and directs switching movements. His records consist of a block sheet containing a record of only such trains as

are reported by telephone to his office; he stated he kept this record for the convenience of dispatchers.

Pushing the cars of train No. 7 ahead of the engine for a distance of more than five miles is the usual daily practice. Facilities for running the engine around the train are provided, but the train is handled in this manner to avoid delay. In foggy weather such as prevailed at the time of the accident, this practice is particularly dangerous. That a greater number of fatalities and injuries did not result is due to the fact that there were no passengers on this train, only the train crew riding in the passenger cars. No one was riding on the front platform prepared to apply the brakes, all the train employees riding inside the first car.

Engine hostlers who have not been examined on the train rules are permitted to operate helper engines on this division.

The Kansas City Southern Railway Company has permitted to grow up and continue in vogue on this division loose and slipshod methods of operation which led directly to this collision. These dangerous practices should be abandoned immediately, and some safe method of operation should be adopted before a more disastrous accident occurs.