

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN
RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED
ON THE LAKE SHORE ELECTRIC RAILWAY NEAR BELLEVUE,
OHIO, ON JANUARY 23, 1929.

April 23, 1929.

To the Commission.

On January 23, 1929, there was an accident involving a passenger train of the Lake Shore Electric Railway and a motor bus of the Greyhound Lines at a grade crossing near Bellevue, Ohio, which resulted in the death of 20 passengers of the motor bus, and the injury of 9 passengers and 1 employee of the motor bus and 2 passengers and 2 employees of the passenger train. This investigation was made in conjunction with representatives of the Ohio Commission of Public Utilities.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Toledo Division of the Lake Shore Electric Railway which extends between Toledo and Norwalk, Ohio, a distance of 60.63 miles, and is a single-track line operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The point of accident is about 2 miles east of Bellevue, Ohio, where a public highway known as route U.S. 20 crosses the tracks at an angle of 25° , approaching this point from the east the track is level and tangent for a distance of 5.6 miles, the accident occurring at a point 742 feet east of the west end of this tangent. The route of the Greyhound Lines on which this accident occurred extends from Detroit, Mich., to Cleveland, Ohio, and the busses are operated by time-table schedule under rules posted at bulletin boards at terminals. Approaching the point of accident from the west on route U.S. 20 the highway is practically level and tangent for a distance of approximately 5,850 feet, the crossing being at a point 150 feet west of the east end of this tangent. On account of the angle at which the highway crosses the track it is necessary for the driver of an eastbound bus to look ahead and to the right in order to see an approaching westbound train.

In the vicinity of the point of accident a line of poles 16 to 19 inches in diameter, located about 100 feet apart along the electric railway and about 3 feet south of the south ends of the ties, restricts the view had by drivers of eastbound highway vehicles when such vehicles are very close to the crossing, when at a distance from the crossing the view is unlimited in clear weather, since the surface of the ground in this vicinity is about level with the railroad and the highway. There is a railroad warning sign on the highway approaching this crossing from the west, and a railroad crossing sign when close to the track of the electric railway, this railway does not maintain any warning bell or flashlights at the crossing.

It was snowing at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 1.10 p.m.

Description.

Westbound passenger train No. 213 consisted of motor 164, of steel-underframe construction, and was in charge of Conductor Trueman and Motorman Schuyler. This train departed from Monroeville, 7.47 miles east of Bellevue, at 1.p.m., five minutes late, and was derailed by striking the bus on the crossing near Bellevue while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 40 miles per hour.

The Greyhound motor bus, No. 343, eastbound, had a seating capacity for 31 passengers and had one door in the front end on the right side opposite the driver's seat. This bus, in charge of Driver Edward Butler, departed from Detroit, Mich., at 8.30 a.m., and was crossing the tracks of the Lake Shore Electric Railway at a speed estimated to have been from 2 to 9 miles per hour when it was struck by train No. 213.

The bus was practically destroyed and came to rest in a ditch of about 3 feet in depth parallel with the track just off the north ends of the ties and about 100 feet west of the crossing. The front end of motor 164 came to rest on top of the rear end of the bus and the rear end partly derailed on the road bed. The employees injured were the motorman and conductor of the passenger train.

Summary of evidence

Edward Butler, driver of bus 343, stated that as he approached the crossing on the Lake Shore Electric Railway he made a stop about 8 or 9 feet from the tracks, he then got out, wiped the wind shield, walked ahead and looked up and down the track but could not see far on account of the snow. He then got back in the bus, looked both ways and started, and when the front end of the car had reached about the middle of the track, a passenger in the front end of the car called "train". The bus driver said he then looked out and saw the train just before it struck the bus. He stated that he did not hear the whistle at any time, nor did he see the train coming before the passenger called a warning, saying it was snowing so hard that he could see a distance of only 25 or 30 feet. Bus Driver Butler further stated that he was perfectly familiar with the territory in which this accident occurred, he had operated a bus daily over this route for the past five months, and when employed by the Greyhound Lines he was required to undergo a physical examination which included his sight and hearing. He also said it is a requirement of the Greyhound Lines and of the Public Utility Law to make a stop at all railroad crossings.

Lillian Lapalla, a passenger who was riding in the front seat behind the driver, on the left side next to the window, stated that the window was so badly steamed that she could not see through it, that the bus stopped at the railroad crossing for a few seconds and the driver got out and wiped the wind shield, then got in again, looked both ways and started. She said she did not see the train coming before it struck them.

Edward Williams, a passenger who was riding in the front seat next to the window on the right side, stated that the bus stopped at the crossing but on account of the window being covered with steam he could not see out. He did not know how long the bus stopped or whether or not the driver opened the door.

Martin Loranger, a passenger who was riding in the third seat from the front end on the left side, next to the window, said the bus stopped and started again, and that if the driver left the bus he must have done it quickly as he did not see him take any such action. Mr. Loranger saw the train just before it struck the bus.

Howard Schaffer, a passenger who was riding in the second seat from the rear end on the left side, next to the window, stated that he did not know whether or not the bus stopped at the crossing, the window was covered with steam but he paid no particular attention to what was going on around him.

All of the above statements were taken at the hospital at Bellevue, Ohio, and the condition of some of the patients was such that it was not advisable to question them any more than was absolutely necessary.

Motorman Schuyler, of train No. 213, stated that approaching the crossing his train was traveling at a speed of about 40 miles per hour and that he saw the bus when his train was about 800 feet from the crossing, being able to see that far because the snow had turned to rain, he also saw the bus make the safety stop 10 or 12 feet from the crossing but did not see the driver get out. When his train was about 200 feet from the crossing the bus started ahead and he then shut off the power, applied the brakes, put on the sanders and reversed the motors, and then stepped back out of the way. He stated that his train struck the bus right back of the cab, and estimated that the bus was traveling at a speed of 2 or 3 miles per hour and that he had reduced the speed of his train to about 25 miles per hour. The brakes on his car were operating properly and the headlight was burning dimly, on account of the weather conditions.

Conductor Trueman, of train No. 213, stated that he was standing in the rear end of the car when he felt the brakes applied and heard the motorman sound several short blasts on the whistle, this being just before the accident occurred. He estimated the speed of his train to have been about 40 miles per hour and did not think there was any material reduction in the speed. He also said that it was snowing at the time of the accident.

Messenger Boggs stated that he was riding behind the motorman and when within a distance of about 700 feet of the crossing he was able to look through the snow and see the bus, which had practically stopped. He could not say whether or not the driver got out of the bus, but it appeared that he only stopped long enough to shift gears. Messenger Boggs thought the train was traveling at a speed of about 50 miles per hour and that it was about 150 feet from the crossing when the bus started across, the motorman sounded the regular crossing whistle, then short blasts, and applied the brakes. He thought the speed of the train had been reduced to about 35 or 40 miles per hour and that the bus was traveling at a speed of about 5 miles per hour.

Section Foreman Everly stated that at the time of the accident he was at stop 215, located about 900 feet west of the crossing. He saw the bus approach the crossing, heard train No. 313 sound the regular crossing whistles for several highway grade crossings, these crossings being located 3,900 feet, 1 mile and $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, respectively, east of the point of accident, and shortly after the whistle signal for route 20 had been sounded he heard several short blasts of the whistle. He saw the bus stop momentarily at the crossing but did not see the driver leave the bus. He was also able to see the train approaching and realized that a collision was imminent.

A check made a week after the accident occurred disclosed that 1,979 vehicles, including 33 passenger busses, passed over this crossing within a 24-hour period. Of this number 1,173 vehicles including 12 passenger busses passed within an 8-hour period extending from 10.45 a.m. to 6.45 p.m. The records for a 30-day period show that an average of approximately 29 trains of the Lake Shore Electric Railway, 18 trains of the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad and approximately 6 trains of the New York Central Railroad pass over this highway daily at the crossings of their respective railroads. Both the New York Central and the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroads maintain flash light warning signals in addition to the usual crossing signs.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by a bus being driven on the track directly in front of an approaching train, for which Bus Driver Butler is responsible.

While this crossing is not protected either by a watchman or automatic flash light devices, the fact remains that the bus driver was thoroughly familiar with the conditions at this crossing, having driven over it daily for a period of several months. He said the snow restricted his view to a distance of 25 or 30 feet, but other evidence indicated that the bus could be seen a distance of from 700 to 900 feet. Under these circumstances there is no reason why the bus driver should not have seen the approaching train unless the windows through which he was looking were covered with steam, as was the case with some of the other windows. There is also a probability that when he brought the bus to a stop it was at a point which caused the line of poles beside the railway track to cut off his view when seated in the driver's seat, and that the train was closely approaching the crossing at the time he returned to his seat and started ahead. If the windows at the head end of the bus

were free from steam on the inside and snow on the outside, there is no reason why the use of reasonable precaution by the bus driver in stopping his bus, as well as in starting it, should not have enabled him to prevent this accident.

A blue print furnished by the County Engineers' Office at Norwalk, Ohio, shows a proposed route U.S. 20 which would necessitate approximately 5,000 feet of new right of way and would discontinue the crossing of the tracks of the 3 railroads mentioned and also the tracks of 12 railroads on Monroe Street, at Bellevue, and substitute the crossing of 5 railroad tracks on Main Street where a new highway is under consideration. This would lessen the number of railroad tracks to be crossed in this vicinity to 5 instead of 15, and shorten the distance over route U.S. 20 by approximately 1,350 feet. Until such time as this proposed route is completed and in operation, in view of the density of highway traffic as well as the traffic over the Lake Shore Electric Railway, protection of some kind should be furnished at the crossing at which this accident occurred, either by flash lights or by a watchman.

Bus Driver Butler had had five years' experience as a driver for a transfer company and an undertaking company, and had been in the employ of the Greyhound Lines for eight months, the last five months operating over the route on which this accident occurred. All of the Lake Shore Electric employees 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. The bus driver arrived in Detroit at 9.45 p.m. the previous evening and left Detroit the following morning at 8.30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.