

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
LONG ISLAND RAILROAD AT BROOKLYN, N. Y., ON APRIL
10, 1926.

May 12, 1926.

To the Commission:

On April 10, 1926, there was a collision between a passenger train and a work train on the Long Island Railroad at Brooklyn, N.Y., resulting in the death of 1 passenger and the injury of 17 passengers, and 1 employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Atlantic Division extending between Flatbush, N.Y., and Jamaica, L.I., a distance of 9.3 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is an elevated double-track line operated by electricity, the current being supplied by means of a third rail, trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred on the eastbound main track at a point about 88 feet east of the east end of the station platform at Nostrand Avenue, Brooklyn, the station is also located on an elevated structure. Approaching from either direction the track is tangent and practically level. East of the station there is a crossover connecting the two main tracks, the switches being trailing-point switches for movements with the current of traffic. The east crossover switch is 340 feet east of automatic signal A-15, which is located at the eastern end of the station platform and governs eastbound movements on the main track. The switches are of the ground-throw type and are connected with the automatic block-signal system, they are not equipped with switch lamps.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 10.15 p.m.

Description

The work train consisted of seven cars and was in charge of Conductor Thompson and Motorman Cook, the four cars on the west end of the train were motor cars, while the three remaining cars on the east end of the train were box cars, loaded with ties. This train departed from Jamaica, westbound, at 9.15 p.m., and on reaching Nostrand Avenue station it was brought to a stop in order to unload some ties.

While this work was in progress it became necessary to clear the westbound track in order to permit several trains to pass, and the work train therefore proceeded through the crossover and was brought to a stop on the eastbound main track just east of the crossover switch; after this had been done the switches were lined for main-track movements. After the westbound trains had passed, the work train started a back-up movement, it being intended to return to the westbound track; the motorman at this time was operating the train from the fourth car from the western end of the train instead of from the car at the extreme western end of the train, and the crossover switch not having been opened the work train passed the switch, continued westward on the eastbound main track, and on reaching a point about 370 feet beyond the switch, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 10 miles an hour, collided with train No. 1688, which was standing just west of signal A-15.

Eastbound passenger train No. 1688 consisted of six motor cars and was in charge of Conductor Richard and Motorman Randall. This train departed from Flatbush Avenue at 10.08 p.m., on time, made a station stop at Nostrand Avenue, 1.6 miles beyond, then moved ahead a short distance and again stopped, about 30 feet west of signal A-15, in compliance with the stop indication displayed by this signal. While standing at this point it was struck by the work train.

None of the equipment was derailed, but the force of the impact considerably damaged the rear vestibule of the first car and the forward vestibule of the second car in train No. 1688; the passenger who was fatally injured was in the forward vestibule of the second car.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Thompson, of the work train stated that he opened both crossover switches for the movement from the westbound track to the eastbound, and that he also closed both of these switches after the crossover movement had been completed. He had stationed a flagman in each direction for protection, and he said that as there was no brakeman available to assist him in operating the crossover switches, Bridge Carpenter Krause, who was acting in the capacity of foreman of the work train, offered to operate the east crossover switch, which offer was accepted. Conductor Thompson said he was depending on the foreman to open the switch for the return movement to the westbound main track, and to close it behind the work train after it had passed.

At the time this contemplated movement was started the conductor was stationed at the west crossover switch and he said that after opening this switch he turned around and saw the foreman, who was standing at a point about 30 or 40 feet from the east crossover switch, give the motorman a back-up signal. Conductor Thompson then saw that the east crossover switch had not been opened and called to the foreman to stop the train, at the same time running toward it and endeavoring to board the cars but he was unable to do so before the accident occurred.

Acting Foreman Krause, of the work train, said he had offered to help Conductor Thompson and it was arranged that he should give Motorman Cook the back-up signal for the return movement; it was his understanding that the conductor would open the switches, and that he himself was to close the east switch behind the work train after it passed through the crossover in making the return movement. He said he did not look at the east switch before the back-up movement was started, but that he did shout to the conductor and the conductor shouted back to him "all right!" after which he gave the motorman a flash-light back-up signal. The conductor had a white lantern but the foreman did not see him give any signals or hear the conductor shout to him just prior to the accident; and he was unaware of anything wrong until he saw the west car of the work train continue westward on the eastbound main track instead of taking the crossover; when the car from which the motorman was operating the train passed him, he banged on the door of the vestibule and shouted a warning of danger but was unable to attract the motorman's attention. Foreman Krause further stated that he was unaware that the crossover switches worked in conjunction with the automatic signals, that there was no lamp on the switch and he could not see its position from where he stood when the back-up movement started, and that the last time he saw the switch it was lined for the crossover, this being at the time the work train crossed over from the westbound to the eastbound main track.

Motorman Cook, of the work train, stated that while standing on the eastbound main track Foreman Krause told him that when everything was all right he would give him a back-up signal. Motorman Cook was stationed in the motorman's box at the east end of the fourth car in the train and on receiving the back-up signal he started the train. He did not realize that the train was not moving through the crossover until the car from which he was operating the train was about opposite the switch, and he said he immediately removed his hand from the controller, which automatically shut off the power and applied the air brakes in emergency, the accident occurring immediately

afterwards. Motorman Cook said he understood that under the rules a competent man with proper equipment should have been stationed at the head end of the leading car giving signals from a point within his line of vision, and he also said that had he changed his position from the fourth car and operated the train from the leading car, as should have been done, he could have seen where he was going and the accident probably would have been averted. Motorman Cook further stated that the reason he did not change his position was because he wanted to be in a better position to spot the cars after getting back on the westbound track. It was his understanding that the work train foreman was going to attend to the east crossover switch, as was customary under similar conditions.

Motorman Randall, of train No. 1688, stated that he noticed the work train pass the switch, instead of entering the crossover, and continue westward on the eastbound main track, and he at once sounded one blast on the whistle as a stop signal and then looked out of the door to see whether or not there was room enough for his train to back up, but the accident occurred before he could start his train in reverse motion.

Conductor Richards, of train No. 1688, stated that he was near the rear end of the first car in his train and was unaware of anything wrong prior to the collision.

Supervisor of Track Hammer stated that the crossover switches were not equipped with switch lamps as the crossover was only used for emergency purposes. It also appeared from his statements that work similar to that performed on this occasion was generally done at night owing to the density of traffic by day.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to ascertain definitely that the switches were properly lined before the crossover movement was started.

It was the understanding of Conductor Thompson and Motorman Cook that Foreman Krause would open the east crossover switch for the back-up movement through the crossover to the westbound main track. Foreman Krause, however, was of the impression that the conductor was going to handle the switches and that all he was to do would be to give the motorman the signal to back up and then close the east crossover switch after the work train had passed through it. Had a thorough understanding been had by all concerned as to just how the movement was to be made, or had Motorman Cook stationed himself in the motorman's compartment at the head end of the leading car in the train, as

required by the rules, this accident undoubtedly would not have occurred.

On account of the density of traffic a large proportion of the work-train service on this division is performed at night, and it also appeared that only the facing-point switches are equipped with switch lamps. As a matter of safety, it is believed that all the crossover switches should be equipped with switch lamps.

The train-service 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. HURLAND,

Director.