INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE LOUISVILLE AND NASHVILLE RAILROAD AT BILOXI, MISS., ON OCTOBER 4, 1923.

November 30, 1923.

To the Commission:

On October 4, 1923, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad at Biloxi, Miss., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of five passengers, two mail clerks and four employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the New Orleans and Mobile Division extending between New Orleans, La., and Mobile, Ala., a distance of 140.66 miles, which at the point of accident is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. Northbound trains are superior by direction. There are two passing tracks at Biloxi; this accident occurred at the north switch of the north passing track, about 3,300 feet north of the station, this switch being a facing-point switch for southbound trains. Approaching the point of accident from the trestle over the Bay of Biloxi the track is tangent to the south for about 3,260 feet, followed by a 30' curve to the right extending 4,300 feet, on which the accident occurred at a point 521 feet from its southern end. The grade is level or slightly ascending for some distance. The switch stand is of the high rotary type, located on the engineman's side of a southbound train, the center of the lens being 7 feet 5 inches above the base of the rail. The headlight of an engine standing at the point of accident can be seen by the engineman of an approaching southbound train across the curve for a distance of at least 2,100 feet. A light rain was falling at the time of the accident, which occurred at 7.25 p.m.

Description

Northbound passenger train No. 134 consisted of one combination baggage and passenger coach, one day coach, three Pullman sleeping cars and one dining car, all of all-steel construction, hauled by engine 182, and was in charge of Conductor Ramsey and Engineman Smith. This train left New Orleans at 3 p.m., and at Bay St. Louis, 27.54 miles from Biloxi,

a copy of train order No. 127, on Form 31, was received, reading in part as follows:

"No 1 Eng 184 meet No 134 Eng 182 at Biloxi
No 134 will run by and back in north passing track at Biloxi"

The train left Biloxi about 7.18 p.m., proceeded to the north switch of the north passing track, and while backing into the passing track at a speed estimated to have been about 5 miles an hour was struck by train No. 1.

Southbound passenger train No. 1 consisted of one mail car, one baggage car, three coaches, one dining car and four Pullman sleeping cars, all of all-steel construction, hauled by engine 184, and was in charge of Conductor Wallace and Engineman Loucon. This train left Mobile at 5.45 p.m., 23 minutes late, and at Pascagoula, 20.35 miles from Biloxi, a copy of train order No. 127, previously quoted, on Form 19, was received. The train left Pascagoula at 6.52 p.m., 22 minutes late, passed Ocean Springs, 4.02 miles from Biloxi and the last open telegraph office, at 7.19 p.m., 13 minutes late, and collided with train No. 134 at the north switch of the north passing track at Biloxi while running at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 35 miles an hour.

Engine 184 of train No. 1, came to rest on its left side on the west side of the track headed north, and was badly damaged, the mail and baggage cars and the forward truck of the first coach were derailed. Engine 182, of train No. 134, was derailed but remained upright, while none of the cars of that train were derailed. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 1.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Ramsey, of train No. 134, said he received a copy of the train order at Bay St. Louis, at which time the operator told him there was a train in the north passing track and that it was for this reason the order to run by was given. He showed the order to the flagman and told the porter about it, and after leaving Biloxi instructed the porter to handle the switch for the back-up movement. He said the train proceeded to the north switch of the passing track and ran by the switch a sufficient distance to permit the switch to be thrown, a southbound freight train stood on the passing track, but there was sufficient room for his train to back in and be clear of the main track. He said he was riding on the trap door of the second car from the engine, on the fireman's side, while the train was backing in at a speed of about 5 miles an hour, and when the engine had apparently cleared the switch points the train lurched suddenly and on looking ahead he saw the porter throw the switch for the main track, and a second later saw the headlight of the engine hauling train No. 1, followed in a few seconds by the collision; he had not heard any whistle signals before the collision occurred, and also said the

switch lamp was burning properly. He further said that while he had never received orders to run by and back in this particular passing track, orders of this kind were often issued, and it was not considered necessary to protect such movements by flag, and that the opposing train should come to the meeting point under control, expecting to find the main track occupied beyond the switch.

Train Porter Pope said that leaving Biloxi Conductor Ramsey instructed him to handle the switch for the back-up movement. While the train was backing in he was looking back for signals and did not notice the approach of train No. 1 until it was about 40 feet from the switch, and seeing that his train was not clear of the switch he threw the switch for the main track, he heard the engineman of train No. 1 sound one long and one short blast of the whistle at about this time, but was unable to say whether or not the engine was working steam. He estimated the speed of train No. 1 to have been about 35 miles an hour and said that the headlights of both engines were burning brightly, and that the switch lamp was also burning bright ly. The statements of Flagman Woodham and Baggage Master Perry were to the same effect.

Engineman Smith said that he did not see train No. 1 when pulling by the north passing track switch, and after receiving a signal to back up he reversed the engine and backed the train at a speed of about 5 or 6 miles an hour, and when he thought the engine was over the switch he looked ahead, saw that the porter had closed the switch, and also saw train No. 1 approaching less than a car length away; knowing that his engine was not clear of the main track he opened the throttle wide in an effort to back up far enough to clear the main track and did not have time to get off before the collision occurred. He further said that the headlight on each engine was burning brightly and at no time did he hear any whistle signals sounded, nor could he say whether or not the engine of Train No. 1 was working steam. The engineman's statements concerning the practice followed in connection with the kind of train order here involved practically agreed with those of the conductor. Fireman Dembo said he was standing up on the fireman's side of the engine taking the signals for the back-up movement, these signals were slow back-up signals, and at no time did he see a signal transmitted to train No. 1, the back-up signals were being given by the conductor, flagman and porter.

Conductor Wallace, of train No. 1, said he read the order received at Pascagoula in the presence of the operator, who remarked that there was a freight train in the passing track, and he gave the order to the flagman and told the porter about it. He said that approaching Biloxi the train slowed down for the drawbridge, approximately 2 miles from the point of accident, this being the last point at which he felt the brakes applied before the accident occurred. The rules required that

when approaching a meeting point the engineman will sound the station whistle, one long blast, followed by the stop signal, one short blast, and Conductor Wallace said he heard these signals sounded about the time the train passed a station which is one-quarter of a mile or more north of the point of accident, thus indicating to him that the engineman understood that they were to meet train No. 134 at Biloxi. He said he was occupying a seat on the right side of the smoking car and on looking out saw the headlight of the engine of train No. 134 across the inside of the curve then got up and walked to the platform of the car to be in a position to look for the number of the engine of train No. 134, at this time the speed was about 25 miles an hour, and he had just stepped out on the platform when the collision occurred. While he felt no reduction in the speed of the train before the accident, he was unable to say whether or not the engine was working steam. Conductor Wallace's statements concerning the use of train orders similar to train order No. 127 corroborated those of Conductor Ramsey. Flagman Franco corroborated Conductor Wallace's statement to the effect that he felt no further application of the air brakes after leaving the drawbridge, and he estimated the speed at the time of the collision to have been about 25 miles an hour. He said he heard the meeting point whistle signal sounded, but did not hear any other signals. Baggage Master Kenton and Porter Walker both stated that they heard the meeting point whistle signal sounded.

Fireman Anthony said the engineman read to him the order received at Pascagoula, at which time he noticed nothing wrong with the engineman. He said speed was increased after the drawbridge was crossed, that the engineman did not shut off steam until the accident occurred, and that while he heard a road crossing whistle signal sounded when approaching the point of accident, he did not recall having heard the meeting point whistle signal sounded. He further said he thought it queer that the engineman did not shut off steam when approaching Biloxi, but that he supposed the engineman knew what he was doing, he was unable to see train No. 134 from his side of the cab until they were very close.

Dispatcher Laxton said that dispatchers are instructed in the event that train No. 1 is late to put train No. 134 in the north passing track, that the train order was put out by him for train No. 134 at Bay St. Louis on Form 31, and to t train No. 1 at Pascagoula on Form 19, instructing train No. 134 to run by and back in at the north switch, and he told the operators at those points to notify the train crews of the reason for the movement. He said he issued the order by reason of the fact that train No. 1 was late, that this order would make a close meet, and would advance train No. 134, together with the fact that it would be necessary to have that train back over an important street crossing if the train was placed in the south end of the passing track. He further said there was also a freight train in the south passing track, an-

while he would have been able to put train No. 134 in that track it would have necessitated backing the train out and doing the station work after train No. 1 had passed, entailing a delay of about 20 minutes. Dispatcher Laxton said this form of order is used regularly but not when the weather is foggy, and verified other statements to the effect that flag protection was not necessary on the part of the crew of the train backing in on the side track. Operator Westbrook, at Pascagoula, said he displayed the train-order board for train No. 1 and delivered a copy of the order to the fireman by means of a hoop, and when he gave Conductor Wallace his copy of the order he told him the reason for the movement.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Louzon, of train No. 1, properly to control the speed of his train approaching a switch at which an opposing train was backing in on a side track.

Rule 88, of the Rules for the Government of the Operating Department, reads in part as follows:

> Trains must pull into the siding when practicable, if necessary to back in, the train must first be protected as prescribed by Rule 99, but in no case must a train pass the switch to be used in taking siding, to back in, until the opposing train has arrived, unless otherwise provided.

This rule would appear to require that trains backing in at a switch for the purpose of meeting an opposing train should be protected by flag at all times, the words "unless otherwise provided" apparently referring only to that part of the rule forbidding the train to pass the switch until the opposing train has arrived. As enforced on this railroad, however, and as understood by the employees, flag protection need not be provided when an order has been issued similar to the one here involved, it being the duty of the crew of the opposing train to approach the switch under control, expecting to find the other train occupying the main track or backing in on the side track. In this particular case, train No. 1 was inferior by direction and was behind its scheduled time, while train No. 134 was practically on time; under these circumstances it was necessary for the crew of train No. 1 to have authority to proceed against train No. 134, and that the engineman of train No. 1 was so proceeding indicates that the fireman delivered to him the copy of train order No. 127 received at Pascagoula. It is also apparent that the engineman was awake and conscious of his surroundings when approaching Biloxi, as he sounded a meeting-point whistle signal, although the evidence is conflicting as to the exact location of the train at the time this signal was sounded. It further appears that the headlight of

the engine hauling train No. 134 was burning, indicating that the train was still occupying the main track, while the switch was open until the engine of train No. 1 was within a short distance of it. Notwithstanding all these circumstances, Engineman Louzon failed to have his train under control, in fact, the weight of evidence indicates that the air brakes were not applied prior to the occurrence of the accident.

Leaving out 1 train which is operated on Sundays only, there are 32 scheduled trains operated either daily or daily except Sunday on the particular section of the railroad on which this accident occurred. Traffic of such density on a single-track line fully warrants the installation of a block-signal system to guard against the occurrence of accidents.

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.