

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
MARYLAND ELECTRIC RAILWAYS AT SHIPLEY, MD., ON JANUARY
31, 1921.

February 24, 1921.

On January 31, 1921, there was a side collision between an electric car of the Maryland Electric Railways and an automobile, at a highway crossing at Shipley, Md., resulting in the death of 2 and injury to 5 persons riding in the automobile. After investigation, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

Location.

The electric car involved was a southbound car enroute from Baltimore, Md., to Annapolis, Md. The automobile was the property of the U. S. Army driven by a soldier and was conveying a party of school children from Linthicum School, near the point of the accident, to Camp Meade, Md.

The railroad is a single-track line, the general direction of which is north and south. Power is furnished from an overhead wire. Beginning at a point about 3,200 feet north of the highway crossing, and proceeding southward on the railroad, the line is tangent for a distance of 2,000 feet; this is followed by a curve to the left of $40^{\circ} 15'$, 1,341 feet in length. The highway crossing is located on this curve about 150 feet from its southern end. The tangent track and about 950 feet of the curve are located in a cut 12 to 15 feet in depth. Emerging from the cut a view of the highway, about 150 feet to the left, can be had for a distance of about 200 feet north of the crossing. At this

point the track is on a grade of .82 per cent descending southward.

The highway on which the automobile was running is constructed of concrete 12 or 14 feet wide. Approaching the crossing from the north the highway is tangent for a distance of about a mile up to the crossing and for a considerable distance beyond. It is located some two or three hundred feet east of and practically parallel to the tangent track, the curve in the track gradually diminishing the distance between them until the crossing is reached where the highway crosses the track at an angle of about 60 degrees.

Leaving the school the highway is practically level up to a point about 300 feet north of the crossing where a moderate descent begins extending down to the crossing. From a point about 250 feet north of the crossing a view can be had on the right of a car or train emerging from the cut and from that point up to the crossing, about 250 feet, the view of the railroad is unobstructed. At the time of the accident there was a strong wind blowing from the west and it was raining and snowing.

Description.

Southbound passenger train No. 136, en route Baltimore to Annapolis, consisting of combination motor-baggage-passenger car 51, was in charge of Motorman Langley and Conductor Barber. It left Camden Station, Baltimore, at 3.00 p.m., on time, and while running at a speed estimated

to have been 25 miles an hour collided with the automobile at the crossing at Shipley Station at 3.16 p.m.

The automobile involved in the accident was driven by Corporal Wall and left Lanthicum School, about a quarter of a mile north of the point of the accident, shortly after 3.00 p.m. and was proceeding on the highway southward toward Camp Meade when it collided with the electric car as above stated.

The points of contact were the left front corner of the car and the right front corner of the automobile. The impact of the collision swung the automobile around parallel to the car and it came to rest with its front end against a telegraph pole at the left side of the roadway. The electric car continued on and came to a stop 150 feet east of the crossing.

The electric car was slightly damaged on its left forward corner, the forward journal box on the left side was broken, the body of the car was scratched, one window broken and the door in the center of the car was smashed. The front guard of the automobile was broken, the front axle bent, the right front wheel and engine slightly damaged and the mud guard and running board on the right side were crushed.

Summary of Evidence.

The electric car is constructed with the door in the center of the car, the baggage compartment is in the forward end of the car and contains the motorman's compartment

in the forward right hand corner. The windows in the motorman's cab permit a view in front and on the right side of the car only, but as the door to the compartment had been taken off a view to the left could be had by looking through the doorway across the baggage compartment and out of the window on the left side of the car; however, while on the curve the superelevation of the track lowered the left side of the car, causing the top of the window frame to obstruct the vision of the motorman on that side, making it necessary for him to lean over to the left to look out of the window.

The automobile was a White car of the type commonly known as an "Army bus", left hand drive, with the seats extending across the body of the car and the whole covered by a canvass top. At the time of the accident, on the account of the inclement weather, the curtains on both sides were down, from the wind shield to the rear of the car, except that on the left hand side of the drive, which was rolled up. The curtain on the right side of the car prevented a view of the track north of the crossing.

The station at Shipley is located in the southwest angle formed by the track and the highway. It is a flag stop and a small semaphore operated by passengers for the purpose of flagging trains is located on the platform. There is no watchman stationed at the crossing nor is it equipped with gates, crossing bell or other warning device, except the usual permanent painted crossing sign located north of the crossing.

Motorman Langley of the electric car stated that he sounded the station whistle, one long blast, as the car came out of the cut, followed by the usual crossing signal. At this time he had reduced the speed of his car to about 15 miles per hour. As the car emerged from the cut he looked across to the highway at the left, but saw no vehicle approaching; he then looked to the right and then at the station for the signal, but seeing no signal and the track clear he increased the speed of the car. When about 25 feet from the crossing the conductor who, was standing in the baggage compartment, shouted "Hold her, there's an auto". He looked out and saw an automobile about 15 feet from the crossing. Realizing that a collision was inevitable he turned on more power intending to increase his speed in order to avoid striking the automobile in the middle. As soon as the collision occurred he applied the brakes and brought the car to a stop as quickly as possible. Motorman Langley further stated that a bulletin in effect requires all trains to approach Shipley crossing under control and he feels that he complied with the requirements of this bulletin. The brakes on his car were in good order and operated properly.

Conductor Barber of the electric car corroborates the statement of Motorman Langley. Conductor Barber stated that immediately after the accident the driver of the automobile made the statement that he could not see the car on account of the curtains, but he heard it approaching and tried to stop but could not, that the automobile slid and

the brakes would not hold.

The statement of the motorman as to the sounding of the whistle approaching the crossing is also corroborated by passengers on the electric car.

Corporal Wall, driver of the automobile stated that coming over the top of the hill, about 300 feet from the crossing, he reached up putting his head out around to the left of the windshield and looked across to the track on the right but saw no car approaching. At that time the speed of his car was about 10 miles per hour; approaching the crossing his car was in neutral gear and he made several applications of the brakes and reduced his speed. When about 15 or 20 feet from the crossing he heard a car approaching; he immediately applied his emergency brakes and swerved his car to the left in an effort to avert a collision. He succeeded in bringing the automobile to a stop with the right front wheel on the first rail when it was struck by the electric car. He did not hear any whistle blown until a second or two before the collision occurred. He further stated that the brakes of his car had recently been renewed and were working properly. He believes that if it had not been storming the curtains would have been rolled up and he would have seen the approaching car.

Thaddeus and Robin Clapp, two schoolboys who were riding on the front seat with Corporal Wall at the time of the accident substantiate the statement of Wall as to his looking around the wind shield on reaching the top

of the hill. From their seat they were unable to see the side except through the opening to the left of the driver, the windshield being covered with sleet. They consider Corporal Wall a careful driver.

William Brannon, another schoolboy riding on the rear seat of the automobile at the time of the accident stated that when the automobile was a few feet from the crossing he heard the car approaching and jumped immediately. The automobile was running so slow at the time that he landed on his feet without being thrown.

The investigation of this accident disclosed that both Motorman Langley and Driver Wall used reasonable precaution in approaching the crossing and after the danger was discovered did all in their power to prevent the accident.

The evidence is such that it cannot be definitely determined whether the car struck the automobile or the automobile struck the car. It is believed that they cornered simultaneously.

Since June 1st, 1910, the following accidents have occurred at this crossing:

June 14, 1910	Wagon struck
August 19, 1911	" "
Oct. 23, 1911	" "
Sept. 27, 1912.	Horse struck
August 29, 1913.	Team struck
June 16, 1918.	Automobile struck
Jan. 31, 1921.	" "

That this crossing is recognized as a dangerous one by the railroad company is conclusively shown by the following bulletins issued to its employees:

Bulletin No. 44.

Annapolis, Md. Sept. 12, 1913.

"All Motormen: All cars that are operated around Shipley Curve and across the road crossing must be so operated that collision with a vehicle or person at this point is impossible."

"We have had some very bad accidents at this point, and no excuses will be accepted from the motormen for collisions at this point in the future."

C. G. Britton,

TRAINMASTER

Bulletin No. 247.

Annapolis, Md. Nov. 27, 1917.

"TRAINMEN: Please refer to Bulletin No. 44 dated September 12th, 1913. The same will apply to all Northbound trains at Linthicum Station Crossing, must be under full control to avoid accidents.

"No excuses accepted for accidents at either Shipley or Linthicum Station crossings,

C. G. Britton,

TRAINMASTER."

A strict compliance with these bulletins would require that every electric car come to practically a full stop before passing over the crossing. However, no such compliance was attempted nor was it intended by the management. Motorman Langley stated that he complied with the requirements of the bulletin in this case by having his car under control and he is upheld by the Supt. of

transportation. In interpreting this bulletin, Supt. of Transportation Britton stated that if a car approaches the crossing under full control and if everything shows clear that the car would have a right to proceed. The purpose in issuing such a bulletin was to impress upon the motormen clearly that there should be no recklessness at this crossing.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by failure of the Maryland Electric Railways to provide adequate protection at this dangerous crossing. Had a crossing gate, flagman or other suitable protective device been installed at this point, this accident would probably have been averted.

The physical conditions surrounding this crossing are such as to make the approach of southbound trains dangerous to highway travel in either direction. Between the hours of 5.30 a.m. and 1.00 a.m. 66 scheduled trains pass over this crossing and the highway is one much traveled. In view of these conditions it is recommended that The Maryland Electric Railways Company place a crossing flagman at this crossing immediately until such time as gates or other adequate protection is provided.

Motorman Langley has had about nine years experience as a motorman and has a good record. At the time of the accident he had been on duty 1 hour and 17 minutes having previously been off duty two days.

Corporal Wall had had several years experience as an automobile driver and this is the first time he has been involved in an accident. He had been assigned to driving this school bus for about two months and has the reputation of being a careful driver.