

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
MOBILE & OHIO RAILROAD NEAR JACKSON, TENN., ON
DECEMBER 2, 1924.

December 16, 1924.

To the Commission:

On December 2, 1924, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Mobile & Ohio Railroad near Jackson, Tenn., which resulted in the death of two employees

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Jackson Division extending between Cairo, Ill., and Jackson, Tenn., a distance of 107.5 miles, which, in the vicinity of 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. The point of accident was about 3,100 feet north of the station at Jackson, approaching from the north there are about 2,250 feet of tangent, a curve of 2° to the left 1,050 feet in length, and about 1,600 feet of tangent, the accident occurring on the last-mentioned tangent about 400 feet from its northern end. The grade is descending for some distance, varying from 0.22 to 0.92 per cent, being 0.81 per cent at the point of accident.

The weather was clear and dark at the time of the accident, which occurred at 5.44 a.m.

Description

Southbound second-class freight train No. 33 consisted of 46 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 413, and was in charge of Conductor H. Johnson and Engineman Alexander. It left Humboldt, Tenn., the last open office, 17.2 miles from Jackson, at 5 a.m., one hour late, and was moving at a speed of 6 or 7 miles an hour preparatory to stopping for a railroad crossing which is located north of the station at Jackson, when the rear end of the train was struck by train No. 3.

Southbound passenger train No. 3 consisted of one express car, one baggage car, two coaches, one Pullman sleeping car and one private car, hauled by engine 263, and was in charge of Conductor J. M. Johnson and Engineman Garr. It left Humboldt at 5.22 a.m., four minutes late, and collided

with the rear of train No. 33 at Jackson while traveling at a speed estimated to have been from 20 to 25 miles an hour.

The caboose of train No. 33 was demolished and the two cars immediately ahead of it badly damaged, while the third car from the rear was partly derailed. Engine 263 was derailed but sustained only slight damage. The employees killed were the conductor and flagman of train No. 33.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Garr, of train No. 3, said he sounded the station whistle for Jackson when in the vicinity of mile-post 388, which is 2 miles from the station, and that when near mile-post 387, or 1 mile from the station, he sounded a road-crossing whistle signal for each of two highway crossings in the vicinity. The corporate limits of Jackson extend nearly to mile-post 387 and under a time-table rule the speed of all trains is restricted to 6 miles an hour within these limits. Engineman Garr said he made a service application of the air brakes immediately after passing mile-post 387, at which time his train was traveling at a speed of 35 or 40 miles an hour, this application reducing the speed to about 30 miles an hour. Shortly after this application had been made the fireman called to him that there was a fusee ahead and he said he at once made another service application of the air-brakes, and while this was being done the fireman said he saw the caboose of the train ahead and Engineman Garr placed the brake valve in the emergency position. He then leaned out of the cab window on his side of the engine, which was near the southern end of the curve to the left, and was able to see the caboose and also the reflection of a red fusee on the rear of the caboose. He did not see any one on the rear platform or on the ground nearby. Engineman Garr was under the impression that the speed limit within the corporate limits of Jackson was 10 miles an hour and said he could have stopped his train had it been moving at that speed. He further stated, however, that it was not customary to observe this rule strictly when entering the corporate limits.

The point picked out by Engineman Garr as the approximate point at which the fireman first called his attention to the burning fusee is approximately 1,100 feet from where the accident actually occurred, and observations made afterwards indicated that the markers of a caboose standing at the point of accident could be seen by a fireman when 947 feet distant, while the engineman's view was restricted to 547 feet.

The statements of Engineman Garr were corroborated by those of Fireman Pyron who added that no torpedoes had been encountered and that he had not seen any fusee other than the one which was sticking in the end sill on the rear of the caboose. Fireman Pyron also said that the markers on the rear of the caboose were burning properly. The statements of Conductor J. M. Johnson, Baggage Master S. G. Johnson and Flagman Bullock, all of train No. 3, brought out no additional facts of importance.

At the time of the accident the engineman, fireman, and head brakeman of train No. 33 were riding on the engine, only the conductor and flagman, both of whom were killed, being in the caboose. Engineman Alexander stated that his train was moving at a speed of 6 or 7 miles an hour, with only the independent brake applied, when he felt the automatic brakes applied from the rear of the train, due to the train line being broken as a result of the accident. Thinking at the time that the brakes had applied because of the fact that the train had broken in two, he whistled out a flag and then looked at his watch, noting that it was 5.44 a.m., and he said that he had expected to arrive at the station and clear the time of train No. 3 by five minutes as required by the rules, train No. 3 is due at Jackson at 5.50 a.m. The statements of the fireman and head brakeman developed nothing additional of importance.

Section Foreman Weaver, who lives about 3/4 mile north of the point of accident, was outside of his house when the two trains passed and he saw a lighted fusee near the center of the end sill on the rear of the caboose of train No. 33, but did not see any one on the caboose platform. After train No. 33 had passed he heard train No. 3 approaching in the distance and on looking in that direction did not see any other burning fusee which might have been thrown off by the crew of train No. 33. He was unable to estimate the time intervening between the passing of the two trains.

S. D. Bledsoe, a resident of Jackson living about 700 feet north of the point of accident, was an eye witness. When the caboose of train No. 33 passed him he noticed a man standing on the platform holding what appeared to be a burning fusee in his hand, and on looking northward he saw train No. 33 approaching around the curve. He again looked toward the freight train and saw the fusee on the ground and on looking toward the passenger train a second time he saw that it was then passing a factory which is about 1,100 feet from where the accident occurred and by the time it had reached a culvert, which is about 200 feet south of this factory, he saw fire flying from the wheels under the train. Mr. Bledsoe again looked toward the caboose of the freight train and saw a man on the ground about 10 or 12 feet from the caboose ap-

parently coming back toward the approaching passenger train, but on again looking in that direction this man had disappeared

General Superintendent Ervin stated that the officials tried to enforce the rules restricting the speed within corporate limits only so far as the main streets in the congested portions of the various cities and towns were concerned, but that these rules were not enforced within the entire corporate limits for the reason that they are considered as entirely inconsistent with the expeditious operation of trains and he further stated that it was generally known by the supervising officials that the limits prescribed by these speed restrictions are exceeded.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of train No. 33 to be properly protected by flag, for which Conductor H. Johnson and Flagman Graves are responsible

Page 2 of the current time-table shows only one time for train No. 3 at Jackson, on the Jackson District, this being 5.50 a.m.; on page 6, however, covering the territory between Jackson and Okolona, Tenn., on the Okolona District, the time of train No. 3 is shown as 5.55 a.m. Undoubtedly, 5.50 a.m. should be regarded as its arriving time at Jackson, and in view of the fact that the accident occurred at 5.44 or 5.45 a.m., train No. 33 had not more than one minute in which to come to a full stop for the Illinois Central crossing and then proceed and be clear of the station five minutes before train No. 3 was due to arrive. This could not possibly have been done, and under the circumstances it was necessary for the crew of train No. 33 to provide flag protection in accordance with the rules by throwing off lighted fuses at proper intervals. On account of the fact that the conductor and flagman were killed, no reason could be obtained as to why they did not protect their train properly. The evidence of the crew of train No. 3, as well as of a section foreman and also of an eyewitness, indicates that all that was done was to place a burning fuse on the rear of the caboose. Had lighted fuses been thrown off at proper intervals when reducing speed on entering Jackson, or had a fuse been thrown off north of the curve, the engineman of train No. 3 would have had ample warning of a train ahead and would have been able to prevent the occurrence of the accident.

Train No. 3 passed the station mile-board not later than 5.44 a.m., and had it not been for the accident it probably would have stopped for the Illinois Central crossing and have arrived at the station at Jackson before 5.50 a.m., its scheduled arriving time. It is also to be noted that

the time-table rule restricts the speed of all trains within the corporate limits of Jackson to 6 miles an hour; the accident occurred within these limits, and had Engineman Garr been operating his train in accordance with this rule, the accident undoubtedly would not have occurred. It appears, however, from his statement, as well as from the statements of others including the general superintendent, that it is not customary to observe or enforce this rule except when passing through the more densely populated portion of the city.

Had an adequate block system been in use on this line, this accident probably would not have occurred, an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

The employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of train No. 33 had been on duty about 7 hours and the crew of train No. 3 about 4 hours, previous to which they had been off duty approximately 12 and 14 hours, respectively.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.