

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE NEW YORK & LONG BRANCH RAILROAD AT ASBURY PARK, N. J., ON JULY 4, 1922.

July 26, 1922.

To the Commission:

On July 4, 1922, a light engine on the New York & Long Branch Railroad collided with 3 delivery automobiles and 1 station baggage truck, at Asbury Park, N.J., resulting in the death of 3 newspaper employees and the injury of 4 newspaper employees.

Location and method of operation.

This railroad extends between Bay Head Junction and Perth Amboy, N.J., a distance of 38.61 miles, and in the vicinity of the point of accident is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. There is a signal governing each main track located approximately 450 feet on either side of Asbury Park station; these signals are operated manually by a towerman stationed at GO Tower, opposite the station, between the hours of 5 a.m. and 9 p.m., for the protection of trains standing at the station. From 9 p.m. until 5 a.m. they are connected with the track circuit and are operated automatically. Trains of the Pennsylvania Railroad and Central Railroad of New Jersey are operated over this line, subject to the rules and regulations of the New York & Long Branch Railroad, which does not possess any rolling stock. The station at Asbury Park is located on the south side of the main tracks; there is no intertrack fence separating the main tracks, and in the case of westbound trains passengers have to cross the eastbound track on leaving or entering the station, while various conveyances stand on it while being loaded or unloaded from westbound trains. Approaching the station from either direction the track is tangent and level. The weather was misty at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 4.30 a.m.

Description.

Westbound express train No. 343, a Central Railroad of New Jersey train, consisted of 7 express cars, hauled by engine 608, and was in charge of Conductor Poole and Engineman Byrnes. On Arriving at Asbury Park, two cars were cut off and placed

on a siding, and while this switching movement was being made, the delivery automobiles and baggage truck involved were standing on the eastbound track being loaded with newspapers and mail from the remaining portion of the train left standing on the westbound track, while so engaged they were struck by extra 1600.

Eastbound extra 1600 consisted of engine 1600, of the Pennsylvania Railroad, without cars, and was in charge of Engineman Alex and Fireman Kruse. This engine passed Sea Girt, 6.1 miles from Asbury Park, at 4 a.m., and collided with the delivery automobiles and baggage truck while traveling at a speed variously estimated at between 12 and 60 miles an hour.

The automobiles and baggage truck were demolished; the engine was neither derailed nor materially damaged, and was brought to a stop about 500 feet beyond the point of accident.

Summary of evidence.

According to Engineman Alex, the whistle was sounded for all of the various road crossings, while the bell was ringing continuously. Approaching Springwood Avenue, about 600 feet west of the point of accident, he had sounded the whistle, and applied the brakes when he saw an elderly lady crossing the tracks. He then released the brakes and sounded the whistle again to attract the attention of the gate keeper, saw the gates being lowered, and when he again looked ahead saw the delivery automobiles and baggage truck about 50 or 100 feet distant. Engineman Alex said he then applied the independent brake, but as the rails were wet, owing to the mist, the engine was not brought to a stop until some distance beyond the point of accident. He estimated the speed to have been 12 or 15 miles an hour at the time of the accident. He did not use sand, and did not use the automatic brake because the engine would have slipped on the wet rails. Engineman Alex said the headlight on his engine was burning brightly, also that he was aware train No. 343 was due at Asbury Park at 4.31 a.m., but said there was no light visible on the automobiles or cars, while there was no engine in sight, the engine of train No. 343 then being obscured from view by the cars left on the main track and as the track looked clear, he did not think it necessary to bring his engine to a stop. Fireman Kruse was watching the crossing gates being lowered as the engine was passing over the crossing, and when he again looked ahead saw the automobiles directly in front of the engine. The engine crew of extra 1600 said their engine stopped 100 or 150 feet beyond the point of accident, but the engineman also said the engine cleared the next crossing, which is a distance of 400 or 450 feet, which latter statement is verified by statement of Conductor Poole that the engine was beyond the crossing.

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Conductor Poole, of train No. 343, heard the two blasts of the whistle; he estimated the speed of the light engine to have been about 60 miles an hour at the time of the accident. It also appeared from his statement, as well as that of Station Master Kinsinger, that the operators of these various conveyances had been warned on several occasions not to move vehicles close to cars standing on the main tracks while work of loading or unloading was being performed.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of extra 1600 to be brought to a stop before reaching the station, for which Engineman Alex and Fireman Kruse are responsible.

Rule 59, of time-table No. 255, effective June 18, 1922, reads as follows:

"Any train approaching a station, where a train is receiving or discharging passengers, mails, baggage, express or freight, must be stopped before reaching the station and must not proceed until the train moves away, except where proper safeguards are provided between tracks."

While the evidence is conflicting as to the speed of extra 1600, and as to the extent of the view, on account of weather conditions, Engineman Alex was aware train No. 343 was due at Asbury Park at 4.31 a.m., and had he properly controlled the speed approaching the station, and had he and Fireman Kruse maintained a proper lookout of the track ahead, there is no reason why they should not have seen the automobiles on the track in ample time to have stopped without colliding with them. Engineman Alex seemed to think that had there been a light of any kind, he would have seen it in time to stop, but not only did he himself say it was daylight but it also appears that he saw the automobiles as soon as he looked ahead.

Traffic passing this station is very dense, particularly in summer, and during the period when scheduled trains are most frequent, the signals on either side of the station are manually operated, and provide protection for trains doing station work. To provide for the safe handling of passengers, baggage, mail, etc., a station, or at least a station platform, should be provided on the north side of the westbound track, with an inter-track fence to prevent the use of the eastbound track in connection with the station work of westbound trains.

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The employees involved in this accident were experienced men; at the time of the accident they had been on duty less than 6 hours, after having been off duty 9 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Chief, Bureau of Safety.