

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD NEAR SYRACUSE JUNCTION,
N.Y., ON JANUARY 19, 1930

March 10, 1930

To the Commission:

On January 19, 1930, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a light engine on the New York Central Railroad near Syracuse Junction, N.Y., which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of one employee, who subsequently died.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the West Shore main line of the Syracuse Division which extends between Syracuse and Bowmansville, N.Y., a distance of 136.93 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident the main line is double tracked, these tracks being numbered 5 and 6. The accident occurred within yard limits and within the limits of an interlocking plant, on the westbound main track at a point approximately 3,900 feet east of Syracuse Junction or 2,009 feet east of the east switch of a connecting track 908 feet in length which leads to what is known as the New York Central main line tracks and the Auburn Branch. Approaching the point of accident from the east the track is tangent for a distance of 2,520 feet, followed by a $1^{\circ} 30'$ curve to the right 2,288 feet in length and then tangent track for a distance of 2,344 feet, the accident occurring at a point 1,680 feet from the eastern end of this tangent track. The grade for westbound trains is 0.27 per cent ascending at the point of accident. The rules governing the operation of trains over the track in the vicinity of the point of accident provide that within yard limits the main track may be used, protecting against first-class trains. Second class and extra trains must move within yard limits, prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear.

The only signal involved is an interlocking signal of the semaphore type located 446 feet east of R^W Tower at Syracuse and approximately 10,209 feet east of the point of accident. This is a slow-speed signal and has

WEST

Connecting tr ck

$0^{\circ}45'$

1345'

664'

Point of accident

1680'

10209'

$1^{\circ}30'$
2288'

No. 1610
New York Centr l R.R.
Syracuse Jct., N.Y.
Jan. 19, 1930

R W

Signal location

EAST

two indications, stop and proceed with caution. It is operated from RW Tower and governs movements on the westbound main track.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8.43 p.m.

Description

Westbound freight train DQR-5 consisted of 30 loaded cars, 8 empty cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 3902, and was in charge of Conductor Hare and Engineman Connelly. This train passed RW Tower, at Syracuse, at 8.20 p.m., came to a stop on the main track at the east switch of the crossover at 8.30 p.m., and while waiting for permission to make the crossover movement it was struck by light engine 2706.

Westbound light engine 2706, headed east was in charge of Enginemen Connors and Fireman Brown. This engine passed RW Tower at 8.40 p.m. and collided with the rear of train DQR-5 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 8 miles per hour.

Train DQR-5 was moved forward a distance of about 18 feet by the impact of the collision. The caboose was driven under the next car and demolished, and both cars were burned, apparently due to an overturned stove in the caboose. The rear end of the tender of engine 2706 was considerably damaged. The employees killed were the conductor and two brakemen of train No DQR-5.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Connelly, of train No. DQR-5, stated that his train stopped just east of the east switch at the crossover and was waiting to make the crossover movement when his train was struck by engine 2706. He said that after passing RW Tower he looked back along his train to see if any of the brakes were sticking and at that time he observed the markers burning brightly on the rear of his train. He thought that approaching Syracuse Junction he could have seen a red light burning for a distance of about one-half mile. Fireman Haley, of train No. DQR-5, stated that he observed the marker burning on the south side on the rear of his train after the train came to a stop at the crossover.

Head Brakeman Gibbs, of train No. DQR-5, stated that when his train stopped at the crossover switch near Syracuse Junction he immediately went to the telephone booth nearby to obtain permission from the signalman at SS 2 Tower to enter the connecting track. He was told that after train No. 17 had cleared and after a puller engine had performed work in that vicinity his train could proceed upon the connecting track. Brakeman Gibbs then went back to the engine of his train and had been there only a few minutes when suddenly the train was moved ahead about half a car-length. Brakeman Gibbs stated that when he registered for duty at Devitt yard he went to the caboose to get his equipment before going to the head end of the train and at that time the markers were lighted and in place. He also said that when he went to the telephone booth near the crossover he looked back and saw the marker light on the south side of the caboose.

Enginemen Connors, of light engine 2706, stated that he received a yellow or slow speed indication at the home interlocking signal at RW Tower and after passing that signal he operated his engine at a speed between 15 and 18 miles per hour, looking ahead until he reached the west end of the last curve east of the point of accident. He said that he asked Fireman Brown three different times about the track ahead; twice Fireman Brown reported "all clear" and on the last occasion he reported "clear to the switch." Enginemen Connors then observed the water glass and as it showed the boiler to be only about half full he started the water pump and he watched the gauge until the hand started to move. When he again looked out of the window, his glasses were covered with steam but he saw a glare ahead--the tail light shining on the caboose windows, and he applied the air brakes in emergency. He thought that the caboose was about 200 feet distant when he first observed it, he did not see any marker on his side. Enginemen Connors said that on the evening of the accident Fireman Brown appeared to be normally alert and competent and that the last time he looked at him Fireman Brown was looking out the window toward the west. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the collision to have been about 8 miles per hour. He further stated that the air brakes on engine 2706 worked properly.

Fireman Brown, of light engine 2706, stated that from RW Tower to the point of collision he maintained a constant lookout ahead and during that time Enginemen Connors asked him on three different occasions about the

track ahead and he told him on two occasions it was clear and the last time when the engine was near the west end of the curve just east of the point of accident he told him the track was clear to the switch. Fireman Brown said that when rounding this curve he saw a red light ahead but thought it was the switch light at the crossover where they were to stop and he did not say anything about it to the engineman. After the accident he saw that this light was a marker on the rear of train No. DQR-5. Then he first realized that it was the rear of train No. DQR-5 ahead of his engine it was only about 3 car-lengths distant. Fireman Brown said he was not thoroughly familiar with the physical characteristics of this line, he had made about 75 trips over this track during the last six months and about 15 of these trips had been made at night. He thought that the speed of their engine had been reduced from 15 miles per hour to 8 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Telegraph-Leverman Hoyt, located at RW Tower, stated that when train No. DQR-5 passed the tower on the evening of the accident he was standing near a crossing and he noticed the markers were burning brightly on the rear of the train. He said that light engine followed train No. DQR-5 some time later and he estimated the speed of that engine at that time to have been about 10 miles per hour.

Trainmaster Zwilling stated that on the night of the accident while he was on his way to the passenger station train No. DQR-5 passed him and he noticed the markers on the rear of the train burning. Several tests were made on the day following the accident to ascertain the distance markers could be seen at the point of accident, and it was found that from a westbound engine, headed east, the markers on a caboose located at the point of accident could be seen plainly from the fireman's side of the engine for a distance of 3,550 feet and from the engineman's side of the engine for a distance of 1,550 feet. During these observations, while the engine was traveling at a speed of 15 miles per hour the brakes were applied in emergency and the engine stopped within a distance of 150 feet. Trainmaster Zwilling also stated that it is not possible to see the switch lights at the crossover while rounding the curve east of the point of accident.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Connors to operate light engine 2706 within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear, and by the failure of Fireman Brown to give the engineman correct information regarding the track ahead.

The investigation disclosed that the markers on train No. DQR-5 were burning at the time of the accident and could have been seen by an engineman of an approaching westbound engine, backing up, for a distance of 1,550 feet. In view of this Engineman Connors was not compelled to depend upon the fireman for information as to whether or not the track was clear approaching the point of accident. Approaching the tangent track on which the accident occurred, Engineman Connors asked the fireman if the track was clear ahead and upon being told that it was clear to the switch he withdrew his attention from the track ahead and started the water pump as the water glass showed the boiler to be only about half full and he watched the gauge until the hand started to move. When he again looked out, he saw the caboose of train No. DQR-5 about 200 feet distant and was unable to stop his engine in time to avert the accident. This does not excuse him in any way from operating his engine under proper control. The rules provide that engineman must, if any difficulty with machinery withdraws attention from constant lookout ahead, or weather conditions make observation of signals, or warnings, in any way doubtful, at once regulate speed as to make train progress safe.

Fireman Brown had an unobstructed view of the track approaching the point of accident for a distance of 3,550 feet. He maintained a constant watch of the track ahead between RW Tower and the point of accident and on three different occasions he reported to the engineman that the track was clear, the last time he told him that the track was "clear to the switch," and at that time engine 2706 was about 1,700 feet from the rear end of train No. DQR-5, yet he failed to see the rear of this train, the switch being located about 1,600 feet beyond. His only excuse for his failure in seeing this train was that he mistook the marker for a switch lamp at the crossover. He appeared to be in normal physical condition at the time of the accident, and during the preceding six months he had operated over the territory on which the accident occurred a sufficient number of times to have been thoroughly familiar with the characteristics of this line.

All of 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. Engineman Connors and Fireman Brown had been on duty only about 1 hour at the time of the accident, Engineman Connors having been off duty prior to this trip 23 hours, and Fireman Brown having been off duty, 10 hours, and during that time about 7 hours had been spent in sleep.

Respectfully submitted,

W.P. BORLAND,
Director.