

## 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 WALLACETON,  
PA., ON DECEMBER 26, 1925.

February 17, 1926.

To the Commission.

On December 26, 1925, there was a rear-end collision between a light engine and a freight train on the New York Central Railroad near Wallaceton, Pa., resulting in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Beech Creek subdivision of the Pennsylvania Division which extends between Jersey Shore Junction and Clearfield, Pa., a distance of 87.67 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders. An absolute block is maintained at all times for passenger trains, the rules require the spacing of freight trains on certain descending grades, but light engines are permitted to follow freight trains into blocks without regard to time or space intervals. The stations involved, proceeding westward, are Munson, Van, Wallaceton, Bigler, Woodland, and Clearfield Junction, those at Munson, Woodland and Clearfield Junction being open block offices at the time this accident occurred. The block from Munson to Woodland is operated as permissive block for freight trains but they are not allowed to proceed beyond Bigler until notified that the block is clear between Woodland and Clearfield Junction, the latter block covering one of the descending grades on which an absolute block for freight trains is maintained.

The accident occurred at a point approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile east of Wallaceton, approaching this point from the east there are 1,650 feet of tangent, followed by a  $10^{\circ}$  curve to the right 660 feet in length and then a  $30^{\circ} 30'$  curve to the left 2,300 feet in length, the accident occurring on this last-mentioned curve at a point about 220 feet from its western end. The grade for several miles is ascending westward, averaging about 1 per cent, then level for about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile, and is then 1 per cent descending to the point of accident, an additional distance of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile, and for some distance beyond.

An embankment and shrubbery bordering the right-of-way restrict the view of the point of accident from the fireman's side of an eastbound engine to a distance of about 400 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 8.35 a.m.

#### Description

Westbound freight train extra 5135 consisted of 90 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 5135, and was in charge of Conductor G. F. Bertram and Engineman Beam. It had been assisted by helper engine 3800 from Avis, 72.33 miles from Wallaceton, to Van, a station about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile east of the point of accident, at this latter point the helper engine was cut off while the train was in motion and extra 5135 proceeded down the grade toward Wallaceton. Extra 5135 had about been brought to a stop at Wallaceton for the purpose of ascertaining if the block were clear between Woodland and Clearfield Junction, and also to permit the brakemen to turn up the retaining valves, when the rear end was struck by light engine 3800.

Light engine 3800 was in charge of Engineman Richards, and after uncoupling from extra 5135 at Van, the engine was brought to a stop and Engineman Richards got into communication with the dispatcher by telephone and was directed to proceed to Wallaceton and to get into clear at that point for a following train. Accordingly, it proceeded westward and had moved about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile when it collided with the rear of extra 5135 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been from 8 to 12 miles an hour.

None of the equipment was derailed and only slight damage was sustained by the head end of engine 3800 and the two rear cars in extra 5135, the caboose was quite badly damaged. The employee killed was a brakeman of extra 5135 who was crushed between the caboose and the first car.

#### Summary of evidence

Conductor G. F. Bertram, of extra 5135, said train LS-9 was following his own train and when helper engine 3800 was cut off at Van he realized that it would be compelled to follow his train to Wallaceton in order to clear the following train and as his train slowed down

when approaching Wallacetown he got up from his seat in the caboose to look for the light engine. He had just reached the door when he saw the light engine, about 10 or 12 car-lengths distant, and called a warning of danger to the flagman and brakeman, he and the flagman left by the rear door while the brakeman started out the front door. Conductor Bertram said his train was moving at a speed of about 6 miles an hour when he first saw the light engine and that it had nearly stopped when it was struck. He further stated that it was customary to provide flag protection against following helper engines, but that in this case he did not know his train was going to stop and that it had not been necessary to provide protection before it reached the point where the accident occurred.

Flagman Caldwell said his train moved at a low rate of speed after the helper engine had been cut off and that under such circumstances it had not been customary to get off and protect the train against the following helper. In this case when the speed of the train began to decrease he looked out of the door and saw engine 3800 approaching around the curve, called a warning to the others in the caboose, and got off with a red flag, at which time the speed of his train was about 4 or 5 miles an hour, and he estimated that he had succeeded in getting back a distance of about three car-lengths.

Engineman Beam, of extra 5135, said that upon arriving at Wallacetown the train was brought to a stop and he called the dispatcher from a nearby telephone booth and asked if the block at Woodland were clear, being told to call again when he reached Bigler, about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  miles distant. Upon returning to the engine he noticed that something was wrong with the air, the gauge indicating that the brakes were set, the head brakeman started back toward the rear end to locate the trouble but returned shortly afterwards and told him of the accident.

Engineman Richards, of engine 3800, said he called the dispatcher from the telephone booth at Van, after uncoupling from extra 5135, and was instructed to proceed to Wallacetown to clear a following train. He started his engine about a minute or two after extra 5135 had departed, and said it was drifting as it approached the point of accident. On account of being on the outside of the curve and also on account of steam being blown across the front of the engine, he was able to see but a short distance ahead, and his first knowledge

of the fact that he was closing up on extra 5135 was when Fireman Bloom told him that that train was about 14 car-lengths ahead and he at once applied the brake, reducing the speed to about 8 miles an hour. After moving a short distance he suddenly saw the rear of the train apparently about 30 feet distant, but was unable to stop his engine before striking the caboose. He did not know whether or not extra 5135 was moving at the time of the collision. He further stated that to the best of his knowledge the air brakes on his engine were in proper working order.

Fireman Bloom, of engine 3800, said that when his engine had been cut off from extra 5135 at Van, it was brought to a stop near the telephone booth, and while the engineman hurriedly got in touch with the dispatcher he went out on the front of the engine to put up white flags, before he had finished doing this the engineman returned and called to him to hurry as they had to go to Wallaceton. Steam was used until the time he told the engineman that extra 5135 was about 12 or 14 car-lengths distant, the engineman then applying the brakes. At first it seemed to him that extra 5135 was traveling as fast as engine 3800, but the smoke and steam then seemed to settle down in front of the engine so that he did not see the caboose again until they were within two car-lengths of it, and upon seeing some one jump from the caboose he called to the engineman to stop. Fireman Bloom said he had not seen the rear of extra 5135 from the time his engine was uncoupled from that train until the time he called to the engineman.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Richards, of engine 3800, to operate his engine under proper control in view of the fact that he knew he was closely following extra 5135, by the failure of Conductor Bertram and Flagman Caldwell of extra 5135 properly to protect their train, and by the failure of the railroad company to provide safe methods for the operation of helper engines after they have been cut off from their trains at Van.

Engine 3800 had been cut off from the rear of extra 5135 within less than 1 mile of the point where the accident occurred, and under the circumstances it was incumbent on Engineman Richards to operate his engine pre-

pared to stop within range of vision. Where the view was obscured by smoke and steam, or by the curvature of the track, then it was all the more necessary that the speed of his engine be reduced accordingly in order to avoid the hazard of an accident. In this connection, it may be stated that examination of the engine did not reveal any steam leaks that would interfere with the engineman's vision.

While the train crew of extra 5135 may not have known that their train was going to stop at Wallaceston, such information should not be necessary in order to enable them to provide proper flag protection. Conductor Bertram said his train attained a speed of 15 or 18 miles an hour after passing Van and that it had stopped, or nearly stopped, when the accident occurred. Both the conductor and the flagman were in the caboose and knew that their train probably would be followed closely by the helper engine, had either of these men been sufficiently on the alert it is believed he could have thrown off a fusee in time to have prevented the accident.

It is the custom for the helper engine on a westbound train to be cut off at Van and for the engineman in charge of the helper to call the dispatcher for instructions. These instructions are given verbally, as was the case in this instance, Engineman Richards having been told to follow extra 5135 to Wallaceston in order to get into clear at that point for a following train. No space or time interval is required although the existing physical conditions would seem to warrant some such method of protecting train movements, these conditions consisting of a 1 per cent descending grade over a substantial portion of the distance, with sharp curves which very materially restrict the range of vision of engine crews, it also appears that no conductor or flagman is assigned to these helper engines. The operation of an engine on the main track on verbal authority with no means provided of spacing the movement is not conducive to safety, the installation of a spur at Van to enable helper engines to get into clear for following trains would eliminate the dangers of the existing situation.

Had an adequate automatic train stop or train control device been in use, this accident would not have occurred.

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.