INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE NORFOLK & PORTSMOUTH BELT LINE RAILROAD AT PORT NORFOLK, VA , ON MAY 1, 1929

August 1, 1929.

To the Commission

On May 1, 1929, there was a side collision between two transfer trains on the Norfolk & Portsmouth Belt Line Railroad at Port Norfolk, Va., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

The Port Norfolk yard is the northern terminus of this railroad, the tracks in this yard extend north and south, are tangent and practically level, and parallel each other. Eastward from what is known as yard track 0 there are four tracks, designated as tracks A, B, C, and D, while westward from track 0 the tracks are numbered consecutively, 1 to 17 inclusive, these tracks vary in length from 1,364 feet to 2,745 feet, track 3 being 1,828 feet long. The north lead track extends from northwest to southeast, and the accident occurred at the fouling point of track 3 with the north lead track. Transfer and switching movements only are made within the yard, they being made under yard rules, with no time-table schedules, train orders or block-signal system in effect Crews of the Southern Railway System make deliveries and receive cars in this yard.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 10.45 p.m.

Description

N&PBL engine 35, headed north, and hauling 28 loaded freight cars, was in charge of Conductor Pierce and Engineman Todd. This transfer movement headed in the south end of the yard on track 2 and instructions were received from the yardmaster to place the first 11 cars in the train on track 1. These cars were cut off and pulled ahead, out on the north lead track, after which the switch leading to track 2 was closed, and as these cars were then being backed in on track 1 at a speed of about 3 or 4 miles per hour ~~when~~ the car next to the engine was struck on the left side by the leading car in a transfer train being shoved northward on track 3 by Southern engine 219.

Southern engine 219, headed north, was in charge of Conductor Thompson and Engineman Kay. This engine headed against the south end of a transfer train of 37 cars that stood on track 3, which cars filled that track to capacity, and after shoving them northward about 70 feet they fouled the lead track and the head car struck the cut being backed in on track 1 by N&PBL engine 35.

The leading car in the transfer train being shoved by Southern engine 219 scraped the car next to N&PBL engine 35 its entire length and then cornered the tender cistern and forced it against the boiler head. None of the equipment being moved by N&PBL engine 35 was derailed, but the leading car in the transfer train being shoved by Southern engine 219 came to rest across track 4, leaning toward the left, somewhat damaged, while the following car was slightly damaged but not derailed The employee killed was the fireman of N&PBL engine 35, and the employee injured was the engineman of that engine.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Todd, of N&PBL engine 35, stated that the first he knew of anything wrong was when he heard the noise caused by the leading car in the other transfer striking his engine and he immediately applied the air brakes. The statements of the other members of this crew added nothing of additional importance

Flagman Bone, of Southern engine 219, stated that he was working as the field man on his transfer and that his conductor had instructed him that it was intended to shove their transfer out of the north end of track 3. N&PBL engine 35 was standing on track 2 with the headlight burning and he lined the switches for that engine to pull the head portion of its transfer out on the lead track, which was done, and as those cars were being backed in on track 1 his own transfer was shoved northward on track 3 and fouled the lead track Flagman Bone stated that he did not give any signal for the movement.

Head Brakeman Williamson, of Southern engine 219, stated that he thought the cars in his transfer were about two car-lengths in the clear at the north end of the yard and that after his engine headed against the south end of these cars he gave his engineman a proceed signal, of his own accord, as there was an engine on the south lead track waiting to get by. Head Brakeman Williamson stated that he did not see the lighted lantern of the field man, received no signal from the north end to proceed, and was unaware of anything wrong, and after the movement stopped he began

coupling the air and inspecting couplings as he walked toward the north end of the yard. It further appeared from the statements of Head Brakeman Williamson that his engineman did not call for a signal before the cars were shoved ahead, and that it was customary when coupling to a cut of cars to shove them ahead not over an engine-length, without receiving a signal from the field man, in order to determine whether all couplings have been made, but that in making a regular yard movement it is his general practice not to give a signal to move until it has been ascertained that the way is clear. Head Brakeman Williamson also said that he was not familiar with instructions issued in 1926 prohibiting the shoving of cars until a signal from the field man has been received.

Engineman Kay, of Southern engine 219, stated that after heading against the cars standing on track 3 his head brakeman, who was then standing opposite the head end of the first car, gave him a signal to proceed and he shoved the cars ahead about an engine-length and stopped, not being aware of anything wrong until afterwards. The air brakes were not cut in on the cars after the engine went against them. Engineman Kay further stated that it was his practice to accept a signal to proceed, such as was given in this case, without any question. Statements of Fireman Lamb brought out nothing additional of importance.

Conductor Thompson, of Southern egine 219, stated that he had been to the yard office to deliver and receive bills, during which time the accident occurred. Before going to the yard office he instructed Head Brakeman Williamson to go to track 3 with the engine and told Flagman Bone that it was intended to shove the cars on that track. He considered these two brakemen reliable, and trusted them to carry out the work during his absence. Conductor Thompson also stated that he had instructed Head Brakeman Williamson not to shove cars until a signal was received from the field man, with respect to making couplings and testing the air, the conductor said that it is the duty of the head brakeman to couple the engine to the cars and cut in the air, and that the car inspector then works on the air. If any couplings are to be made the head brakeman makes them as he goes along the cut

Conclusions

This accident was caused by Head Brakeman Williamson giving a proceed signal without having received a similar signal from the field man to indicate that the way was clear for the intended movement.

The following Special Instructions were issued by the Southern Railway System, dated Pinners Point, Va , Oct 13, 1926.

"All Yard Train and Engine Crews

"In future when working Belt Line connection you find No. 3 or any other track full of cars do not allow your engine to shove these tracks in at the south end until you get a signal from your rear man at the north end, the rear man will look out and see that everything is clear on the ladder before he will allow these cars to be shoved out.

"I hope you will comply with these instructions and help keep accidents down

G L. Lipscomb
General Yardmaster "

These instructions covered the exact situation as it existed at the time of the accident. Conductor Thompson and Engineman Kay were familiar with these instructions, but Head Brakeman Williamson, as well as Flagman Bone, said they were not acquainted with them. It is not at all certain that this was the case, but even so, Head Brakeman Williamson knew nothing about conditions at the north end of the yard, and common sense should have told him not to give a proceed signal until he knew that the movement could be made in safety.

Head Brakeman Williamson had been in yard service at this point since March, 1929, prior to which he had had 17 months' experience as a road brakeman, Flagman Bone had had more than two years' yard service. The other employees were also 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.