

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN  
RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED  
ON THE NORFOLK & WESTERN RAILWAY NEAR PEEBLES,  
OHIO, ON JANUARY 24, 1925.

March 18, 1925.

To the Commission:

On January 24, 1925, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Norfolk & Western Railway near Peebles, Ohio, which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Cincinnati subdivision of the Scioto Division, which extends between Cincinnati and East Portsmouth, Ohio, a distance of 108.5 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point approximately 1.75 miles east of Peebles; approaching this point from the west there are 2,871 feet of tangent and then a 4° curve to the left 625 feet in length, the collision occurring at the east end of this curve; approaching from the east there are 2,553 feet of tangent to the point of accident. The grade for eastbound trains is generally slightly descending to the western end of the curve on which the accident occurred, and is then 1.12 per cent descending to the point of accident, about 600 feet distant, and for 2,250 feet beyond. On account of the fact that the curve extends through a rock cut 20 feet in depth, the range of vision is restricted to about 250 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 2.42 a.m.

Description

Eastbound freight train first No. 86 consisted of 31 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 1039 and 1036, and was in charge of Conductor Kelly and Enginemen Wyatt and Freeman. At Sardinia, 24.4 miles from Peebles, a copy of train order No. 202, Form 31 addressed to trains first and second No. 86 at Sardinia, was received, which provided as follows:

"Eng 389 run Extra Vera to Clare meet  
Third 78 at Ctway First 86 at Peebles  
Second 86 at Lawshe and Third 86 at  
Macon Third 78 take siding."

train

A clearance card was also received and first No. 86 departed from Sardinia, according to the train sheet, at 1.28 a.m. As this train passed Peebles a copy of train order No. 202, Form 19, and a block clearance card were received, the clearance card providing that:

"Block is clear on arrival of Ex 389  
west Signal is displayed for First 86  
and Ex 389 meet or pass as per Order  
No. 202. Except as stated, block is clear."

After receiving the order and clearance card train first No. 86 passed extra 1067, which was standing on the passing track, mistaking it for extra 389, and proceeded eastward, colliding with extra 389 while traveling at a speed of about 25 miles an hour.

Westbound freight train extra 389 consisted of 40 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 389 and 1080, and was in charge of Conductor Boyles and Enginemen Hill and Plummer. This train departed from Vera at 1.15 a.m., after having received a copy of train order No. 202, previously quoted, passed Rarden, 10.1 miles from Peebles and the last open office, at 2.19 a.m., and collided with train first No. 86 near Peebles while traveling at a speed of about 7 or 8 miles an hour.

The leading engine of train first No. 86 remained upright on the roadbed; the second engine was derailed to the left and turned over on its side. The two tenders, and the first, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth cars were also derailed, the tenders, first and eleventh cars being demolished. The leading engine of extra 389 remained upright on the roadbed and the second engine was only partly derailed, while both tenders and the first car in this train were demolished. The employees killed were the fireman of the first engine, and the head brakeman, of train first No. 86.

#### Summary of evidence

Engineman Wyatt, of the leading engine of train first No. 86, stated that at the time of receiving train order No. 202, he also received several other orders, and while he did not read train order No. 202 to the conductor at that time he thoroughly understood the meet provided therein for his train with extra 389 at Peebles. As his train approached Peebles he sounded

the meeting-point whistle signal, which was answered by a train on the passing track and it appeared that extra 389 was waiting for his train, and he remarked to this effect to the fireman. So certain was he that the train was extra 389 that he felt no alarm when unable to distinguish the numbers in the pilot cage of the leading engine of that train, which as a matter of fact was engine 1067, due to steam around the front end of that engine, nor when later he was unable to see the number on the engine cab. He said he made no attempt to register with the engine crews as his engine passed, saying that no one from either of the engines on the passing track registered, it being his practice to wait for the members of the crew of an extra train to register first. His train passed through Peebles without stopping, having slowed down only to pick up a Form 19 order and a clearance card, neither of which he attempted to read until after passing the train on the passing track. He said his first intimation of anything wrong was when the fireman called a warning, at which time he applied the air brakes in emergency, and then jumped from the engine. Engineman Wyatt admitted full responsibility for the collision as a result of his failure to identify the train on the passing track, saying the proper thing for him to have done under the circumstances would have been to stop and ascertain the number of that train, instead of presuming as he did that it was extra 389.

Engineman Freeman of the second engine of train first No. 86, said he could not see the numbers of the engines on the passing track at Peebles on account of smoke and steam blowing around engine 1067. When registering he heard the man on the first engine call but could not understand what was said. He estimated the speed of his train at the time to have been about 15 miles an hour, and admitted that he did not identify the train, taking it for granted that Engineman Wyatt had assured himself of the identity of the train and that everything was all right.

Fireman Waits, of the second engine of train first No. 86, corroborated the testimony of Engineman Freeman and brought out no additional facts of importance.

Conductor Kelly, of train first No. 86, stated that upon the arrival of his train at Peebles there was an extra on the passing track but at the time the caboose passed the engines, steam and smoke obscured the engine numbers and he was unable to identify the train, and although he called his own train/number he received no reply from the members of the other crew, neither did he receive an answer to his own register as the two cabooses passed. Conductor Kelly took no action toward

bringing his train to a stop for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not the train on the passing track was extra 369, giving as a reason for his failure to do so, the fact that Engineman Wyatt had the reputation of being very reliable, and that he did not think the engineman would pass a train on a passing track without learning its identity.

Flagman Vance, of train first No. 86, stated that he read the order received at Sardinia and understood the meet provided for his train with extra 389 at Peebles. He said that while he was unable to identify the train on the passing track at Peebles it did not occur to him that it was not extra 389, and even after the collision he thought the stop was due to the train parting, got a wrench and hose connection for Conductor Kelly, and then took his flag equipment and went back to protect the rear of his train.

Engineman Hughes, of extra 1067, which was occupying the passing track at Peebles at the time train first No. 86 passed, stated that as soon as his train was into clear the headlight was turned off but that the pilot light in the cage above the headlight was burning; he did not notice any smoke or steam blowing around the engine. He answered the meeting-point whistle signal of train first No. 86 and when the engines were passing he registered the number of his own train but received no reply, although he saw and recognized both enginemen and could plainly see the engine numbers on the sides of the cabs. He said the engines of train first No. 86 passed him at a speed of about 18 miles an hour, which speed had been increased to about 23 miles an hour at the time the caboose passed.

The statements of the other members of the two engine crews of extra 1067 corroborated the testimony of Engineman Hughes in substance and indicated that when effort was made, they were able to identify train first No. 86 by sight, but that the speed and noise of the passing train was such that they were unable to hear what was called by the various members of the crew of train first No. 86, and in several instances it appeared that no answers were returned to attempts on their part to register with that train. Fireman Theiss, of engine 1067, also stated that all of the lights on the front end of his engine had failed at a station 10 miles east of Peebles, but that they had been repaired before leaving that station. Head Brakeman Thacker, of the same train, stated that at the time train first No. 86 approached and passed he was standing in front of engine 1067 and that the classification lights and cage light of engine 1067 were burning.

The statements of Conductor Janney and Flagman Hackworth, of extra 1067, indicated that attempts were made to register with various members of the crew of train first No. 86, but that its speed was such that it was impossible to hear the replies given.

Engineman Hill, of the leading engine of extra 389, said train order No. 202, on form 19, was received at Vera, which order provided for a meet with train first No. 86 at Peebles. He saw the reflection of the headlight of that train as his own train approached the curve on which the accident occurred, and he at once applied the air brakes and had reduced the speed of his train to about 7 or 8 miles an hour at the time of the collision. The statements of the other members of the crew of extra 389 brought out no additional facts of importance.

Operator Porter, on duty at Peebles, said that when he handed the orders to the crew of train first No. 86 as the train passed the office he had no idea that they were not going to stop. When extra 1067 started to pull out of the passing track, after the passage of train first No. 86, he noted that the figure "7" in the pilot light of engine 1067 was somewhat dim on the fireman's side of the engine, this however, being on the side opposite to that on which train first No. 86 had passed.

Enginemen Pugh and Miller and Conductor Sampson, of train third No. 78, which had met extra 1067 at Rarden, stated that they had no difficulty in observing the number of engine 1067 and that there was no unusual amount of steam around the front end of the engine.

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of train first No. 86 to obey a meet order, due to the fact that they failed properly to identify a train which was standing on the passing track at the meeting point. The responsibility for this accident rests with Enginemen Wyatt and Freeman and Conductor Kelly.

The testimony of the train and engine crews of train first No. 86 and extra 1067, which latter train was standing on the passing track at Peebles at the time train first No. 86 passed that point, was conflicting, various members of both crews claiming that their attempts to register with the other crew were unanswered. The

members of the crew of train first No. 86 also claimed that smoke and steam around engine 1067 were such that it was impossible to discern the number and identity of that engine. Regardless of this or any other condition, it was incumbent upon the crew of train first No. 86 to know that the train specified in train order No. 302 had arrived before their own train departed from Peebles.

Had an adequate automatic block-signal 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.

At the time of this accident the crew of train first No. 86 had been on duty about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours after an off-duty period of 17 hours or more, the crew of extra 389 had been on duty nearly 3 hours, previous to which they had been off duty periods varying between 10 hours and 15 minutes and 41 hours and 45 minutes.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.