

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE NORTHERN PACIFIC RAILWAY NEAR DURANT, MONT., ON AUGUST 14, 1922.

September 14, 1922.

To the Commission:

On August 14, 1922, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Northern Pacific Railway near Durant, Mont., resulting in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 20 passengers and 4 employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Board of Railroad Commissioners of Montana.

Location and method of operation.

The accident occurred on the Second Sub-Division of the Rocky Mountain Division, extending between Butte and Garrison, Mont., a distance of 51.5 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, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred approximately 1.2 miles east of Durant, in what is known as Silver Bow Canyon, through which also run the tracks of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, and the Butte, Anaconda & Pacific Railway; this latter road is an electric railway bordering the track of the Northern Pacific Railway on the south at the point of accident. The Northern Pacific Railway occupies the center track in the canyon, while large bluffs rise abruptly from the far side of the tracks of the other railways in this vicinity. Approaching the point of accident from the west there are 1,450 feet of tangent, followed by a 6-degree curve to the right 450 feet in length; the accident occurred on this curve at a point about 132 feet from its eastern end. Approaching from the east there are several short curves and tangents, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for a considerable distance in each direction from the point of accident is practically 1.0 per cent ascending for eastbound trains. Owing to the bluffs, the view is much restricted. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 10:50 a.m.

Description.

Eastbound passenger train No. 2 consisted of 1 mail car, 1 baggage-dynamo car, 1 smoking car, 1 coach, 1 dining car, 4 Pullman sleeping cars, and 1 observation car, hauled by engine 2230, and was in charge of Conductor Grant and Engineman Dreyer. The cars were of all-steel construction with the exception of the second car, which had a steel-underframe. This train passed Durant, the last open office, at 10.45 a. m., 5 minutes late, and after having proceeded about 1.2 miles collided with extra 1747 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 10 miles an hour.

Westbound freight train extra 1747 consisted of 57 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1747, and was in charge of Conductor Durrant and Engineman O'Donnell. This train left Silver Bow, 7.1 miles east of Durant and the last open office, at 10.32 a. m., and after having proceeded approximately 5.9 miles collided with train No. 2 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 18 miles an hour.

Neither engine was derailed, however, they were both considerably damaged, as were the first two cars in the passenger train, the second being telescoped by the first for a distance of about 15 feet. Six cars in the freight train were slightly damaged, some of which were also derailed. The employee killed was the express messenger on train No. 2.

Summary of evidence.

Engineman O'Donnell, of extra 1747, was unaware of anything wrong until Fireman Edwards gave warning of danger, immediately afterwards he saw Head Brakeman Gove and Fireman Edwards jump; he then made an emergency application of the air brakes, and also jumped just before the accident occurred. Conductor Durrant and Flagman Blay were in the caboose and the first they knew of anything wrong was when the accident occurred. The crew of the extra held no orders giving their train any rights against train No. 2, and all of them admitted overlooking train No. 2 entirely, stating they did not give the superior scheduled passenger train a thought until after the accident occurred, although they were furnished with time-tables, and were thoroughly familiar with the physical characteristics, and also all of the scheduled trains on this division. Conductor Durrant admitted he consulted his time-table leaving Butte; however, he did not make a thorough check of it for opposing trains, as he had worked in this vicinity for years and was positive he absolutely knew which trains were due.

When Engineman Dreyer, of train No. 2, first saw the steam engine of extra 1747 as it rounded the curve, it was only a short distance away; he was of the impression that the freight train was on the track of the Butte, Anaconda & Pacific Railway, the electric railway, but immediately afterwards he realized the train was on his track, and when about 6 or 7 car-lengths away he made an emergency application of the air brakes. The first intimation Conductor Grant, of train No. 2, had of anything wrong was when the air brakes were applied in emergency, immediately followed by the collision, he estimated the speed of his train at the time of the emergency application to have been about 25 miles an hour, and at the time of the collision at about 10 miles an hour.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by extra 1747 occupying the main track on the time of train No. 2, for which the crew of extra 1747 is responsible.

All of the members of the crew of extra 1747 admitted having entirely overlooked the superior scheduled passenger train, and none of them advanced any reason for the error. Rules 87 and 89 of the Transportation Rules read in part as follows:

Rule 87. "An inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains and failing to clear the main track by the time required by rule must be protected as prescribed by Rule 99.

Extra trains must clear the time of regular trains five minutes unless otherwise provided *****."

Rule 89. "At meeting points between trains of different classes the inferior train must take the siding and clear the superior train at least five minutes *****."

Had these rules been complied with this accident would not have occurred.

This accident again calls attention to the necessity for extending the block system. Had an adequate block system been in use on this line, this accident no doubt would have been averted.

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The employees involved were experienced men; at the time of the accident the crew of extra 1747 had been on duty less than 3 hours, after having been off duty 8 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Chief, Bureau of Safety.