

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE CINCINNATI, LEBANON & NORTHERN BRANCH OF THE PENNSYLVANIA SYSTEM AT LESTER, OHIO, ON AUGUST 1, 1922.

August 17, 1922.

To the Commission:

On August 1, 1922, there was head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Cincinnati, Lebanon & Northern Branch of the Pennsylvania System at Lester, Ohio, resulting in the death of 4 passengers and 2 employees, and the injury of 64 passengers and 4 employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the Cincinnati Division of the Cincinnati, Lebanon & Northern Branch of the Pennsylvania System, extending between Dayton and Cincinnati, Ohio, a distance of 55.2 miles. On this line trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. From Cincinnati to Highland Avenue, a distance of 5.8 miles, it is double-track, and from that point to Dayton it is a single track line. The switch at the end of double track is normally set for an eastbound movement. The accident occurred on the single track line about half a mile east of Highland Avenue, just west of the station at Lester; approaching this point from either direction there are numerous short curves and tangents, the accident occurring about the center of a 6-degree curve, approximately 400 feet in length, where the grade is 1.28 per cent descending for westbound trains. Owing to the station, trees and shrubbery, the view across the inside of the curve is restricted to about 200 feet. The accident occurred at about 9.38 a.m., at which time the weather was clear.

Description.

Westbound passenger train No. 11 consisted of 1 combination passenger and baggage car, and 1 coach, of wooden construction, hauled by engine 8317, and was in charge of Conductor Kahoe and Engineman Williams. This train was en route from Lebanon to Cincinnati, Ohio; it passed Blue Ash, about 5.3 miles from Lester and the last open telegraph office, at 9.21 a.m. 6 minutes late, made a stop at Kennedy Heights, a flag station, and collided with extra 9111, just west of Lester Avenue, while traveling at a speed of about 25 miles an hour.

Eastbound passenger train extra 9111 was an excursion

train en route from Cincinnati to Winslow Park, Ohio, it consisted of 4 coaches, and 1 combination passenger, mail and baggage car, of wooden construction, in the order named, hauled by engine 9111, and was in charge of Conductor Morley and Engineman Meyer. This train left Cincinnati, about 6.3 miles from Lester, at 9.05 a.m., stopped at Idlewild, passed East Norwood, the last open telegraph office at 9.32 a.m., passed from the double to single-track and after having proceeded a distance of 0.54 miles on single track collided with train No. 11 while traveling at a speed of about 25 miles an hour.

Both engines were derailed and badly damaged but remained upright, while three cars were considerably damaged; the leading truck of the first car in extra 9111 was derailed, and the forward half of this car was telescoped, the forward end of the first car in train No. 11 was crushed for a distance of 5 or 6 feet. The employees killed were the fireman and head brakeman of extra 9111.

Summary of evidence.

At Court Street, Cincinnati, Conductor Morley and Engineman Meyer of extra 9111 procured orders from Operator Miller, and before leaving the office Conductor Morley examined the train register, these employees showed their orders to Head Brakeman Fite and Fireman Seelinger, respectively, it being the intention of Conductor Morley to also show his orders to Flagman Brown after working his way to the rear of the train. Conductor Morley also examined the train register at Idlewild, 3.7 miles from Cincinnati, and supposed Engineman Meyer would wait for train No. 11, which was the superior train, at Highland Avenue, the end of the double-track, although nothing was said and there was no definite understanding as to the meeting point for this train. Shortly after passing Highland Avenue, Head Brakeman Fite inquired of Conductor Morley where it was intended to meet train No. 11 and Conductor Morley, realizing his train had passed Highland avenue, immediately reached for the emergency cord, but the collision occurred while he was doing so. Engineman Meyer stated he misread his watch and intended meeting train No. 11 at Deer Park, approximately 2.8 miles east of the point of accident; he was on the outside of the curve which cut off his view of the track ahead and he thought the engine was still working steam at the time of the accident.

Fireman Evans of train No. 11 stated Engineman Williams sounded the whistle signal for the road crossing at Pleasant Ridge, about 2,000 feet east of the point of accident, and reduced speed slightly; Fireman Evans then heard another engine whistle which had the same sound as the whistle on their engine, and just as he was about to speak to Engineman Williams in regard to this whistle signal, the air brakes were released, and on account of the noise he did not do so. About

opposite the station at Lester speed was again reduced in preparation for a sharp curve, approximately 1,000 feet west of the point of accident, the brake valve immediately being moved from this position to the emergency position when Engineman Williams saw extra 9111; Fireman Evans was of the opinion that the emergency application did not take effect owing to the previous air brake applications. Engineman Williams was injured and he did not remember anything in regard to the accident. Conductor Kahoe stated the air brakes had been tested and were working properly, the first intimation he had of anything wrong was when the collision occurred.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by extra 9111 occupying the main track on the time of train No. 11, a superior scheduled train, for which Conductor Morley and Engineman Meyer are primarily responsible.

Although the entire crew of extra 9111 knew of the superior scheduled train, nothing was agreed upon between them as to where they would meet this train; Conductor Morley checked the train registers at Cincinnati and Idlewild, shortly before the accident occurred, and knew it was getting close on the time of train No. 11. Idlewild is 2.1 miles west of Highland Avenue. Had a train register been maintained at Highland Avenue, the end of double track, and required to be checked by eastbound trains before passing from double to single track, the possibility of overlooking an opposing superior train would have been materially reduced.

In view of the fact that Conductor Morley expected to wait for No. 11 at the end of double track, and Head Brake-man Fite called attention to the superior scheduled train shortly after leaving the double-track, it is probable that had the switch leading to the single-track been normally lined for a westbound movement, making it necessary for trains to stop and open the same before passing from double to single-track, some member of the crew of extra 9111 would have called attention to the fact that it was necessary to wait at that point for train No. 11, and the accident would have been averted.

This accident again calls attention to the liability of error under the time-table and train order system of operation, and the necessity for the block system. Had an adequate block system been in use on this line, this accident would no doubt have been averted.

Had all-steel equipment been in service on these trains, it is probable that the casualties would have been greatly reduced.

The employees involved were experienced men; at the time of the accident the crew of extra 9111 had been on duty less than $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours, after having been off duty 15 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Chief, Bureau of Safety