

MEMORANDUM TO COMMISSIONER McCHORD
relative to accident on the Pere Marquette R. R., October 19, 1911.

Draft submitted by the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances
as a basis for the report of the Commission.

December 11, 1911.

On October 19, 1911, the Pere Marquette Railroad reported by telegraph a head-on collision occurring in the Rouge-mere Yard, Detroit, Mich., between special passenger train No. 389, east-bound, and extra freight train No. 608, west-bound. Inspectors Coutts and Smith, who were in Detroit at the time, made an investigation and a synopsis of their report is given below.

Freight extra No. 608 left the Seventeenth Street Yard at Detroit at 1:05 A. M. for Toledo, Ohio, with 51 cars and a caboose, and reached Rouge-mere Yard at 2:05 A. M. There the train was cut in two, the engine and 26 cars proceeding to the west end of the yard for the purpose of setting out three cars in the train for which the conductor had no way-bills. Under ordinary circumstances the switching movement involved would not have called for the use of the main track, but because a switch had been broken by running through it, it was necessary to head out on the main line. After setting out the cars, the train backed in on a siding, and the main line switch was open in anticipation of the conductor's receiving orders to start out.

The special train, No. 389, consisting of engine No. 389, one baggage car and two passenger cars, was bound from Saginaw to Detroit, and left Plymouth, Mich., a station west of Detroit, at 3:17 A. M., making the run of 20 miles between that station and Rougemere Yard in 23 minutes. Before leaving Plymouth, the crew of this train received a copy of order No. 14, giving them rights over all trains except first class trains. The first indication the engineman had that the main line switch at Rougemere Yard was open was when he saw the switch light. He then applied the emergency air brakes, but it was too late to prevent the collision, which caused the death of 1 employee and injuries to 1 employee and 7 passengers. Although the engines did not leave the rails, they were both quite badly damaged. The wooden baggage car was completely telescoped, while the two passenger cars, equipped with steel underframes and non-telescoping ends, escaped with very slight damage. Several of the cars in the freight train were demolished. The speed of the passenger train at the time of the accident was probably about 50 miles per hour.

The Pere Marquette Railroad uses a joint double track from the Union Station at Detroit, to Delray, Mich., and its own single track from Delray westward to Plymouth, Mich., and beyond. Rougemere Yard is immediately beyond Delray and all west-bound freight trains, after leaving the joint track at Delray, enter this yard without coming in contact with the main line.. Freight train crews register, and also receive orders, at

the Rougemere Yard office, no orders being received prior to reaching that place.

While the crew of Extra No. 606 was working in the west end of the yard, the conductor went to the yard office for orders, and received order No. 14, for which he signed at 2:53 A. M., 47 minutes prior to the accident. This order was as follows:

Train Order No. 14. Superintendent's Office,
Detroit, Mich., Oct. 19, 1911.

To C. & E. Engine 389, Plymouth, and all excepting first class trains. To Yardmaster Rougemere and all west excepting first class trains.

Engine 389 will run special, leaving Plymouth on Thursday, October 19th, as follows, with right over all except first class trains. Leave Plymouth 3:00 A.M., Oak 3:20 A.M., arrive Delray 3:30 A.M.

W.K.T.

By this order, special No. 389 was made a train superior to freight extra No. 608. After signing for this order in the yard office, the conductor in charge of the freight extra remained there for some time, and a short time prior to the accident, started for the west end of the yard, but did not reach there in time to notify his crew of the order relating to the approaching special train. Immediately upon receipt of order No. 14, he should have notified his crew that a train superior to his own was due at Oak, the first station west of Rougemere Yard, at 3:20 A. M. It was also his duty to see that after this time the main track was not occupied by his train unless properly protected.

There is a heavy grade out of Rougemere Yard, west-bound, owing to the fact that the Pere Marquette tracks cross

those of the Michigan Central by means of an overhead bridge about 3,000 feet west of the yard. For this reason freight trains usually start 300 or 400 yards east of the switch which lets them out on the main line, in order to obtain the momentum necessary to carry their trains over the grade.

Extra No. 608 was standing on a side track in this yard about 800 feet from the open switch, waiting for the return of the conductor from the yard office before starting out. None of the members of the freight crew knew of the order relating to the special train, and consequently left the switch open in readiness to proceed. When the head brakeman of the freight train heard special No. 369 approaching, he made an effort to reach the switch for the purpose of closing it and preventing the accident, but did not have time to do so.

The main line switch above mentioned is protected by a semaphore signal located about 1,000 feet east of the bridge and about 2,800 feet west of the place of the accident, and cannot be opened without this signal indicating danger. The signal is plainly visible to east-bound trains for a distance of at least 3,000 feet. The track is straight, and there is a down grade of about 1-1/2% after passing the bridge.

The weather on the night in question was foggy, the fog lying in thick banks, and the engineman in charge of the passenger train states that in the vicinity of the semaphore the fog was very dense. It also seems that smoke from a neighboring brick yard contributed to the thickness of the weather, the engineman stating that for these reasons he did not see the semaphore at all. While there is no question about

the weather being foggy, there are various landmarks, namely, a curve about a mile from the semaphore, the passing over at grade of a single track electric railway at Michigan Avenue, and a steep grade to the bridge west of the semaphore, which would have located it for the engineman if he had had it in mind at the time.

All of the employees of both trains had been in service for some time, their records were good, and none of them had been on duty in excess of the statutory period.

The accident was caused by the failure of the conductor in charge of the freight train, upon receiving order No. 14 at the telegraph office, to immediately notify his crew that an approaching special train had the right of way, and to see that his train was properly protected. A contributing cause was the failure of the engineman in charge of the special train to observe and be governed by the semaphore signal provided for the purpose of preventing an accident of this kind.

As a preventive of accidents of this character, it is recommended that, in all cases where accidents are likely to occur through the non-observance by enginemen of any rule or signal calculated to insure safety, automatic train control apparatus shall be provided to insure that trains will be brought to a stop in case the rules or signals are not observed.

Respectfully submitted,

Chief Inspector of
Safety Appliances.