

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
PERE MARQUETTE RAILWAY NEAR PETOSKEY, MICH., ON
SEPTEMBER 27, 1929

January 23, 1930

To the Commission:

On September 27, 1929, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Pere Marquette Railway, near Petoskey, Mich., which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of six employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on Sub-Division 6 of the Chicago-Petoskey Division, which extends between Boardman and Bay View, Mich., a distance of 79.02 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point approximately 2 miles south of Petoskey, approaching this point from the north there is a 4° curve to the right 1,026.3 feet in length, from which point the track is tangent for a distance of 442.2 feet, followed by a 3° curve to the left 812.5 feet in length, the accident occurring on the last mentioned curve at a point 261.5 feet from its northern end. Approaching from the south the track is tangent for a distance of 3,627 feet, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade at the point of accident is 0.4 per cent ascending for southbound trains. Owing to an embankment on the inside of the curve on which the accident occurred, the view had by engine crews of southbound trains is restricted to about 520 feet and that of northbound trains is limited to about 610 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 4.56 p.m.

Description

Southbound engine 282, hauling a caboose, was running as an extra train and was in charge of Conductor Ely and Engineman Mertes. At Petoskey, 0.99 mile south

of Bay View, the crew received a copy of train order No. 247, Form 31, reading as follows

"Eng 282 run extra Petoskey to
Boardman with right over extra
372 north wait at Petoskey
until five 500 PM Larson until
five forty 540 PM for extra 372
north"

Extra 282 departed from Petoskey at about 4.53 p.m., and shortly afterwards it collided with extra 372 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been from 2 to 20 miles per hour.

Northbound freight train extra 372 consisted of eight cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 372, and was in charge of Conductor Dobson and Engineman Markham. The crew received a copy of train order No. 247, Form 31, previously quoted, at Charlevoix, 15.44 miles south of Petoskey, and left that point at 3 40 p.m., departed from Larson, 3.4 miles south of Petoskey, at 4.52 p.m., according to the train crew, and was approaching Petoskey when it collided with extra 282 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 20 and 60 miles per hour.

The impact forced extra 282 backward a distance of 165 feet but did not derail the engine, although it was badly damaged, the rear truck of the caboose was derailed. Engine 372 was entirely derailed but remained upright, and it also was badly damaged. The tender came to rest standing on its forward end, with the rear end against the boiler head. The first car in this train was demolished and the second car was derailed and damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and head brakeman of extra 372, and the employees injured were the rear brakeman of extra 372 and the entire crew of extra 282.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Mertes, of extra 282, stated that he was called to leave Petoskey at 5 p.m., and that while in the caboose awaiting the arrival of northbound train No. 1, which he knew was due at that point at 4.55 p.m., the conductor delivered to him a copy of train order No. 247. His train was standing in the south end of the yard and shortly after train No. 1 passed, he pulled out on the

main track, waited until the brakeman closed the switch, and then continued southward without noting the time of departure. He estimated the speed of his train at 25 miles per hour as it approached the point of accident and when he saw the approaching train, he shut off steam but did not remember whether he applied the brakes. After the accident he looked at his watch and it was then 4.58 p.m., but his watch was 20 seconds slow. Engineman Mertes further stated that although both he and the conductor read the order to each other at the time it was delivered to him, he failed to remember that it required his train to wait at Petoskey until 5 p.m., and at Lamson until 5.40 p.m.

Fireman Weaver, of extra 282, stated that he read and understood train order No. 247 before leaving Petoskey. He did not know at what time his train departed from that point, but about one or two minutes after train No. 1 passed, the head brakeman opened the main line switch and gave them a proceed signal. Fireman Weaver then started working on the fire and continued to do so until just before the collision occurred; when the engineman applied the brakes, the fireman jumped from the gangway of the engine. Immediately after the accident he looked at his watch and saw that it was 4.56.30, but he was not certain that this time was entirely correct as he had not compared his watch with a standard clock before departing, and had not compared it with any member of the crew. He also said he did not know whether the conductor and engineman had read the order involved, but that when he read it he remarked "five o'clock Petoskey and 5.40 Lamson," no mention of the order was made en route.

Head Brakeman Wilkins, of extra 282, read the orders before his train entered the main track at Petoskey and understood they were required to wait at that point until 5 p.m. After the arrival of train No. 1, he was instructed by the engineman to open the main track switch, he complied with these instructions, closed the switch after the train was on the main track, and then gave a proceed signal, after which he boarded the caboose. He did not remember of anything being said concerning the wait order after leaving Petoskey, and said he was riding in the cupola of the caboose as the train approached the point of accident and that on account of his position on the outside of the curve he did not see the opposing train. Head Brakeman Wilkins was aware that train No. 1 was due at Petoskey at 4.55 p.m., but did not know at what time it arrived on the day of the accident and he failed

to check the time of departure of his own train. Shortly after the accident, however, he noted that it was 5.02 p.m., and this convinced him that his train had departed before the time specified in the wait order.

Conductor Ely, of extra 282, stated that train order No. 247 was made complete at 4.22 p.m., but that he did not deliver it to the engineman until about 4.50 or 4.52 p.m., and the engineman, who was in the caboose at the time, read it back to him. Conductor Ely also informed the engineman that train No. 1 was on time. The conductor did not know how much time elapsed after the arrival of train No. 1 before his own train departed, neither did he know the time at which his train departed, while due to his being rendered unconscious as a result of the collision he was unable to determine the time of its occurrence.

Brakeman Sherwood, of extra 282, stated that before leaving Petoskey he read back train order No. 247 to the conductor and also heard the engineman read it to him. Train No. 1 passed the point where their train was standing in the south end of the yard at 4.56 p.m., and he then started setting his markers ready and did not know at what time his train departed, paying no further attention to the time until eight or nine minutes after the accident, at which time it was then 5.08 p.m. He estimated the speed of his train as it approached the point of accident at 20 or 22 miles per hour, and thought that the air brakes, which were applied just prior to the accident, reduced the speed to not more than 2 miles per hour.

Fireman Brown, of extra 372, stated that they received a copy of train order No. 247 at Charlevoix and that his train proceeded to Lamson and there cleared the main track for train No. 1, which passed that point at 4.46 p.m., the schedule shows train No. 1 as due by Lamson at 4.57 p.m. His train then moved out on the main track and departed at 4.52 p.m. He had just picked up his shovel preparatory to putting in a fire when the engineman applied the brakes and shouted a warning. Fireman Brown jumped immediately and was slightly dazed by his fall, but as soon as he regained his composure he compared time with his conductor and it was then 4.53 p.m. It was his opinion that the speed of his train was between 50 and 60 miles per hour at the time of the accident. Fireman Brown also said that he was a promoted man, that he is familiar with the rule which permits

freight trains to follow passenger trains with caution after the expiration of 10 minutes, and that under this rule his train should not have left Lamson until 4.57 p.m. He did not call the engineman's attention to it, but instead when the train was departing, he remarked to the engineman that the time was very short and they would have to hurry.

Conductor Dobson, of extra 372, stated that before starting on this trip, he and the engineman compared time with a standard clock. Train No. 1 passed him at Lamson at 4.47 p.m., and his own train left that point at 4.52 p.m., which allowed them eight minutes in which to reach Petoskey on the wait order for extra 282. The accident occurred at 4.56 p.m., and shortly after its occurrence he compared watches with Engineman Mercus and Fireman Brown and it was then 4.58 p.m. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident at 25 miles per hour. Conductor Dobson also knew that under the rules, freight trains on the Petoskey Division are not permitted to follow passenger trains until the expiration of 10 minutes, but took no action to see that this rule was complied with.

Rear Brakeman Price, of extra 372, stated that although he had read train order No. 247, he paid no particular attention to the time at which train No. 1 passed Lamson or the time at which his own train departed from that point, but was of the opinion they had ample time in which to reach Petoskey and comply with the wait order. The rear brakeman was riding in the caboose when the collision occurred and the shock caused him to be thrown, but as soon as he regained his feet he noted the time as 4.57 p.m., he was not certain as to the speed of his train at the time of the accident, but thought it was between 20 and 30 miles per hour.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to obey a wait order, for which the entire crew of extra 282 is responsible.

The evidence indicates that train order No. 247, requiring extra 282 to wait at Petoskey until 5 p.m., was received and read by all members of the crew of extra 282. Shortly after northbound train No. 1 passed through the south end of the yard, extra 282 pulled out

on the main track and proceeded southward without any of the employees noting the time at which their own train departed, the engineman said he could not remember that part of the order requiring him to wait at Petoskey until 5 p.m., and all of the other members of the crew seem to have left it to the engineman. No adequate reason could be developed to explain the failure of all of these employees to pay more attention to the proper performance of their duties.

Under special instructions contained in the timetable, it is provided that, except in automatic block-signal territory, freight trains are permitted to follow passenger trains under caution, after the expiration of 10 minutes, while rule 91 of the operating rules, requires following movements to keep 10 minutes apart except when closing up at stations. It appears that train No. 1 passed Lamson at 4.46 or 4.47 p.m., and that extra 372 departed from that point at 4.52 p.m., instead of waiting the required 10 minutes. The crew of extra 372 was familiar with the spacing rules, and had they waited at Lamson until 4.56 or 4.57 p.m., there would not have been sufficient time for them to attempt to reach Petoskey before the time specified in the wait order, which was 5 p.m., and in this event the accident would not have occurred.

The employees involved were 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.