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August 14, 1911.

Interstate Commerce Commission,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sirs:

On July 28th, 1911, the Seaboard Air Line Railway reported by wire the death of eight passengers and serious injury to several others in an accident at Hamlet, N. C.

I had Inspectors Archer, Coutts and Smith investigate this accident and submit herewith a summary of their report of the accident:

Second section of No. 33, a southbound passenger train, consisting of engine 684, one baggage car and ten coaches, collided head-on with regular Scheduled freight train No. 17, consisting of at the time of the accident engine 537 and nine cars. Ten passengers were killed and fifty-six injured, many of them seriously.

DESCRIPTION.

Southbound passenger train, known as 2nd No. 33, was an excursion train delivered to the Seaboard Air Line Railway by the Durham & Southern Railway at Apex, N. C., 82 miles north of Hamlet, the place of accident. It was proceeding south over the Raleigh District to Hamlet and was then to proceed south to Charlotte, N. C., on the Monroe and Charlotte District.

At the time of the accident this train had orders to run 3 hours and 40 minutes late and was 12 or 13 minutes behind its schedule.

Freight train No. 17 is a regular scheduled freight train from Wilmington, N. C., to Hamlet, N. C., on the Wilmington District of the Seaboard Air Line Railway, and on arrival at Hamlet, their terminal, they take their train into the freight yards of the Raleigh District.

These trains are handled by separate train dispatchers; one train dispatcher, Mr. Purvis, has charge of the Wilmington District, between Hamlet, N. C., and Wilmington, N. C.; and one dispatcher, Mr. Witt, has charge of the Raleigh District, between Hamlet, N. C., and Raleigh, N. C. These dispatchers' office is located and they work in the same room in the Company's building at Hamlet.

Standard Rules, which the Seaboard Air Line use, require that trains on arrival at registering stations--such as Hamlet--shall check the train register to ascertain whether or not all trains due have arrived. On account of the heavy grade from the Wilmington District into the yards on the Raleigh District, it had been the practice for the train dispatchers to notify freight trains by message at Laurel Station, about 10 miles north of Hamlet, that "All overdue first class trains are by Hamlet," stating the time, so that trains need not check register at Hamlet. Before sending such messages the dispatcher on the Wilmington District would ascertain from the dispatcher on the Raleigh District the location of first class

trains and whether or not all had arrived, so that the above message might be sent to freight trains.

On the morning of July 27th Dispatcher Purvis sent train No. 17 a message that "All overdue first class trains are by Hamlet at 9:40 A. M.," without ascertaining from the dispatcher on the Raleigh District whether or not this information was correct. Freight trains receiving this message would not check the register at Hamlet but would take this message as authority that all first class trains had arrived and that therefore their rights on the Raleigh District would not be affected by any overdue first class trains. Train No. 17 on account of heavy train was compelled to double its train into Raleigh yards and at the time of the accident had but nine cars. The conductor and engineman of train No. 17 had no knowledge that train 2nd No. 33 was running on the Raleigh District. The conductor and engineman on 2nd 33 had no knowledge that any train would be occupying the main track at Hamlet. The accident occurred on heavy grade, about 50 to 60 feet per mile, on a sharp curve in the yards where the view was obstructed by cars. The passenger train (2nd No. 33) at the time of the accident was running at a speed of between 25 and 30 miles per hour. The freight train (No. 17) was moving at a speed of about 5 or 6 miles per hour. There is no rule restricting the speed of passenger trains through the Hamlet train yards.

Mr. Purvis, the dispatcher at fault for this accident, has been train dispatcher for over seven years and was considered a reliable and competent man.

CONCLUSION.

The cause of this accident was the issuing of message instructions by the train dispatcher, Mr. Purvis, to the regular freight train (No. 17), relieving them of the duty of checking the register and incorrectly notifying them that all overdue first class trains had arrived at Hamlet at 9:40 A. M.

From the investigation it appears that the operating officials of the Seaboard Air Line were fully aware of this practice and that it had been customary to issue messages of this character at this place for years on account of the physical condition of the track requiring trains to double into Hamlet yards if they have heavy trains.

The practice of issuing message instructions to trains relieving them of duties required under Standard Rules is a dangerous one and it should not be permitted on any railroad. Such authority should be given only by regular train orders, so that all trains affected shall have notice.

The Seaboard Air Line uses the manual block system on its Raleigh District between Raleigh, N. C., and the yard office at Hamlet. The yards at Hamlet are on a grade and

have a long, sharp curve between the yard office and Hamlet passenger station. This accident would have been prevented had these yard limits been governed by the block signal system.

Respectfully submitted,

Chief Inspector
of Safety Appliances.