

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN  
RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED  
ON THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY AT PLANT CITY,  
FLA., ON DECEMBER 29, 1924.

January 26, 1925.

To the Commission:

On December 29, 1924, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Seaboard Air Line Railway at Plant City, Fla., which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the Plant City Sub-division of the Florida Division, which extends between Plant City and Malaca, Fla., a distance of 67 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 collision occurred within yard limits at Plant City, at a point 767 feet north of the south yard-limit board, approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for more than 3,000 feet, followed by a 2° curve to the right 395 feet in length, and then tangent track to the point of accident, 1,710 feet distant. The grade for northbound trains is level for approximately 2,900 feet, from 0.2 to 0.8 per cent descending for about 1,200 feet, and is then level to the point of accident, 280 feet distant. Under rule 93 the main track may be used within yard limits without protecting against second-class and inferior trains. All trains are required to move under control with ability to stop within one-half the range of vision unless the main track is seen or known to be clear.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 11.15 p m.

### Description

Northbound freight train extra 328, in charge of Conductor Beach and Engineman Jones, departed from Edison Junction, the last open office, 12 miles south of the point of accident, at 8.15 p.m., after having received a copy of train order No. 87, which directed it to run ahead of second-class train No. 480 from Edison to Plant City. Upon arriving at Plant City at 10.45 p.m. the engine was cut off and moved to the shops to have the headlight repaired, the train, which at that time consisted of 30 cars and a caboose, being left standing on the main track. About 30 minutes later the rear of this train was struck by train No. 480.

Northbound second-class freight train No. 480, in charge of Conductor Bright and Engineman Haven, departed from Edison Junction at 10.10 p.m., after having received a copy of train order No. 87, previously referred to, and did station work at Welcome Junction and Alafia, two non-telegraph stations, 11 and 7.6 miles, respectively, from Plant City. It departed from Alafia with 15 cars and a caboose and proceeded northward, passing the south yard-limit board at Plant City at a speed of about 25 miles an hour and colliding with the rear of extra 328 without the speed having been materially reduced.

The caboose of extra 328 was demolished and a loaded steel car immediately ahead of it was turned over and badly damaged. Engine 728, of train No. 480, was derailed and turned nearly around, but remained upright diagonally across the track, it was considerably damaged. The next three cars behind the engine were derailed and turned over to the left of the track while the leading truck of the fourth car in this train was also derailed. The employees killed were the fireman and middle brakeman of train No. 480.

### Summary of evidence.

Engineman Haven, of train No. 480, stated that when rounding the curve just south of the tangent upon which the accident occurred, the speed of his train was about 20 or 25 miles an hour and that he applied the air brakes in service application making about a 15-pound reduction, after reducing speed and believing the track to be clear he released the brakes and very shortly afterwards, while drifting

at a speed of about 15 miles an hour, he saw the caboose of extra 328 a short distance ahead, applied the brakes in emergency and jumped. He said he had not seen any markers on the rear of the caboose and that the reflection of the headlight on the caboose was his first intimation of danger. Engineman Haven said the headlight on his engine was badly out of focus, making it impossible to see objects on the track more than a few car lengths ahead of the engine, that the headlight had been in that condition several weeks, during which time he had been running this engine regularly, and although he had tried to adjust it himself he had not at any time reported it as being defective. Engineman Haven said the accident was due to his inability to distinguish the rear of extra 328 owing to the marker lights on the caboose burning very dimly or not burning at all and to the defective condition of the headlight on his engine, he admitted, however, that at the rate of speed his train was running he could not have stopped within one-half the range of his vision, as required by rule 93. In connection with the testimony of Engineman Haven, statements by two enginemen concerning the condition of the markers on the rear of extra 328 were read into the record, one stated that the right marker was burning dimly when he passed it going in the opposite direction, while the other, a cousin of Engineman Haven's, said he could not see the markers until within 6 or 8 car lengths of them.

Brakeman Maxwell, of train No. 480, said he was standing in the gangway on the left side of the engine approaching the point of accident and that he saw the marker on the left side of the caboose of extra 328 just before the collision but could not tell if it was lighted or reflected the light from the headlight of the engine of his own train. He stated that the headlight of engine 728 was in poor condition and that he was able to see only three or four car lengths.

Conductor Bright, of train No. 480, said he felt the air brakes applied just before the impact, while Flagman Simms, who was in the caboose with the conductor, said his first intimation of anything wrong was when the collision occurred. From the damage done Flagman Simms thought the speed of his train must have been 20 or 25 miles an hour.

Conductor Beach and Flagman Martin, of extra 328, testified that the marker lights on the rear of their train were burning and that in addition a lighted red lantern was placed just inside the open door when they left the caboose to go forward to the front of their train upon arriving at Plant City. Flagman Martin said he cleaned the markers

before lighting them at Edison Junction but did not put oil in them as they were full at that time. He said they were practically new markers and in good condition and were so turned that the red lights showed directly to the rear.

The engineman, fireman and head brakeman of extra 328 all testified that the marker lights on the caboose were plainly visible from the front end of the train at various points on the trip. Engineman Jones also said he noticed that the marker lights were burning after his train arrived at Plant City.

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Haven, of train No. 480, to operate his train under proper control within yard limits.

Engineman Haven claimed that the accident was due to his inability to distinguish the rear end of extra 328 owing to the fact that the marker lights were burning very dimly, or not burning at all, and to the further fact that the headlight on his engine was defective. It was incumbent upon him, however, to control the speed of his train in accordance with that provision of rule 93 which requires trains to move through yard limits at a rate of speed at which the train may be brought to a stop within one-half the range of vision; according to his own statements he was not operating his train in accordance with this requirement.

Paragraph 4, of rule 93, requires that cars left standing on the main track at night must be protected by a flagman or by a burning red light placed where it can be seen by approaching trains. The conductor and flagman testified that the proper red lights were displayed to the rear of their train, and that in addition to the marker lights a lighted red lantern was placed in the open rear door of the caboose, when they left it about 30 minutes prior to the occurrence of the accident, while the statement of the engineman is that he saw the marker lights on the caboose after the train had been brought to a stop at Plant City.

At the time of the collision the crew of extra 328 had been on duty 9 hours and 15 minutes and the crew of train No. 480 had been on duty 13 hours and 30 minutes, previous to which both crews had been off duty 10 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director.