

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE ST. LOUIS-SAN FRANCISCO RAILWAY NEAR NEELYS,
MO., ON JANUARY 25, 1923.

March 2, 1923.

To the Commission:

On January 25, 1923, there was a head-end collision between a work train and a freight train on the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway near Neelys, Mo., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the River Division which extends between St. Louis and Chaffee, Mo., a distance of 143.5 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this 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 1,000 feet north of the station at Neelys; approaching from the north there are 907 feet of tangent, followed by a 2-degree curve to the left 531 feet in length, the accident occurring near the leaving end of this curve, approaching from the south the track is tangent for several thousand feet. The grade is slightly descending for southbound trains. There was a dense fog at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 7.35 a.m.

Description.

Work extra 623, hauled by List & Gifford Construction Company's engine 623, in charge of Conductor Hubbard and Engineman Putler, was engaged in hauling rock from an embankment located about 3,000 feet north of the station and unloading this rock from a spur track opposite the station. This train left Neelys at about 7.30 a.m., northbound, with the engine backing up and hauling one car, and had proceeded about 1,000 feet when it collided with extra 1247 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 8 or 10 miles an hour.

Southbound freight train extra 1247 consisted of engine 1247 also backing up, with a service car and caboose back of the tender, and a wrecking train consisting of another engine, four cars and a caboose, attached to the front of engine 1247, and was in charge of Conductor Moguin and Engineman Mouser. This train left Wittenberg, 11.6 miles north of Neelys, at 6.40 a.m., was flagged at a point about 1 1/2 miles north of Neelys by the flagman of extra 623, proceeded at a speed of about 4 miles an hour to a point about 1,000 feet north of the station and had stopped after extra 623 was seen to be approaching, and was struck by that train.

None of the equipment was derailed, while only slight damage was sustained by the caboose and service car of extra 1247. The employee killed was a division engineer, who was crushed between the caboose and the service car.

Summary of evidence.

The general routine of the crew of work extra 623 was to supply a coal and water car each morning to the construction camp cars located just south of the station and to supply fuel to a steam shovel used at the embankment 3,000 feet north of the station, after which the dump cars were hauled between the steam shovel and the unloading point near the station. Conductor Hubbard, of extra 623, stated that on the morning of the accident the usual work order was received, the order including instructions to protect against extra 1247 after 6.30 a.m., and against northbound extra 1252 after 8.30 a.m. This order was made complete at 6.30 a.m., and Conductor Hubbard directed Flagman Edwards to proceed northward and to notify extra 1247 to proceed expecting to find extra 623 between the steam shovel and the station; according to Conductor Hubbard, Flagman Edwards started at about 6.40 a.m. Conductor Hubbard also stated that after supplying the camp cars and pumping station with coal and water, his train proceeded northward towards the steam shovel at about 7.30 a.m., brakeman Smith accompanying it, while he remained at Neelys station to protect against northbound trains. His first knowledge of the accident was when engine 623 returned to the station.

Engineman Butler, of extra 623, stated that he had just passed a road crossing which is located a little more than 100 feet from the point of accident, when he saw the red markers of the caboose of extra 1247; he then applied the independent air brake and reversed the engine, but could not stop in time to avoid the collision. He stated that on account of the fog, his range of vision was restricted to a distance of about two car lengths, but as

he was not moving at a speed of more than 8 miles an hour he thought he could stop within this distance. He was expecting extra 1247, but did not know they were making a back-up movement and was expecting first to see the headlight of the engine. He also stated that the air was not cut in on the coal car.

Flagman Edwards, of extra 623, stated that he knew of the orders received, and upon flagging extra 1247 he notified Brakeman Green, who was riding on the rear platform of the caboose, to look out for his train between the steam shovel and the water tank and he then boarded the engine and repeated his flagging instructions to Engineman Mouser; he remained on the engine to the point of collision, and thought the speed of extra 1247 was not more than 5 miles an hour. He did not know whether or not extra 1247 stopped before the collision.

Conductor Moguin, of extra 1247, stated that after Flagman Edwards boarded the caboose and notified him of extra 623, the flagman got off and boarded the engine. He said his train then proceeded slowly while he and the two brakemen kept a sharp lookout for extra 623 from the cupola of the caboose, and when extra 623 was seen, one of the brakemen applied the air brakes by means of the conductor's valve, stopping the train before it was struck, he said the red markers on his caboose were properly displayed, but that he did not see any lights on the rear of the tender of extra 623. He had not instructed the brakemen to ride on the rear of the caboose as he thought a better view could be had from the cupola.

Engineman Mouser, of extra 1247, said that after being informed by the flagman that extra 623 was between the steam shovel and the station, he proceeded at a speed of about 4 miles an hour, sounding the engine whistle frequently; upon seeing the engine in the fog about three car lengths from the caboose of his train he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, but said the brake-pipe pressure had already been materially reduced by an application from some other part of the train. He further stated that the headlight on the rear of engine 623 was not lighted.

The statements of Fireman Napier and Brakemen Featherstone and Green, of extra 1247, corroborated the statements of Conductor Moguin and Engineman Mouser and added nothing further of importance.

The members of the crew of extra 1147 said that the headlight on the rear of the tender of engine 623 was not burning, and Flagman Edwards, of the crew of extra

623, who was riding on engine 1247, said he did not notice it. The employees on engine 623 at the time of the accident said this headlight was burning when the engine was at Neelys, but none of them knew whether it was burning at the time of accident.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of work extra 623 to be operated prepared to stop within range of vision, for which Engineman Butler is primarily responsible

Conductor Hubbard having remained at the station, Engineman Butler was in charge of the movement being made, and should have taken such precautions as would have enabled him to avert an accident. As it was, there were four men on the engine, all riding in the cab, and none of them observed the markers on the caboose of extra 1247 until the engineman had seen them, too late to stop. Had the employees in charge of this train maintained a proper lookout, and had the engineman operated his train with the caution required in view of the existing weather conditions, undoubtedly this train could have been stopped in time to prevent the accident.

All the employees involved were experienced men; at the time of the accident the crew of extra 1247 had been on duty 10 hours and 5 minutes, and the crew of extra 623 about 1 1/2 hours, previous to which both crews had been off duty 14 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted.

W. P. PORTLAND,

Director.