

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE TEXAS & PACIFIC RAILWAY AT CHENEYVILLE,  
LA., ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1928.

December 8, 1928

To the Commission:

On September 1, 1928, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train of the Texas & New Orleans Railroad, Southern Pacific System, and a Texas & Pacific freight train on the tracks of the last-named company at Cheneyville, La., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of four employees and one other person.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Alexandria Subdivision of the Louisiana Division extending between Alexandria and Goulsboro, La., a distance of 194.5 miles, which in the vicinity of the point of accident is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and a manual block-signal system. Between S. P. Junction and Cheneyville trains of the Southern Pacific System are operated over the tracks of the Texas and Pacific Railway under supervision of the last-named company. The switch at Cheneyville leading to the Southern Pacific track, which diverges to the right or south, is located 580 feet east of the end of the station, and the accident occurred at a point 484.5 feet west of this switch. Approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for a distance of more than 4 miles and the grade is practically level. The maximum speed permitted for freight trains is 25 miles per hour while the speed is further restricted by ordinance to 6 miles per hour through Cheneyville.

The signal at Cheneyville is a double-arm combination train-order and block signal, the semaphore blades being mounted on a mast 26.2 feet above the rails, this signal is located on the south side of the main track, opposite the station, 124 feet west of the point of accident and 7,221 feet inside of the west yard-limit board.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 9:18 p. m.

### Description

Eastbound S P freight train extra 429 consisted of 58 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 429, and was in charge of Conductor Segura and Engineman Berry. At LeCompte, 8 miles west of Cheneyville, the crew received a copy of train order No. 115, Form 19, authorizing the train to run ahead of train No. 54 until overtaken. Extra 429 left LeCompte at 8 50 p m and while entering the Southern Pacific connection at Cheneyville, moving at a speed of from 6 to 8 miles per hour, the rear end of the train was struck by train No. 54.

Eastbound second-class T & P. freight train No. 54 consisted of 70 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 394, and was in charge of Conductor Griswold and Engineman Treadway. When passing LeCompte at 9 05 p.m., 32 minutes late, the crew received a copy of train order No. 115, Form 19, previously mentioned, together with a permissive card authorizing them to proceed to Cheneyville expecting to find extra 429 in the block. After entering the yard at Cheneyville train No. 54 passed the block signal, which was displaying a stop indication, and collided with the rear end of extra 429 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 6 and 25 miles per hour.

The caboose and four rear cars of extra 429 were practically demolished. The engine truck of engine 394 was derailed and the front end of the engine was considerably damaged. None of the other equipment was derailed or damaged. The employee killed was an assistant B. & S. foreman who was riding on the car next to the caboose of extra 429.

### Summary of evidence

Engineman Berry, of extra 429, stated that while approaching the train-order signal at Cheneyville he noticed that it was displaying a stop indication. The fireman received the orders as the train passed the station and the head brakeman got off and opened the Southern Pacific connection switch without the train having been brought to a stop. It was entering the connection at a speed of about 6 or 8 miles per hour when he felt an application of the brakes but he did not know what had caused it until some time after the occurrence of the accident. He also said he had no difficulty in distinguishing the lights on the train order signal at Cheneyville as his train approached that point and that he had never experienced trouble of this nature in the past.

The statements of Fireman Lisbony and Head Brakeman Scroggs, of extra 429, practically corroborated those of Enginemen Berry. Fireman Lisbony said he did not know the exact location of his train when the train-order signal at Cheneyville, which was displaying a stop indication, first came into view but he noticed it was burning brightly and could be seen for some distance.

Conductor Segura, of extra 429, stated that he did not see or hear anything of the following train until his own train was about 1 mile from Cheneyville when he looked back and saw the headlight of train No. 54 some distance away. He then went out on the rear platform of the caboose and on realizing that the approaching train was traveling at a high rate of speed under the existing conditions he instructed the flagman to light a fusee but not to throw it off. The flagman did as instructed and held the fusee until the following train was within about 15 car-lengths of the caboose at which time the flagman jumped off and started running towards train No. 54 giving stop signals, continuing to give these signals until the engine passed him. Conductor Segura understood the rules did not require flag protection within yard limits, except against first-class trains, but did so in this instance as an additional precaution. He further stated that he did not hear a whistle signal sounded by the engineman of train No. 54 calling for the block at Cheneyville, that the signals of the flagman were not acknowledged, and that there appeared to be no effort made to bring the approaching train under control, as the engine was still working steam. The headlight of train No. 54 was burning brightly as well as the markers on his caboose, which were displaying red indications to the rear. Conductor Segura saw the engineman of train No. 54 after the accident and thought he acted rather queerly, although he was positive he smelled no odor of intoxicants.

Flagman Olivier, of extra 429, stated that when his train stopped at the east end of LeCompte yard he went back and placed two torpedoes on the rails and also left a burning fusee. When the train reached a point about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Cheneyville he went out on the rear platform of the caboose and saw the headlight of train No. 54 approaching. He procured a fusee and lighted it, and upon reaching a point about 1 mile from Cheneyville he realized that train No. 54 was getting closer so he started waving stop signals. As the following train did not appear to be reducing speed he got off on the engineman's side of the track at the road crossing just west of the station.

and continued to give stop signals as he hurried westward. He had heard train No. 54 whistle for the block but his stop signals with the fusee were not acknowledged, he did not know whether the brakes were applied prior to the accident but said steam had been shut off.

Engineman Treadway, of train No 54, stated that before leaving Alexandria Yard, 21 5 miles from Cheneyville, an air-brake test was made but that no stops were made between that point and the point of accident. At LeCompte he received a copy of train order No. 115 and a permissive card indicating that extra 429 was occupying the block, but he did not see a fusee in that vicinity, although two torpedoes were exploded east of the crossing at that point, with the result that speed was reduced while he was constantly on the lookout for extra 429. His train passed the west yard-limit board at Cheneyville at a speed of about 25 miles per hour and about the same time he noticed that the block signal was in stop position, the fireman and head brakeman also noticed the signal and called its indication. Engineman Treadway said he then sounded the station whistle signal which was followed by sounding the whistle twice for the block, but as it did not clear he made a service application of the brakes just east of the west switch of the eastbound passing track, which is about 4,200 feet from the point of accident. This reduced the speed of his train and it was his intention to bring it to a stop at the station providing he did not get a clear signal before reaching that point. A lighted fusee suddenly appeared and he immediately applied the brakes in emergency and opened the sanders, but on account of just having made a service application the emergency application did not cause the brakes to take proper hold. He estimated the speed at 10 or 12 miles per hour as the engine passed over the road crossing west of the station but as it passed the signal some unusual movement of the engine caused him to fall and at the time of the accident he did not know at what speed the train was traveling. He did not see the markers on the caboose of extra 429, which he said was due to the fact that the depot and crossing lights in the vicinity interfered with his view, although he admitted he had never experienced trouble of this kind in the past. Engineman Treadway further stated that the speed of his train was about 30 miles per hour between LeCompte and Cheneyville, which he knew was in excess of that permitted for freight trains, but he said it was customary to exceed the speed limit to the extent of at least 5 miles per hour. He thought the train was being operated in a safe and proper manner although he knew that he was moving in a permissive block and might overtake extra 429 at any point. He also said that he was not under the influence of intoxicants but in falling in the engine cab just before the collision his head struck some object which dazed him for some time.

Fireman Cruickshank, of train No. 54, said a speed of about 25 miles per hour was maintained between LeCompte and Cheneyville. Upon reaching a point of from 1,000 to 1,500 feet west of the signal at Cheneyville he noticed it displayed a stop indication, and both he and the head brakeman called it to the engineman who in turn repeated it. The engineman made a service application of the air brakes when about 40 or 50 car-lengths from the signal which reduced the speed to about 15 miles per hour and shortly afterwards he noticed a lighted fusee a short distance east of the signal, he called the engineman's attention to it and the engineman immediately applied the brakes in emergency, closed the throttle and opened the sanders. Fireman Cruickshank got off at the highway crossing west of the station and estimated the speed at that time at 10 or 12 miles per hour. He further stated that the glare of the lights at the station impaired the view and that he did not see the markers, or any other indication of the presence of extra 429, until the fusee suddenly appeared on the caboose of that train.

Brakeman Masden, of train No. 54, estimated the speed between LeCompte and Cheneyville at 35 or 40 miles per hour and on account of this high rate of speed he called the engineman's attention to the permissive card but no attempt was made to reduce speed until after entering the yard at Cheneyville. Brakeman Masden said he called the indications displayed by the signals at Moreland and LeCompte but did not remember calling the indication of the signal at Cheneyville nor did he hear either the engineman or the fireman call its indication. Upon seeing a fusee he got down on the steps of the engine, looked ahead and saw the markers on the caboose of extra 429, about 8 or 10 car-lengths distant, as well as some one near the caboose with a lighted fusee. He immediately alighted but the momentum of the train caused him to be thrown so violently that it rendered him unconscious. He estimated the speed of the train at the time he got off as being about 25 miles per hour. Brakeman Masden knew of nothing about the engine that would restrict the engineman's vision and said the engineman appeared to be perfectly normal prior to the accident.

Conductor Griswold, of train No. 54, stated that he was engaged with his reports between LeCompte and Cheneyville and paid no attention to the speed, although he thought that had it been excessive he would have noticed it. Just after the caboose passed the west switch of the westbound passing track, 6,900 feet from the point

of accident, a light application of the brakes was made and upon reaching a point about 35 or 40 car-lengths beyond this point the brakes were again applied, the second application was much heavier than the first application but he did not think they were applied in emergency. The train was brought to a steady stop and he did not know there had been a collision until he reached the forward end of his train some time afterwards. He later heard the engineman state several times that the station lights caused him to become confused and that he misjudged the distance. The engineman was perfectly normal when the conductor saw him at Alexandria Yard but after the accident he appeared to be in a dazed condition, he did not think, however, that this was due to intoxicants. Conductor Griswold said he never had had any difficulty with the lights at Cheneyville but on this occasion he noticed they interfered with vision to some extent, although he had seen the indication displayed by the signal at the station before the train came to a stop, while the flagman called its indication at about the time the first air-brake application was made. The statements of Flagman Leathem, of train No. 54, who rode in the caboose between Alexandria Yard and the point of accident, added no additional facts of importance.

Operator Eastin, on duty at Cheneyville, stated that as extra 429 passed the station, moving at a speed of 6 or 8 miles per hour, he handed on orders and afterwards he noticed that the markers on the caboose were burning and displaying red to the rear, the block signal was also lighted and in the stop position. At about the same time he noticed some one near the road crossing west of the station waving stop signals with a fusee while train No. 54 was seen to be approaching approximately 1,000 feet distant. He heard the whistle of that train sounded twice for the block but did not remember hearing it sounded to acknowledge the flagman's signals. Train No. 54 passed the station at a speed which he estimated at 20 to 25 miles per hour, and as soon as he heard the crash of the collision he went inside the station and observed the time to be 9 18 p m, which time was registered on the station record.

Car Inspector Duhon stated that he made an inspection of the air brakes on train No. 54 prior to its departure from Alexandria Yard. He found a loose angle cock and a defective air hose on one of the cars and as soon as repairs had been made the brakes were tested and were found to be working properly. Shortly afterwards

the brakes were again applied and were not released until he reached the forward end of the train when he reported them as being all right. Machinist Inspector Kern stated that he inspected engine 394 at Alexandria on September 1 and found the air-brake equipment in good condition except that the driver-brake piston travel was 3 inches, and with the assistance of another man this was reduced to 5 inches. He found no evidence of steam leaks at the time of this inspection. Engineman Treadway also stated that the air brakes on his train were operating properly.

The statements of members of a bridge and building crew who were riding on extra 429 at the time of the accident were to the effect that they noticed Engineman Treadway acted queerly after the accident but they were at variance as to whether he was under the influence of some intoxicant. Doctor Luckett, however, stated that he examined Engineman Treadway a short time after the accident and found that he was injured and appeared to be in a dazed condition. He paid particular attention to learn if the engineman was under the influence of any opiate or intoxicant but detected no evidence of this character.

During the night of September 6 a test was made to determine the maximum distance the markers of a caboose could be seen plainly under conditions practically the same as those existing at the time of the accident. With a caboose standing at approximately the point of accident the markers could be seen from the cab of an approaching eastbound engine for a distance of 3,879 feet. With the caboose standing at a point 417 feet west of the block signal and with a lighted fusee on the rear platform, the markers could be seen for a distance of 2,157 feet while the fusee came into view at a distance of 6,650 feet. The block-signal light could be seen for a distance of 7,047 feet.

### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Treadway, of train No. 54, to operate his train under proper control within yard limits and also by his failure properly to obey the stop indication displayed by the block signal.

The rules provide that second and inferior class and extra trains must move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear, and there also is an ordinance restricting the speed of freight trains through Cheneyville to 6 miles per hour.

Engineman Treadway ignored both the rule and the ordinance, he said his train passed the west yard-limit board at a speed of about 25 miles per hour, at which time he could see the block signal in the stop position, and about the time the engine had passed the west switch of the eastbound passing track, 4,200 feet from the point of accident, a service application of the brakes was made. He then released the brakes, intending to stop before passing the station in case the signal was not cleared. Shortly after the brakes were released, however, a lighted fusee appeared and he immediately applied the brakes in emergency but was unable to stop in time to prevent the accident. Engineman Treadway said he did not at any time see the markers on the caboose of the train ahead, which fact he attributed to the station and other lights in the vicinity. Not only had these lights never interfered with his vision in the past, but tests conducted subsequent to the accident failed to substantiate his claim in any way. Regardless of this phase of the situation, however, the requirements of the yard-limit rule and of the local ordinance were sufficient to have prevented an accident of this character had those requirements been observed. No adequate explanation for the occurrence of this accident was advanced by Engineman Treadway, or by his fireman and the head brakeman, the latter, however, estimated the speed as having been about 35 miles per hour when the train passed the yard-limit board and about 25 miles per hour at the time he got off near the road crossing west of the station, and in this connection attention is called to the fact that the block records indicated that train No. 54 maintained an average speed of approximately 36.9 miles per hour between DeCompte and Cheneyville, a distance of 8 miles, although the speed limit is 25 miles per hour and the crew had a caution card advising that extra 429 was in the block. Under all the circumstances it seems more than probable that the explanation for the occurrence of this accident can be found in the operation of the train at an excessive rate of speed and the failure of those on the engine to maintain an adequate watch of the track ahead of their train.

The rules provide that a train must not leave its initial station or any division, sub-division or a junction until it has been ascertained whether all trains due, which are superior or of the same class, have arrived or left. Dispatcher Adams issued orders at Alexandria Yard for train No. 54 and extra 429 and cleared

both trains, expecting the scheduled train to be followed by the extra, which latter train was given a permissive card advising them to expect to find train No. 54 in the block. Neither the engineman nor the conductor of the extra made a check of the register at Alexandria Yard, but the engineman said the conductor told him train No. 54 had gone. As a matter of fact the conductor made no effort to learn if train No. 54 had gone and the result was that extra 429 left ahead of train No. 54, a superior train. The first the dispatcher knew of this situation was when the operator at Moreland reported extra 429 as passing that station, the dispatcher then corrected the situation by issuing an order to extra 429 at LeCompte authorizing it to run ahead of train No. 54 until overtaken, and at the same time gave a copy of the order, and a permissive card, to the crew of train No. 54. These facts, together with the statement of Conductor Segura that while it is not the general practice for extra trains to leave Alexandria Yard ahead of superior trains yet he knew that this had occurred on numerous occasions, warrant having the responsible operating officials pay closer attention to conditions under their supervision with a view to seeing that the rules are enforced and obeyed by all concerned.

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