

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 GRAND PRAIRIE, TEXAS, ON
AUGUST 16, 1924.

October 9, 1924.

To the Commission

On August 13, 1924, there was a rear-end collision between a Texas & Pacific Railway freight train and a freight train of the Texas & New Orleans Railroad, Southern Pacific Lines at Grand Prairie, Texas, which resulted in the death of one employee and injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Dallas Sub-division of the Fort Worth Division, which extends between Fort Worth and Longview Junction, Texas, a distance of 156 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The collision occurred within yard limits at Grand Prairie at a point 4,14 feet west of the station and 4.83 miles east of the west yard-limit board, approaching the point of accident from the west the track is tangent for more than a mile, there is then a 2° curve to the left 1,257 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 493 feet from its western end. The grade for eastbound trains is slightly descending for more than a mile and is then from 1.40 to 1.10 per cent descending for 1,800 feet to the point of accident. There was nothing to obstruct the view of the markers of a caboose standing at the point of accident from the cab of an approaching eastbound engine for a distance of 2,200 feet. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 12.25 a.m.

Description.

Eastbound Texas & Pacific freight train extra 534, consisting of engine 534 and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Ford and Engineman Kennedy, passed Arlington block station, 6.2 miles west of Grand Prairie, according to the train sheet, at 11.20 p.m., and arrived at Grand Prairie at 11.33 p.m. In accordance with previous instructions received to pick up 28 cars of gravel at

this point and proceed to Longview Junction, the conductor secured the switch list and waybills from the operator at the station and the engine and caboose backed westward in the yard. This train was being made up when the rear end was struck by eastbound freight train extra 850.

Eastbound Texas & New Orleans freight train extra 850 consisted of 30 cars and a caboose, hauled by Southern Pacific engine 850, and was in charge of Conductor Lawler and Engineman Childress. This train left Fort Worth at 11.30 p.m., passed Arlington at 12.15 a.m., according to the train sheet, and collided with the rear of extra 534 at Grand Prairie at about 12.25 a.m. while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been from 18 to 35 miles an hour.

Engine 850 and tender were derailed to the left; the first six cars in extra 850 were derailed and badly damaged and came to rest at various angles across the track. The caboose of extra 534 was derailed and two other cars in extra 534 damaged. The employee killed was the engineman of extra 850.

Summary of evidence.

Conductor Ford, of extra 534, stated that upon the arrival of his train at Grand Prairie at 11.33 p.m. he secured the switch list and waybills at the telegraph office and his train then backed westward and was making up in the west end of the yard when the collision occurred. He said his understanding of rule 93 was that flag protection was not required within yard limits against any but first-class trains and he was not, therefore, affording any flag protection to his train.

Conductor Lawler, of extra 850, said he was riding in the right side of the caboose cupola as his train approached Arlington; he saw the order board at that point in its normal position, stop, as the train approached, heard the engineman sound the whistle signal, the board cleared and the engineman sounded the whistle signal in acknowledgement, his train passing that station at 12.11 or 12.12 a.m., traveling at a rate of speed he judged to have been about 20 miles an hour. The first intimation he had of anything wrong was when Brakeman McGarty, who was riding in the left side of the cupola, called a warning saying they were about to

collide with the rear end of another train, the collision occurring immediately afterwards. He did not know whether or not there had been an emergency application of the air brakes just prior to the collision. Conductor Lawler thought the yard limits at Grand Prairie extended from a crossover just west of the station to mile post 224, a considerable distance east of the station, that the collision did not occur within these yard limits and therefore that rule 93 did not apply, but rather there was a violation of flagging rule 99 on the part of the crew of extra 534.

The testimony of Brakeman McCarty corroborated that of Conductor Lawler with reference to the movement of their train from the time it left Fort Worth to the time of the accident, and his statement indicated that an emergency application of the air brakes was made just before the accident occurred. He saw the markers of extra 534 when they were about five car lengths ahead of the engine of his train. Conductor Lawler instructed him to go back and protect the train after the collision.

Brakeman Byron of extra 650 stated that he was riding on the third car from the engine and first saw the rear of extra 534 when his train was about 25 car lengths distant but did not know at that time whether the marker lights were on a train on the Texas & Pacific tracks or on the interurban tracks nearby. He said Engineman Childress sounded several short blasts on the whistle just before the collision. Brakeman Byron was also of the impression that the accident occurred outside of the Grand Prairie yard limits and that the crew of extra 534 should have protected their train by flag in accordance with rule 99.

Fireman Lewis of extra 850 stated that it was his understanding that the clear signal his train received at Arlington indicated that the operator at that point had no orders for his train and that the block was clear to Grand Prairie. He said he had been operating over the Texas & Pacific tracks since November, 1922, and understood that under the operating rules of this railroad second and inferior class trains were required to move within yard limits under control. It was evident that he knew the approximate location of the west yard-limit board at Grand Prairie and he estimated the speed of his train at the time of passing this board at 22 or 23 miles

an hour being reduced to about 18 miles an hour when he first saw the markers of the caboose ahead, about 300 or 400 feet distant; he called a warning to Engineman Childress and jumped from the engine just before the impact. Fireman Lewis' statements indicated that he had been looking back toward the rear of the train, and that it was when he again looked ahead that he saw the caboose.

Second-trick Operator Woods, on duty at Arlington, said extra 534 passed his station at 11.20 p.m. He called the operator at Grand Prairie about 35 minutes later and asked for the block for Texas & New Orleans extra 850 and was informed that the block was clear with the exception of extra 534 which was switching in the west end of the yard. As a matter of precaution he said he then called the dispatcher and asked for a caution card for extra 850; he was preparing this caution card and a clearance card when third-trick Operator Snyder reported for duty and he informed him of the caution card and its reason and purpose. Extra 850 was then some distance west of Arlington, possibly 5 miles, and he suggested to Operator Snyder that perhaps the operator at Grand Prairie would clear the block by the time extra 850 arrived. He went off duty shortly afterwards and was home, about a block from the station, as extra 850 passed sometime later.

Second-trick Operator Williams, on duty at Grand Prairie, at the time of arrival of extra 534 at 11.33 p.m., said that at about 11.50 p.m. the operator at Arlington asked if extra 534 was clear to which he replied that it was in the west end of the yard switching and was not clear of the main track.

Third-trick Operator Snyder stated that he went on duty at ~~Grand Prairie~~ at 12 o'clock midnight, and was informed by Operator Woods of the caution and clearance cards for extra 850. Shortly afterwards he called the operator at Grand Prairie and asked about extra 534 and understood the operator there to say that extra 534 arrived at 11.33 p.m. and was into clear. When extra 850 approached and called for the block he gave that train a clear block, which he said was an indication that the track was clear and gave that train the right to the west yard limit of the next block station, Grand Prairie, beyond which point, extra 850 should have been governed by the rule providing for the movement of second and inferior class trains through yard limits. Operator Snyder said he did not consult the dispatcher before giving extra 850 a clear block as the rules did not

require him to do so when all he had for the crew was a caution card, he also said he did not deliver the caution card.

Third-trick Operator Hiddle, who relieved Operator Williams at Grand Prairie at 12 o'clock midnight and was on duty at the time of the occurrence of this accident, stated that when the operator at Arlington called asking about extra 534, he replied that that train arrived at 11.33 p.m. and was then in the yard. At about 12.20 or 12.23 a.m. Conductor Ford came into the office, asked about following trains, was told of extra 850 and then said his train would be ready to leave shortly and left the office. Operator Riddle said a motorcycle officer came into the office several minutes later and informed him of the accident.

The question as to the maximum distance the caboose lights of extra 534 were visible to the engine crew of the approaching train was not satisfactorily developed at the hearing, and a test was made at 2.30 a.m., August 20, by placing a caboose at the point of collision and observing its rear lights from the cab of an engine at various points on the main line west thereof. At a point 3,345 feet from the caboose one light could be seen by leaning out of the right cab window, from a point 2,212 feet distant both caboose marker lights were in plain view from both sides of the cab and remained in plain view from the left side of the cab, at a point about 500 feet distant the engineman's view of the left marker light was obscured by the front end of the engine as it entered the 2° curve on which the collision occurred.

Dispatcher Gerrow stated that at 11.50 p.m. he authorized the issuance of a caution card by the operator at Arlington to the crew of extra 850, because he had no report of the arrival of extra 534 at Grand Prairie, and in explanation he stated that sometimes the report was not made by the operator until the train had completed its work and was ready to depart. Dispatcher Gerrow also stated that after a train has been reported as having arrived at Grand Prairie, either by the conductor reporting to the operator or by the operator having seen the markers, it is not the practice to issue a caution card to a following train although the train which has arrived might afterwards be switching in the western end of the yard and in a letter to the superintendent Mr. Gerrow made the statement that it was not necessary for

the crew of extra 850 to have a caution card at the time they passed Arlington, in view of the fact that extra 534 had been reported to the operator at Arlington as having arrived at Grand Prairie.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Childress of Texas & New Orleans freight train extra 850, to operate his train under proper control within yard limits.

Rule 93 of the general operating rules of the Texas & Pacific Railway provides that:

"Within yard limits the main track may be used, protecting against first-class trains.

"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."

Much testimony was taken concerning the location of the yard limits of Grand Prairie and as to whether or not this accident occurred within those yard limits. Under the special instructions in the time-table relating to double track it is provided that that portion of the road between the crossover west of the station building at Grand Prairie and a switch at mile 224.7 shall be known as Grand Prairie. It is also provided that that portion of the road between the switch at mile post 230 and a crossover located east of the point of accident shall be known as Swope. Grand Prairie is also shown as a station having yard limits. While Grand Prairie and Swope may be considered from an operating standpoint as two different stations, it does not follow that the yard limits of Grand Prairie can not extend beyond the station limits. As a matter of fact there is a yard-limit board near the switch at mile post 230, the extreme western end of Swope, while the east yard-limit board is near the switch at mile 224.7, the extreme eastern end of Grand Prairie, and all of the intervening territory including the point at which the accident occurred is within yard limits, and it is believed that this was so understood by the crew of the Texas & New Orleans train, in spite of the positive statement of the conductor of that train that the accident did not occur within yard limits. These employees had been examined on the operating rules of the Texas & Pacific Railroad and had run over its tracks in this territory at different times. The

examination papers of Engineman Childress also indicated that he understood Texas & Pacific operating rule 93, quoted above, and he is considered to be primarily responsible for this accident on account of his failure to have his train under proper control.

In view of the fact that the markers of a caboose standing at the point of accident can be seen at a distance of 2,200 feet, it is difficult to understand why neither Engineman Childress nor Fireman Lewis saw the rear end of extra 534 until it was only a short distance away. With weather conditions as favorable as they were on the night of the accident it is probable that had these employees been maintaining a proper lookout, they would have seen the markers on the rear of extra 534 in ample time to have averted the accident.

There is a discrepancy in the statements of Third Trick Operators Snyder and Riddle, located at Arlington and Grand Prairie, respectively. Operator Riddle said he told Operator Snyder that extra 534 had arrived and was in the yard, while Operator Snyder's version is that he was told that extra 534 had arrived and was into clear. It appears, however, that Operator Snyder, understanding that the train was into clear, took it upon himself not to issue the caution card to the crew of extra 850. This caution card had been requested by Operator Woods and was issued under authority of the dispatcher on duty at the time, and it was not for Operator Snyder to determine whether or not he should deliver it to the crew of extra 850.

The investigation further developed that the Texas & Pacific operators did not have a uniform understanding of the rules covering the operation of the manual block-signal system. Manual block rule 317-e reads as follows:

"When a freight train is within the yard limits at certain block stations indicated by special rule on time-table, it may be reported as arrived, provided, the signalman has seen the markers or has been notified by the conductor that all of his train is within the yard limits. Following trains may be given a clear signal, except that if a passenger train is to enter the block, it must have a Caution Card before it is allowed to proceed. When a passenger train is at a block station no train will be permitted to follow until the passenger train has cleared the block, except as provided in rule 317-a or by train order."

Operator Woods, second-trick operator at Arlington, said that if extra 531 had been reported to him as having arrived, he would have considered the train as being clear had it not afterwards backed into the yard, while Operator Williams, second-trick operator at Grand Prairie, said it was not the custom to give a clear block when trains were working in the yard. On the other hand, Operator Snyder, third-trick Operator at Arlington, said he would give a train a clear block after having been notified that a preceding train had arrived and was switching within the yard at Grand Prairie, and Operator Riddle, third-trick operator at Grand Prairie, said a train is clear at that point when it arrives, or the operator has been so informed by the conductor, and that if the train afterwards should back into the yard he would still consider the block to be clear. Agent Cole, located at Grand Prairie, agreed with Operator Riddle. The provisions of the rule are clear, and with proper instruction and supervision there should be no grounds for varying interpretations being placed upon it.

The investigation also developed that some of the Texas & New Orleans employees, as well as one Texas & Pacific employee, had not been examined on the Texas & Pacific manual block-signal rules. All of these men were old employees, and it would seem that they should have been examined on the rules of the signal system under which they were operating.

Had an adequate train control device been in use on this line, this accident would have been prevented.

All of the employees involved were experienced men and 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.