

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE UNADILLA VALLEY RAILWAY AT BRIDGEWATER, N. Y., ON JUNE 25, 1924.

July 15, 1924.

To the Commission:

On June 25, 1924, there was a head-end collision between a gasoline motor passenger train and a steam freight train on the Unadilla Valley Railway at Bridgewater, N. Y., which resulted in the death of one passenger and one employee, and in the injury of three passengers and one employee.

Location and method of operation

This railway extends between Bridgewater and New Berlin, N. Y., a distance of 19.13 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders transmitted by telephone, no book of operating rules or block-signal system being in use. The operation of trains is governed mainly by special instructions contained in the time-table, scheduled trains having fixed meeting points with opposing scheduled trains. Superiority of trains is not conferred by class or direction. When necessary to issue train orders they are dispatched by the general passenger agent at New Berlin. Train sheets are not used.

The collision occurred at a point 1,915 feet south of the station at Bridgewater; approaching this point from the north, beginning at the station, there is a $4^{\circ} 30'$ curve to the right 589 feet in length and then a tangent 1,027 feet in length, followed by a $3^{\circ} 2'$ curve to the left 908 feet in length, the collision occurring on this curve at a point 300 feet from its northern end; approaching the point of accident from the south there are 4,867 feet of tangent followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is practically level at the point of accident.

An embankment 8 to 12 feet high on the east or inside of the curve on which the collision occurred restricts the range of vision to about 300 feet. There was a light rain falling at the time of the accident, which occurred at 8.15 a.m.

Description

Southbound passenger train No. 2 consisted of motor car M-1 and was in charge of Conductor Caldine and Motorman Dibble. Car M-1 was a gasoline-propelled combination car having a seating capacity of 26 passengers and a baggage compartment approximately 17 feet in length. This train arrived at Bridgewater, its time-table meeting point with train No. 15, at about 8.12 a.m., 2 minutes late on its leaving time and 12 minutes after train No. 15 was due to arrive, departed about two minutes later and had proceeded about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile when it collided with train No. 15 while traveling at a speed of about 20 miles an hour.

Northbound freight train No. 15 consisted of two milk cars, three freight cars and one combination baggage and passenger car, hauled by engine 4, and was in charge of Conductor Risley and Engineman Edwards. It left River Forks, 2.47 miles from Bridgewater, at 8.04 a.m. and at 8.15 a.m. collided with train No. 2 while traveling at a speed of about 18 or 20 miles an hour.

Motor car M-1 was telescoped a distance of about 3 feet by engine 4, the force of the impact dislodging the motor and causing the sills of the car to buckle under the baggage compartment. The employee killed was the conductor of train No. 3.

Summary of evidence

Motorman Dibble, of train No. 2, when interviewed in the hospital, said his train had been standing at the station at Bridgewater about two or three minutes when Conductor Caldine gave the signal to proceed, which he did, and he did not again think of train No. 15 until he heard the whistle of that train just before the collision. He remembered applying the brakes but could not recall anything further, being rendered unconscious by the collision. When asked if he knew of any reason for the conductor giving a proceed signal he said the conductor might have received an order to that effect.

Station Agent Dawson, on duty at Bridgewater, said Conductor Risley of train No. 15 called on the telephone from River Forks and informed him that that train was leaving there. Later train No. 3 registered in from Richfield Junction and during the exchange of mail he said he informed Motorman Dibble that train No. 15 would

be in shortly to which Motorman Dibble made no reply and he took it for granted that the motorman understood. About that time Conductor Caldine hurriedly entered the station office, came out again, gave a proceed signal and the car moved out, but as this car meets train No. 15 at the south end of the yard, at the turn-table switch 372 feet south of the station, he was not alarmed at its leaving as he supposed it would stop there and wait for the freight train.

Engineman Edwards, of train No. 15, said he knew the time-table instructions gave his train the right to go to Bridgewater for the meet with train No. 2 and after leaving River Forks he did not again think of that train until he saw it approaching a very short distance away, the speed of his train at this time being about 20 miles an hour. He immediately shut off steam, applied the air brakes and reversed the engine, the collision occurring before the speed of his train had been materially reduced.

Conductor Risley, of train No. 15, said his train arrived at River Forks at 8 a.m. and as an extra precaution he called the station agent at Bridgewater and informed him that his train would leave very shortly, to which Station Agent Dawson replied, "All right, come ahead." He said his train left River Forks at 8.04 a.m., made one stop en route and was nearing Bridgewater when he heard a blast on the engine whistle and about the same time there was a brake application. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the collision to have been about 18 or 20 miles an hour. He said he was expecting to meet train No. 2 at Bridgewater and as a double protection he called the agent at that point thinking that Station Agent Dawson would advise the crew of train No. 2 that his train had left River Forks.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of train No. 2 to wait at a time-table meeting point, for which Conductor Caldine and Motorman Dibble are responsible.

Special instruction contained in time-table No. 67, effective April 24, 1924, provides as follows:

"Train No. 15 will take turn table siding at Bridgewater to allow train No. 2 to pass. Train No. 2 will pass train No. 15 in Bridgewater yard."

It is evident that this accident would not have occurred had the special instructions above quoted been obeyed, and with which all of the employees involved appeared to be perfectly familiar.

This railway is a short line extending to a connection with the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad at Richfield Junction. It operates four trains daily in each direction, three passenger trains and one milk train. The schedule is so arranged that none of the three passenger trains has meets with any of the opposing passenger trains, while only one of the passenger trains has a meet with the milk train. The general manager stated that a book of operating rules had not been adopted because it would have been confusing in view of the simplicity of operation, one train crew covering all scheduled trains. On April 27, 1924, however, the gasoline motor car was placed in service, necessitating the employment of two crews, and at that time a schedule was adopted showing positive meeting points. As to the confusion that a book of rules might cause, however, it is to be noted that the crew of train No. 2 also operates trains over the Richfield Branch of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad, and had passed an examination on the rules of that railroad. Under these circumstances no confusion should be caused by the adoption of safeguards in addition to the few instructions provided in the time-table; if, for example, a train could not leave a meeting point without receiving a clearance card, or a clearance card and train order, an accident of this character probably would not occur.

None of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted

W. P. BORLAND

Director.