

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD AT OCONEE, NEB., ON
SEPTEMBER 9, 1924

October 18, 1924

To the Commission

On September 9, 1924, there was a rear-end collision between two mixed trains on the Union Pacific Railroad at Oconee, Neb., which resulted in the death of one employee, and the injury of two passengers and one express messenger

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Norfolk Branch of the Nebraska Division, a single-track line extending between Columbus and Norfolk, Neb., a distance of 50.4 miles, over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The point of accident was within yard limits 3,042 feet west of the east yard-limit board. Beginning at the yard-limit board and proceeding westward, there are 1,685 feet of tangent followed by a curve of 4° to the right 1,594 feet in length, the accident occurring on the curve about 136 feet from its leaving end. The grade is practically level for a considerable distance. The view of the point of accident is restricted to about 600 feet. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 7 23 a.m.

Description

Westbound second-class mixed train No. 77 consisted of 40 freight cars, 1 combination rail and baggage car, and 1 coach, hauled by engines 404 and 419, and was in charge of Conductor Larson and Enginemen Cassell and Jones. This train left Columbus, which is also the last open office, 9.4 miles from Oconee, at 6 25 a.m., on time, made a stop en route and arrived at Oconee at 7 10 a.m., 20 minutes late on its scheduled departing time.

While standing at the station the rear end of the train was struck by train No. 79

Westbound second-class mixed train No. 79 consisted of 22 freight cars, 1 combination mail and baggage car, and 1 coach, hauled by engine 412, and was in charge of Conductor Wardle and Engineman Loshbaugh. This train left Columbus at 7.00 a.m., on time, and collided with the rear end of train No. 77 at Oconee while traveling at a speed variously estimated at from 5 to 18 miles an hour

The rear end of the coach in train No. 77 was derailed and considerably damaged while the combination car was entirely derailed. Engine 412 was derailed but was not seriously damaged. The employee killed was a student brakeman on train No. 79

Summary of evidence

Conductor Larson, of train No. 77, said he heard train No. 79 approaching working steam, thought it was moving through the yard at too high a rate of speed, and started across the inside of the curve in an endeavor to signal the engineman to stop, but was unable to do so, the collision occurring while the train was moving at a speed of 5 or 10 miles an hour. Flagman Wolfe said he was unloading merchandise from a car at the rear end of the train when he heard train No. 79 approaching and he said he first saw it when it was about 15 car lengths distant, moving at a speed of about 12 miles an hour; he did not think it would be able to stop but ran toward it giving stop signals. He said the brakes on train No. 79 were applied, the engine reversed and sanders opened, but that it collided with his own train while moving at a speed of about 5 miles an hour

Roadmaster Bennettson said he was following train No. 77 with his gasoline speeder and stopped about three rail lengths from the rear of that train at Oconee. He was standing 15 or 20 feet from the rear of train No. 77 when he heard the engine of train No. 79 whistle for the station and when the engine came in sight about 700 feet distant he thought it was working steam. After the train had traveled about 100 feet farther the engineman shut off steam and he thought that it was at this time that the engineman first saw train No. 77 ahead of him. He estimated the speed of train No. 79 at about 12 miles an hour when it passed him

Engineman Lochbaugh, of train No. 79, said an air-brake test was made before departing from Columbus and that he made his first application of the air brakes when approaching the yard-limit board at Oconee, this was a 6 or 7-pound reduction, made at a speed of 20 miles an hour. He then whistled for the station and allowed the train to drift while he was looking for train No. 77. Just after whistling for a highway crossing he saw the roadmaster with his gasoline speeder, thought that something must be detaining him, and placed the brake valve in the emergency position. He said the brakes had not been released since the first application. At about the time he made the emergency application he saw the markers of train No. 77 and then reversed the engine. Engineman Lochbaugh further stated that after passing the yard-limit board he had been looking through the grove of trees on the inside of the curve in an endeavor to locate train No. 77 and thought he had his train under such control that he could stop it at any point. Engineman Lochbaugh stated that the air brakes worked satisfactorily, that he knew the crew of train No. 77 did not have to protect their train by flag, and accepted full responsibility for the accident.

Fireman Wilson practically corroborated the statements of Engineman Lochbaugh and added that the first he knew of anything wrong was when the engineman made the second application of the air brakes. Fireman Wilson thought the speed approaching the station was a little higher than usual and said he did not think that his train could have stopped at the station due to the fact that the engineman did not begin to apply the brakes soon enough.

Conductor Wardle, who was riding in the combination mail and baggage car of train No. 79, said he felt the slack run up in the train as it passed the yard-limit board at a speed of about 18 miles an hour, and that he did not feel another application of the brakes until immediately prior to the occurrence of the accident. The statements of Flagman Sheridan and Brakeman Jaworski developed no additional facts of importance.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of train No. 79 to be under proper control within yard limits, for which Engineman Lochbaugh is responsible.

Several rules are involved in the failure of Engineer Loshbaugh to have his train under proper control. The time-table instruction limiting the maximum speed within yard limits to 15 miles an hour for all except first-class trains, the speed to be as much lower as other rules or conditions require, operating rule 91-A, requiring trains to approach stations where the view is obscured so they can be stopped in case of emergency, operating rule 93, requiring trains to move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is known to be clear, and operating rule 98, requiring trains to approach junctions with caution. The view of the station at Oconee is materially obscured, and in his endeavor to ascertain the location of train No. 77 Engineer Loshbaugh apparently allowed his own train to continue at a higher rate of speed than was safe under the circumstances, resulting in his being unable to bring it to a stop when the rear end of train No. 77 suddenly came within his range of vision.

With the exception of the student brakeman of train No. 79, 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