

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
WABASH RAILWAY NEAR VALLEY CITY, ILL., ON AUGUST 3,
1928.

September 26, 1928.

To the Commission:

On August 3, 1928, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the Wabash Railway near Valley City, Ill., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Springfield Division extending between Shops, near Springfield, Ill., and Outer Depot, Hannibal, Mo., a distance of 103.1 miles; this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point 4,915 feet east of the depot at Valley City, approaching the point of accident from the east the track is tangent for a distance of 4,724 feet and then there is a 3° curve to the right 2,915 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point approximately 1,072 feet from its eastern end. The grade for westbound trains is practically level to the point of accident and for 783 feet farther west; then it is 0.498 per cent ascending for a distance of 1,547 feet, almost to a water tank at bridge 508, a draw bridge spanning the Illinois River.

Under the rules when a following train is permitted to enter an occupied block the dispatcher authorizes the operator to issue a caution card in addition to the clearance card.

A clear view of the caboose standing at the point of accident could be had around the curve from the engineman's side of the cab of a westbound engine for a distance of only 841.8 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 8.08 a. m.

Description

Westbound freight train extra 2259 consisted of 58 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2259, and was in charge of Conductor Hartnady and Engineman Busn. This train left Bluffs, the last open office and 8.4 miles east of Valley City, at 7.12 a. m., according to the train sheet, and was brought to a stop with the engine opposite the water tank at bridge 508 and the rear end of the caboose 2,330 feet east thereof. While standing at this point the caboose was struck by train No. 3.

Westbound passenger train No. 3 consisted of one mail car, one baggage car, one coach, one cafe-chair car and one Pullman car, hauled by engine 620, and was in charge of Conductor Suits and Engineman Blothen. At Bluffs a clearance card and several train orders were delivered to the crew, however, Operator Marshall failed to deliver a caution card advising that the block was occupied. Train No. 3 departed from Bluffs at 7.50 a. m., according to the train sheet, on time, and collided with the rear end of extra 2259 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 20 miles per hour.

The caboose of extra 2259 and the car ahead of it were derailed and destroyed, while one truck of the next car ahead was derailed. Engine 620 was derailed to the left but remained practically upright; other equipment in train No. 3 was not derailed. The employee killed was the fireman of train No. 3, who jumped prior to the collision.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Hartnady, of extra 2259, stated that when work was completed at Naples, 4.5 miles east of Valley City, his train headed out on the main track, the passing track switch was closed and it was then 7 45 a. m. He figured there was ample time for his train to reach Valley City and clear at that point at the time the following train, No. 3, was due at Naples, at 7.59 a. m., although he said he expected his engine to take water at Valley City. Approaching Valley City extra 2259 was brought to a stop, at 7.56 a. m., with the engine at the water tank at bridge 508; a flag was whistled out and Conductor Hartnady said he instructed Flagman Babcock to go back and flag train No. 3. The flagman said he was going to do so, and it only took a few seconds for him to get the flagging equipment, then Conductor Hartnady went to the desk in the caboose and thought the flagman had gone back. At about 8 02 or 8 03 a. m., after water had been taken, the train made two or three futile attempts to start, Conductor Hartnady walked ahead about six car lengths to bleed off sticking brakes

on some of the cars and at this time he heard train No. 3 approaching. He then ran back to the caboose to see whether Flagman Babcock was far enough out and shouted to him to "get back." He said that the flagman was back about as far as the station board, this board it was afterwards determined was located 488.6 feet east of where the rear end of the caboose stood, when train No. 3 passed the flagman, the accident occurring immediately afterwards, at which time Conductor Hartnady estimated the speed of train No. 3 to have been about 20 or 25 miles per hour. Conductor Hartnady further stated that as train No. 3 rounded the curve he heard the flag answered; also, that the flag had not been recalled by whistle prior to the accident, and that Flagman Babcock had plenty of time to have gone back much farther than he actually did go on this occasion. Conductor Hartnady said that en route on this trip trouble had been experienced with the air brakes sticking on several of the cars and he was of the opinion that had this trouble not occurred at the water tank his train could have proceeded without delay.

Flagman Babcock, of extra 2259, stated that he did not think that water would be taken at the water tank and when the speed of his train was reduced approaching that point he did not throw off a fusee as the caboose started to round the curve, being of the opinion that his train would merely come to a stop at bridge 508 as required, and then immediately proceed, on being signaled by the watchman, in accordance with special instructions contained in the time-table. When the stop was being made at the water tank Flagman Babcock said he promptly got down out of the caboose cupola, went to the front of the caboose, secured torpedoes, then got off the caboose just before his train came to a full stop and started back with flagging equipment in order to flag train No. 3, which train he knew was following his own train, he thought that that train was late. Flagman Babcock said he walked back and had reached a point about five telegraph pole lengths in the rear of the caboose when he saw train No. 3 approaching at the eastern end of the curve; he started running and waving stop signals and heard Conductor Hartnady shout a warning of danger, but train No. 3 passed him and then the collision occurred. Flagman Babcock did not put down torpedoes on this occasion, as required, saying that he had not gotten back as far as he wanted to in order to do this; he felt pretty safe at the point where he flagged but wanted to get back on the straight track and was of the opinion that the following train would be able to stop. He could not say whether his flag signals were answered but felt certain that they were observed; he thought he was back far enough so that the engineers of train No. 3 would be able to see him on the straight track east of the curve; he stated that Conductor Hartnady did not say anything to him about going back to flag or as to how far to go, and that he did not hear a flag whistled out or in

but did think that he heard his engineman whistle off brakes. Flagman Babcock further stated that the fireman of train No. 3 jumped off engine 620 at a point east of where he was flagging. According to measurements made after the accident the body of Fireman Miller was lying at a point 549.8 feet east of where the rear end of the caboose of extra 2259 stood.

Engineman Bush, Fireman Apple and Head Brakeman Ford were unaware of anything wrong prior to the accident. Their statements were to the effect that their train departed from Naples at 7 45 a. m., was brought to a stop at the water tank at 7.56 a. m., took water and endeavored to start at about 8 01 or 8.02 a. m.; that trouble had been experienced en route with air brakes sticking on several cars, and that a flag was whistled out at the time the stop was made at the water tank but that the flag was not recalled.

Engineman Blethen, of train No. 3 stated that his train departed from Bluffs at 7 50 a. m., on time, but that no caution card was received from the operator before leaving that point. He was not aware that extra 2259 was ahead of his train. On approaching the curve involved at a speed of between 45 and 50 miles per hour he shut off steam and reduced speed, preparatory to rounding the curve, and then he saw Flagman Babcock running and waving stop signals with a red flag. Engineman Blethen immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, then saw the caboose ahead and jumped. Engineman Blethen said that the air brakes had been tested and worked properly en route and he estimated that the speed of his train had been reduced to about 20 miles per hour at the time of the collision. Conductor Suits and Brakeman Vincent had no knowledge of anything wrong until the air brakes were applied in emergency just prior to the accident; nor had they received a caution card to the effect that the block was occupied. Conductor Suits estimated the speed of his train to have been about 15 or 16 miles per hour when the accident occurred.

Operator Marshall, stationed at Bluffs, stated that he was an extra operator, he had had about 15 years experience, had worked at this point several times before and was thoroughly familiar with the rules governing the operation of the block system. He said that he went on duty at 7 a. m., checked over the orders with the operator who went off duty, and that his attention was called to extra 2259 being in the block. Operator Marshall said that he handled the train orders for train No. 3 and cleared that train without giving the crew a caution card, as required, although the block was occupied, Train No. 3 departed on time. He was fully aware of the requirements of the rule in regard to issuing caution cards when the block is occupied and stated that the only excuse

he could offer for not doing so was the fact that on the morning in question he was much busier than usual and in his hurry to get a proper line-up of the train orders and trains before the rush he failed to get the caution card for train No. 3.

According to a statement by Superintendent Karnes, caution cards are issued only by the dispatchers. If a preceding freight train has not cleared the block and another train is ready to enter the block, the operator notifies the dispatcher and if conditions warrant it the latter issues a caution card to the operator in accordance with the rules, otherwise the operator holds the train until the preceding train has cleared the block. Mr. Karnes also stated that in this particular case the dispatcher gave the operator at Bluffs the card number allowing train No. 3 to proceed into the block before extra 2259 had cleared the block at Valley City, and that Operator Marshall failed to deliver this caution card to the conductor of train No. 3. It also appeared from the superintendent's statements that these caution cards are issued whenever in the opinion of the dispatcher it is justifiable, and that during the month of August, 1928, there was a total of 1,895 caution cards issued to trains moving over the Springfield Division, of which 123 were issued to the block operator at Bluffs.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Babcock, of extra 2259, properly to protect the rear of his train, and by the failure of Operator Marshall to issue a caution card to train No. 3 before allowing it to enter an occupied block.

Under the rules when a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection. While Flagman Babcock said he got off the rear end of the caboose just before extra 2259 came to a full stop at the water tank and started walking back, and continued to do so until he reached a point in the vicinity of the station sign, located 488.6 feet east of where the rear end of the caboose stood, from which point he saw train No. 3 approaching at the eastern end of the curve, the weight of testimony is to the effect that there was ample time for him to have gone back a sufficient distance to have afforded full protection. The investigation developed that extra 2259 was brought to a stop at the water tank at about 7.56 a. m., while the accident did not occur until about 12 minutes later, or about 8.08 a. m., indicating that there was ample opportunity for Flagman Babcock to have afforded proper rear-end protection. According to his own statements he did not throw

off a lighted fusee at the time the speed of his train was reduced when starting to round the curve approaching the water tank, nor did he put down torpedoes after starting back to flag, although he admitted he knew that train No. 3 was following his own train, saying he thought that train No. 3 would be late. Had he complied with the rules and afforded proper protection to the rear of his train the accident most likely would have been averted.

Operator Marshall admitted his own responsibility for the accident, saying that in his haste he overlooked getting the caution card for train No. 3, with the result that he allowed that train to proceed without the crew in charge having any knowledge of the fact that the block was occupied by extra 2259.

Conductor Hartnady said that while extra 2259 was being brought to a stop he instructed Flagman Babcock to go back and flag train No. 3, although the flagman denied having received such instructions. Conductor Hartnady then went to his desk, although at the time his train was brought to a stop at the water tank, 7.56 a. m., the following train was due at Naples, 4.5 miles east of Valley City, within three minutes. Inasmuch as the rules provide that an inferior train must be clear at the time a first-class train in the same direction is due to leave the next station in the rear where time is shown, Conductor Hartnady therefore knew there was only three minutes for his train to take water, proceed a considerable distance and get into clear at Valley City for train No. 3. According to his own statements, however, his train did not attempt to start from the water tank until 8.02 or 8.03 a. m.; being unable to get started on account of brakes sticking on several of the cars, he walked ahead to bleed off these cars and it was then that he heard train No. 3 approaching, but at this time it was too late to avert the accident. The paramount duty of Conductor Hartnady was to look after the safety of the train and he should not have let other duties interfere therewith; had he made it a point to know whether the rear end of his train was afforded proper protection, and there was plenty of time for him to have definitely ascertained this fact instead of assuming that the flagman had gone back, the accident could have been averted.

All of 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.