

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SAFETY APPLIANCES COVERING HIS INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE VANDALIA RAILROAD AT TERRE HAUTE, IND , ON JANUARY 8, 1913

APRIL 16, 1913

To the Commission

On January 8, 1913, there was a rear-end collision on the Vandalia Railroad at Terre Haute, Ind , which resulted in the death of three passengers and two employees, and the injury of seven passengers, four employees, and one dining-car waiter. After investigation of this accident and of the circumstances connected therewith, I beg to submit the following report.

The St. Louis division of the Vandalia Railroad, upon which this accident occurred, extends between St. Louis, Mo , and Indianapolis, Ind , a distance of 241.8 miles. It is for the most part a single-track line operated under the manual block system. There are short sections of double track at various places, one of these double-track sections extending from a few miles east of Terre Haute Union Station to about one-half mile west of that place. On about 1 mile of this double-track section through the city limits of Terre Haute, and extending out onto the single track to the west approximately one-half mile beyond the double track, the block system is not in operation. The movement of trains over this unblocked section of road is governed by hand signals from switch tenders located on the ground. This collision occurred while one of the trains involved was standing in the train shed at Terre Haute Union Station. There are no signals governing the entrance of trains to the train shed itself.

The trains involved in this collision were regular eastbound passenger trains Nos. 8 and 20. Train No. 8 was in charge of Conductor Smith and Engineman Bundy. It consisted of five cars and engine No. 6, the cars being located in the train in the following order from the engine back: One steel express car, one steel mail car, one wooden express car, one wooden combination car, and one wooden coach.

This train is scheduled to run daily between St. Louis and Indianapolis and is due to arrive at Terre Haute at 12:45 p. m. Engines are changed at Terre Haute, and the train remains there one hour, its leaving time being 1:45 p. m. There is a station master at Terre

Haute, who has charge of all trains within station limits and directs their movements within his jurisdiction. Under the direction of this station master it is the usual practice to attach a switch engine to train No 8 after its passengers have been unloaded and haul it away from the train shed, so as to permit the use of the eastbound track through the station during this hour of dead time. On the date of the accident, however, train No 8 was 31 minutes late upon its arrival at Terre Haute, and its cars were left standing in the train shed.

After the passengers and baggage had been unloaded Conductor Smith and Baggage man Morical went to the station dining room for lunch and Brakeman Scarlett went to the train master's office to take an examination, leaving only the train porter with the cars. About 1 33 p m engine No 6, in charge of Engineman Bundy, backed into the train shed and coupled to the train preparatory to leaving at 1 45 p m. Engineman Bundy then went to the telegraph office, to which place Conductor Smith had preceded him. The conductor and engineman compared watches, after which they were given a clearance, permitting their train to leave on its regular schedule, and were informed by the operator that train No 20 would arrive at 1 48 p m. This train had been marked up by the station master on the public bulletin board as due to arrive at 1 47 p m. After receiving their clearance card Conductor Smith and Engineman Bundy returned to their train, and it was while the train was standing there receiving passengers preparatory to leaving on its regular time at 1 45 p m that the collision occurred, at about 1 42 p m. The force of the collision drove train No 8 ahead about 125 feet and telescoped the wooden coach and combination car nearly the full length of the passenger compartment of the latter car.

Train No 20 is scheduled to run daily between St Louis and Indianapolis, and is due to arrive at Terre Haute at 12 55 p m. On the date of the accident this train was run in two sections. It was the second section, comprising the regular passenger train, that collided with train No 8. This train was in charge of Conductor Newnam and Engineman Davis. It was hauled by engine No 5 and was made up in the following order from the engine back: Two steel mail cars, one steel combination car, one steel coach, two steel Pullman cars, and one wooden dining car. This train left Rose Lake, a station 6 4 miles east of St Louis, at 10 24 a m, one hour and six minutes late. At Effingham, a station 101 2 miles east of St Louis and 67 9 miles west of Terre Haute, the crew in charge received train order No 157, directing them to run one hour late. At Casey, a station 35 5 miles from Terre Haute, train order No 157 was annulled, leaving train No 20 free to exceed its schedule speed to any extent consistent with the judgment of the engineman, there being no rule limiting the speed of passenger trains between Casey and the city limits of Terre

Haute This run of 35.5 miles was made in 35 minutes, including a full stop at Wabash River Bridge and a run of 1 mile through the city of Terre Haute under a speed limit of 20 miles per hour. Engineman Davis stated that he made the run from Casey to the Wabash River "just as fast as that engine could turn a wheel, some places about 75 or 80 miles an hour." He said that his train was running about 8 miles an hour when the collision occurred.

At the east end of the train shed at Union Station the track of the Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad crosses the Vandalia Railroad at right angles. There is just about room for an engine and six cars to stand between the clearing point west of the Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad crossing and Ninth Street which crosses the Vandalia tracks at grade just west of the train shed. At Seventh Street, two blocks farther west, there is a switch tender who has control of the movement of trains between Seventh Street and the entrance to the train shed at Ninth Street. There is nothing to indicate that train No. 20 exceeded the speed limit from the Wabash River to Union Station. According to the statements of both Engineman Davis and Fireman O'Connell the train was running about 18 miles an hour when it reached Sixth Street. After his engine passed over Sixth Street Engineman Davis made a brake application, reducing the train-line pressure about 8 pounds. When between Sixth and Seventh Streets he received a proceed signal from the switch tender at Seventh Street, which indicated to him that the track was clear as far as Ninth Street. The train passed over Seventh Street at a speed of about 15 miles per hour. It is about 700 feet from Seventh Street to the west end of the train shed at Ninth Street.

At the time of the collision two engines were standing on the westbound track at the west end of the train shed. These engines were emitting smoke and steam, which was carried by the wind across the eastbound track in such a way as to obscure the rear end of train No. 8, which stood at the extreme west end of the train shed, just clearing the sidewalk on the east side of Ninth Street. After passing Seventh Street Engineman Davis further reduced speed and brought his train under such control as to enable him to stop at his customary stopping place at the east end of the train shed. He was not expecting to find anything in the train shed, and on account of the pall of smoke and steam which obscured the rear end of train No. 8 neither he nor his fireman saw the rear of that train until their engine was within 20 feet of it. It was then too late to stop.

It will be noted that the collision occurred about three minutes before train No. 8 was due to leave Terre Haute. Engineman Davis admitted that as he was approaching the station at Terre Haute it did not occur to him that train No. 8 was not due to leave there until 1:45, as a matter of fact he did not know what the leaving time of

train No 8 was until he looked at the time card after the accident. He had never before had occasion to come into the station so close to the leaving time of train No 8, and for that reason he had not made himself familiar with it.

The rear end of train No 8 was not protected by a flagman. None of the employees involved had any understanding that the requirements of the flagging rule had any application to a train while standing in the train shed at Union Station, and none of them had ever known of a train being protected by flag there. Station Master Stice stated that he had authority over all employees working in and around Union Station and over trains that came in there. He said that it was customary for the crew on train No 8 to eat lunch after the passengers on their train had been unloaded, and they were relieved from responsibility for handling their train during the time it remained at Terre Haute under his jurisdiction. He had never seen a train protected by a flagman while it was under the shed at the station, knew that the trains were not so protected, and his understanding of the rules was that they did not require trains to be protected in Union Station. He had never received any instructions that trains were not to be protected in the station, and when asked under what authority he acted in not requiring them to be protected, said "Well, it is a terminal, a union station where everybody stops and the train should approach the station under control." His understanding was that responsibility would be on the approaching train. He knew that it was the common practice for train No 8 to be left standing in the train shed without protection, and he had never called the practice to the attention of the trainmaster or superintendent, as he did not consider it necessary to protect at a station like that. The station master knew that trains standing at Union Station on the Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad were protected by flag under the same rule as the one in force on the Vandalia and he admitted that this fact created the impression in his mind that the Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad was furnishing better protection than his road was, but he said "to think of standing in a union station with a flag in their hand looked foolish to me."

Other than the 20-mile-per-hour restriction within the limits of Terre Haute, which is based upon a city ordinance there is no rule governing the rate of speed at which trains may enter Union Station, and aside from this 20-mile restriction enginemen have no instructions about speed. Station Master Stice said that he had seen trains enter the train shed at the west end at speeds of 15 to 20 miles per hour, and on all the fast trains from the west he thought it a frequent occurrence that their speed was as high as 25 or 30 miles per hour down about Sixth Street. He had frequently noticed these trains coming into Union Station at a higher rate of speed than he

considered safe, but had never called the matter to the attention of any officer higher in authority than himself

The direct cause of this accident was the failure of Conductor Smith, of train No 8, to take measures for the protection of his train while it was standing at Union Station on the time of train No 20, knowing that train No 20 had not yet arrived. Engineman Davis, of train No 20, was also directly at fault for not having his train under complete control when approaching Union Station at a time when his view into the train shed was obscured, and but two or three minutes previous to the leaving time of train No 8.

It should be noted, however, that the operating officers of the Vandalia Railroad had permitted an exceedingly unsafe method of handling trains at this point to grow up, and this method had so long been acquiesced in that it had become an established custom. There can be no doubt that under a strict interpretation of the flagging rule in force on the Vandalia Railroad train crews are just as much bound to protect their trains while they are standing in the train shed at Terre Haute Union Station as when they are standing at any other station on the road, but no such interpretation had ever been placed upon the rule, and the fact that it was not customary to protect trains at that point was well known to those in authority. The rule was not invoked, nor were employees informed that it had any application to trains while they were standing in the train shed at Union Station until after this accident.

Train Master Burke of the St. Louis division, who had been stationed at Terre Haute as train master only about two months previous to the accident, said that during that time he had never been placed in a position to know that trains were not protected by flag at Union Station, but thought it was always done because it was the rule. He would not admit that he had any knowledge of the existence of a practice in violation of the rule, although he said that during the 8 years he served as a passenger conductor previous to his appointment as train master he did not have a flagman protect his train at Union Station, and upon further questioning said that he knew the men did not flag there, but that no one had ever called his attention to it. The flagman of train No 8 was away from the train on the date of the accident, under orders from the train master to take an examination, and under the rule the baggageman was supposed to take the flagman's place during the latter's absence.

Supt. Worthington had been stationed at Terre Haute, as superintendent of the St. Louis division, only about two months previous to the date of the accident. During that time he had not discovered that trains were not protected while standing in Union Station, and nobody had ever called his attention to it. He said that during his experience as superintendent of different divisions of the Vandalia

Railroad, he had not uniformly enforced the rule requiring trainmen to protect the rear end of trains while standing at stations, because at some points he had not thought it necessary. His investigation of this accident developed the fact that trains were never protected by flag while standing in the train shed at Union Station, and when asked how it was possible for that condition to exist, he said

As near as I can get to it, it was a condition that had grown up, and the general situation would have indicated, I think, to almost any man even in operating man in charge of the situation that it was a safe proposition at that point. The fact of the railroad crossing, the fact of all trains stopping, the whole situation indicated to me a condition of safety.

Aside from the knowledge that he must stop his train before reaching the Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad crossing at the east side of the station, there was nothing to prevent an engineman from entering the west end of the train shed at a speed of 20 miles an hour. In other words, the speed regulation throughout the city limits of Terre Haute was the only thing that governed, and providing only that he stopped at the railroad crossing an engineman might bring his train into the train shed at a speed of 20 miles per hour without violating any rule of the company.

At the time of the accident, and contributing materially to its occurrence because of the smoke and steam they were emitting, two engines were standing on the westbound main track at the west end of the train shed. These engines were absolutely without protection. Under the rules in force the firemen were required to remain on the engines to watch them and the enginemen were required to be in the telegraph office for orders. The rules also required the firemen to protect the engines by flag in a situation of that kind. Superintendent Worthington admitted that the engines had no right on that track. He said

I asked why that engine had to stand there on that track, and they hadn't any reason to give. It was just the safe feeling that there was around there of the general situation being safe.

Mr. Worthington stated that since this accident the practice of allowing engines to stand there on the westbound main track has been discontinued. The train master had also been instructed to enforce the flagging rule at Terre Haute Union Station to the same extent as at other places on the road.

No employee involved in this accident was working in violation of any of the provisions of the hours-of-service law, and all had excellent service records.

Engineman Davis entered the service of the Vandalia Railroad as a locomotive fireman on August 29, 1873, and has been employed as engineman since February 3, 1879. Up to the time of this collision he had had but four marks against his record.

Conductor Smith entered the service of the company as brakeman on February 10, 1890, and was promoted to conductor September 30, 1897. He had been running a passenger train since September 5, 1904. Previous to this accident he had had but three marks against his record.

At the investigation conducted by the Indiana Railroad Commission and the Interstate Commerce Commission, on January 27, 1913, Superintendent Worthington stated: "If we'd pick out on our railroad the best men, they would have been the men that were concerned in these two trains. The records of these men were as good as any men I ever met, not only that, but their reputations outside."

About 26 regular passenger trains enter Terre Haute Union Station daily. To provide adequate safety for the movement of traffic of this density, better facilities should be furnished by the railroad company. Enginemen of approaching trains should receive notice of the condition of the track a sufficient distance away to enable them to stop before entering the track when it is occupied by another train. This could be done by means of a fixed signal located at about Sixth or Seventh Streets, and controlled by electric track circuit or operated manually under the direction of the station master. There should also be a very material decrease in the speed at which trains are permitted to run between Sixth Street and Union Station.

Respectfully submitted

H W BEINAP,
Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances

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