

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE CHICAGO GREAT WESTERN RAILROAD NEAR WEST PLATTE, MO., ON OCTOBER 23, 1929.

February 16 1930

To the Commission:

On October 23, 1929, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a work train on the Chicago Great Western Railroad near West Platte, Mo., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Seventh District of the Southern Division, extending between Conception, Mo., and Leavenworth, Kans., a distance of 72.4 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. Severly is located 3.1 miles west of West Platte and the yard limits of Severly extend ⁴⁸ west of West Platte, the accident occurred at a point 1,370 feet west of the west passing track switch at West Platte, which point is within the yard limits of Severly. Approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for a distance of 725 feet, followed by a compound curve to the left 2,075 feet in length, the maximum curvature of which is 4° , the accident occurring on this curve approximately 400 feet from its eastern end where the curvature is $2^{\circ} 50'$. Approaching from the east there is a 2° curve to the right 1,400 feet in length, the track is then tangent for a distance of 3,100 feet, to the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade at the point of accident is 7.4 per cent descending for eastbound trains. In the vicinity of the point of accident the track passes through a cut 500 feet in length and with a maximum depth of 14 feet which restricts the view to a short distance from trains approaching in either direction.

It was raining at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 3.40 a. m.

Description

Westbound second-class freight train No. 91 consisted of 102 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 321 and 359, and was in charge of Conductor Golliday and Engineer Richards and Flora. At Bee Creek, 10.8 miles east of West Platte, the crew received a copy of train order No. 59, Form 31, reading in part as follows:

"Eng 278 works extra seven ten 7.10 a. m. until seven thirty 7.30 p. m., between Beverly and Bee Creek protecting against second class trains***
No 91 engines 321 and 359 wait at Dearborn until eight ten 8.10 a. m. New Market until eight twenty 8.20 a. m. for work extra 278***"

Train No. 91 departed from Bee Creek at 7.53 a. m., 8 hours and 18 minutes late, and shortly after passing West Platte it collided with work train extra 278 while traveling at a speed estimated at from 2 to 4 miles per hour.

Eastbound work train extra 278 consisted of 29 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 278, and was in charge of Conductor Bean and Engineman Marlow. The crew of this train received a copy of train order No. 59, form 31, previously mentioned, at Stillings Junction, 6.7 miles west of West Platte, and departed from that point at 7.20 a. m. After picking up cars at Beverly it continued eastward and collided with train No. 91 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 5 or 6 miles per hour.

All three engines were derailed and were considerably damaged. The two forward cars and the 28th, 29th and 30th cars in train No. 91 were derailed, the 28th car being demolished while the 14th car was partly telescoped; the leading car in the work train was also damaged. The employee killed was the engineman of extra 278.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Richards, of the leading engine of train No. 91, stated that when train order No. 59 was delivered to him at Bee Creek he read it aloud to the conductor. His train passed New Market at 8.20 a. m. the time specified in the order, and was running at a speed of about 30 miles per hour when it passed Woodruff, shortly after which he shut off steam and allowed the train to reduce speed to about 10 miles per hour when it passed West Platte, his object being to approach the yard limit board west of that point under control, and he was also looking out for extra 278. The speed had been further reduced to 7 or 8 miles per hour when he saw the work train approaching at a distance of about 120 yards, which was as soon as it could be seen in view of the weather

conditions, the curve and the cut. He applied the brakes in emergency, sounded the whistle and then jumped off. He had experienced no difficulty with the brakes en route and thought that the speed of his train was not more than 3 miles per hour at the time of the collision. Engineman Richards knew that the rules require all trains other than first class trains to approach and move within yard limits under control, which is defined as being able to stop within one-half the distance the track is seen to be clear. He was of the opinion that his train was being operated in accordance with this rule.

Fireman Broscheid, of the leading engine, stated that his train passed New Market at about 8:20 a.m. and at that time he informed the engineman the work train was not on the siding. He said the engineman shut off steam between Woodruff and West Platte and the train was traveling at a speed of 10 or 12 miles per hour when it passed the latter point. He did not see the work train approaching and his first knowledge of anything wrong was when the engineman applied the brakes in emergency; he estimated the speed at that time at 7 or 8 miles per hour and at the time of the accident at 3 or 4 miles per hour.

Head Brakeman Wall stated that he was riding on the fireman's seatbox of the leading engine and noticed the engineman shut off steam about $1\frac{1}{2}$ or 2 miles east of West Platte which resulted in the speed being reduced to about 10 miles per hour. He was looking ahead but did not see the opposing train until it was about 200 feet from his engine, this was after the brakes had been applied and the whistle was blowing. He estimated the speed at 2 to 4 miles per hour at the time of the accident and thought his train would have been stopped in another $1\frac{1}{2}$ car-lengths.

Engineman Flora, of the second engine, stated that he noticed the train had excellent braking power when it stopped at Bee Creek, the last stop prior to the accident. He observed the time to be 8:30 when they passed New Market and upon reaching a point about 2 miles from West Platte he shut off steam on his engine. He was keeping a lookout for extra 278 but did not see it approaching until the trains were approximately seven or eight car-lengths apart, and about the same time the brakes were applied from the leading engine; the brake valve on his engine was cut out. He immediately jumped off, ran up the bank along the track, then looked around and noticed the engine of the work train was still working steam. He estimated that the brake application reduced the speed from 7 or 8 miles per hour to 3 or 4 miles per hour, and was of the opinion the brakes operated properly and would have brought the train to a stop within the distance that the opposing train came into view.

Conductor Colliday, of train No. 91, stated that his train was not separated between St. Joseph and the point of

accident and the air brakes operated properly. While at Bee Creek the conductor read train order 59 back to him. Conductor Colliday estimated the speed of his train as it approached and passed West Platte at 10 miles per hour. His first knowledge of anything wrong was a severe shock, caused by the emergency application of the brakes, the train then traveled a distance of about three car-lengths before it stopped.

Fireman Norris, of extra 273, stated that he read train order No. 59 to the engineman before leaving Stillings and there was nothing about the order that was uncertain or confusing, the order was not mentioned again after leaving that point. The crew worked at Beverly about 45 minutes but he did not note the time they left that point. In view of the heavy train it was necessary for him to shovel coal almost all of the time after leaving Beverly and approaching the point of accident he was on the engine deck, his first warning of danger was when the head brakeman shouted. He jumped off as quickly as possible; before doing so he noticed the engineman standing up and looking ahead, and just about the time he jumped he heard the brakes go into emergency, the collision occurring just about the time he struck the ground. He said that he had entirely forgotten about train No. 91 and was of the opinion that the engineman and brakeman had also overlooked it. There was nothing about the engine to divert their attention from the train orders except that it was necessary to remove and clean a sand pipe at Beverly. He further stated that prior to the accident the engineman appeared to be in normal condition, and he was extremely careful in handling train orders.

Head Brakeman Morrissey, of extra 278, stated that he read train order No. 59 in the presence of the conductor and flagman and understood that train No. 91 was required to wait at New Market until 8.20 a.m. He rode on the engine after leaving Beverly but at no time did he think of train No. 91, neither was there any conversation held by the engine crew concerning that train, he had in mind that the next stop would be at Dearborn, a station beyond New Market. As soon as he realized the danger he jumped off; the engine was working steam at that time, the collision occurring after the engine moved an additional distance of about the length of the tender. He said the last whistle signal sounded was for a crossing at Beverly and the engineman did not indicate that he anticipated meeting train No. 91 at West Platte.

Conductor Beam, of extra 278, stated that among the train orders received at Stillings was order No. 59 which was handled in accordance with the rules and was clearly understood. His train was at Beverly approximately 1 hour, doing station work, and it departed from that point between 8.20 and 8.25 a.m. He stated that he had entirely overlooked train No. 91, and consequently he made no effort to see that his train

cleared the main track for that train as required by the rules. His first indication that something was wrong was when the brakes were applied and the sudden stopping of the train which only moved a distance of from one-half to one car-length after the brakes were first applied. He estimated the speed at 3 to 5 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Rear Brake man Jackson, of extra 278, stated that he read the orders received at Stillings and understood his train was required to clear the main track not later than 8.15 for train No. 91. He thought of that train some time before leaving Beverly but did not think of it again until after the accident, and at the time his train left Beverly, between 8.20 and 8.25 a. m., he was of the impression that the next stop would be at Ferrisboro. He estimated the train moved a distance of only 10 or 12 feet after the brakes were applied immediately preceding the accident.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by all members of the crew of extra 278 overlocking a superior train, and their failure to get into clear for a superior train as required by the rules.

All of the surviving members of the crew of extra 278 admitted they had completely forgotten about train No. 91 and it is evident from the fact that the work train was starting to leave Beverly on the time of train No. 91 that the engine men of the work train had also overlooked train No. 91.

The accident occurred within yard limits and the rules provide that in such territory the main track may be used, protecting against first class trains; however, under the rules both of the trains involved in this accident were required to move within yard limits prepared to stop within one-half the distance the track is seen to be clear. According to the evidence both trains approached the point of accident at low rates of speed, the leading engineer of train No. 91 was on the alert and made every effort to stop his train as soon as the opposing train came into view, but it did not appear that steam on engine 278 was shut off prior to the accident although the brakes were applied just before the collision occurred.

Had an adequate block signal system been in use on this line this accident probably would not have occurred. For a period of 30 days prior to the date of this accident traffic over this line averaged about 14 trains daily.

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. N. BORLAND,
Director.