

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE WABASH RAILWAY AT ATTICA, IND., ON NOVEMBER 12, 1923.

March 6, 1924.

To the Commission:

On November 12, 1923, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Wabash Railway at Attica, Ind., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 16 employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the Second District of the Peru Division, a single-track line extending between Peru, Ind., and Tilton, Ill., a distance of 101.3 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred about 3,654 feet east of the station at Attica; approaching this point from the west there is a 5° curve to the left 718 feet in length, and the track is then tangent for 1,466 feet, followed by a 2° curve to the right 874 feet in length, the accident occurring on tangent track at a point 536 feet east of the leaving end of this curve. The grade from the west is practically level or slightly ascending for about 2,000 feet, and is then slightly descending, being 0.36 per cent descending at the point of accident.

Eastbound automatic signals 276.9 and 276.1 located 316 and 3,654 feet east of the station, respectively, are of the three-position, upper-quadrant type. The view of signal 276.1 is obstructed by an orchard on the south side of the track until within approximately 800 feet of it. A cross-over is located between the signals, about 1,361 feet east of signal 276.9, connecting with a passing track parallel to and north of the main track.

The weather was clear and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred about 6 p.m.

Description.

Eastbound freight train No. 76, hauled by engine 849, in charge of Conductor Brinley and Engineman Lesley, while engaged in switching east of Attica station, had just started to back westward on the main track, the engine headed east, hauling 8 cars, when it was struck by extra 417.

Eastbound freight train extra 417 consisted of 1 car and a caboose, hauled by engine 417, the engine headed west, and was in charge of Conductor Berry and Engineman Miller. This train left Attica at 5.58 p.m., and collided with train No. 76 while running at a speed estimated to have been between 12 and 20 miles an hour.

The tender cisterns of the engines were jammed against the boiler heads and the tender trucks derailed. The employees killed were the firemen.

Summary of evidence.

Conductor Brinley, of train No. 76, said his train arrived at Attica at about 11 a.m., and had been engaged in switching since that time. At about 5.50 p.m. the engine proceeded through the cross-over from the passing track to the main track with several cars to go to the east end of the yard to switch a track at the brick works, leaving their caboose on the passing track. He said he then walked westward to the freight house to obtain a bill for a car and while he was in the freight house he heard a train pass and assumed that it was a westbound train which he had noticed being made up east of the station. Conductor Brinley stated that although there were torpedoes and fusees in the caboose, he had not provided himself with either and admitted that he failed properly to protect his train.

Head Brakeman Fair said he was standing near the brick yard switch, just east of the point of accident, as his engine backed west on the main track and saw extra 417 approaching from the west, at about the point of the curve, at a speed of about 20 miles an hour, and he ran toward that train on the fireman's side, swinging his lantern, and then crossed to the engineman's side, but was unable to see any one on the engine nor did he receive any signals in acknowledgment of his stop signals. He said he did not know how far he ran towards the train before he turned and ran eastward and swung his lantern to stop his own train, which had nearly come to a stop before the collision occurred. Brakeman Fair said that the indication of signal 276.1 was red as extra 417 approached. He also said that while he was unable to see the markers on the tender of engine 417 owing to the smoke, he could see a white light displayed on the rear of the tender.

Middle Brakeman Weakley said he was 5 or 6 car lengths east of the brick yard switch, on the engineman's side, when the collision occurred and had not seen extra 417 before the accident. He further said that he understood that Conductor Brinley was protecting their train while it was using the main track, as was the custom. Rear Brakeman Mullins said he was protecting the train to the east and did not see the approaching extra. Engineman Lesley said they had not completed the work and were pulling west on the main track to again go into

the brick yard switch and he supposed as had been the custom that the conductor was protecting them while they were working on this track. He said he was looking to the east for signals and did not see extra 417 before the collision occurred.

Conductor Berry, of extra 417, said a stop was made for water at Attica, just west of the station, and as the train-order board was displayed he went to the station and obtained a train order, not involved in the accident, at which time the operator told him to be on the lookout for extra 2431, which was in the yard. He did not notice the indication of signal 276.9, east of the station, but as his engine passed him on its way eastward he handed a copy of the order to the fireman and communicated the instructions he had received to be on the lookout for the extra and boarded the caboose. He said he saw extra 2431 standing on the passing track, together with a caboose with no markers displayed, which he concluded was no part of a train. He further said that after seeing the caboose it did not occur to him that the local freight train was still in the yard as no markers were displayed and also as that train had been at Attica six hours previously when his train was going west. He had just entered the caboose when the collision occurred, while the train was moving at a speed of about 10 or 12 miles an hour. Brakemen Dempsey and Dicken said they were riding on the rear platform of the caboose until the train passed the cross-over switch, and estimated the speed of the train at the time of the accident to have been about 13 or 15 miles an hour. They felt no air-brake application prior to the collision, although Brakeman Dempsey said the air was cut in on the caboose.

Engineman Miller, of extra 417, said that when the train order was handed on at Attica he was told to look out for extra 2431 in the yard and that nothing was said about train No. 76. He said the signal east of the station, 276.9, was displaying a stop indication, which he assumed was caused by the train for which he was told to be on the lookout, and he proceeded slowly to the cross-over switch, which was set for the cross-over, and when the switch was lined for the main track by a member of the crew of extra 2431, which was on the passing track, he received a back-up signal and increased speed. He also said that there were two red and two white lights displayed on the rear of the tender. Engineman Miller admitted that he did not look for the indication of signal 276.1 and said he did not ask the fireman concerning its indication and had no intimation of an accident impending until the collision occurred.

The investigation also developed that at the time of the accident the crew of extra 2431 was in possession of a copy of train order No. 81, reading in part as follows:

"Eng 2431 run extra Attica to Tilton
and meet extra 417 east at Attica."

In view of the fact that eastbound trains are superior by direction, this order required extra 2431 to remain at Attica, the point at which it was created, until extra 417 arrived. A copy of the order was not issued to the crew of extra 417 when that train reached Attica, but Engineman Miller had been told that that train was there and warned to look out for it. Rule 515 provides that at meeting points, if a signal is displaying a stop indication, a train may proceed under full control, and Engineman Miller therefore should have so proceeded after passing signal 276.9; he should also have brought his train to a stop at signal 276.1, which is an outbound signal, with a round end, and have obtained a clearance from the dispatcher, failing to obtain which he could proceed only under flag protection.

Conductor Kline, of extra 2431, said his train was standing on the passing track west of the cross-over and when he saw extra 417 leaving the station, he instructed a brakeman to line the main track cross-over switch for that train. Brakeman Carter said his train was ready to head out of the passing track and that the cross-over switch had been lined for that movement, but as extra 417 approached he closed the switch and gave a proceed signal to the engineman of that train to indicate that the switch was properly lined, at which time he said the speed of the train was about 10 or 12 miles an hour. As the engine passed him he noticed a white light on the rear of the tender but was not positive about seeing a red light.

Operator Schwarm, at Attica, said he received a train order for extra 417 and delivered it to the conductor of that train and told him to be on the lookout for extra 2431, which was in the yard, and did not mention train No. 76 as he did not know where it was located. He further said that about 20 minutes after he learned of the occurrence of the accident, Conductor Brinley came into the station and he told the conductor that his train had been involved in an accident. Track Supervisor Harter said he was riding in the caboose of extra 417 with 18 track laborers and that the speed of the train was about 18 or 20 miles an hour when the collision occurred. He said that after the accident he noticed the indication of signal 276.1, located nearly opposite the point of accident, and it was at stop.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Brinley, of train No. 76, to provide proper protection for his train, and by the failure of Engineman Miller, of extra 417, to observe and obey block signal indications.

The action of Conductor Brirley in going to the freight house when he should have been protecting his train while it was using the main track denotes either a misconception of his duties or a laxity in their performance. It further appeared from the testimony that he had not taken steps to provide himself with flagging equipment. An imperative duty rested upon him to protect his train, and had he provided this protection this accident undoubtedly would not have occurred.

Engineman Miller should have operated his train with caution after passing signal 276.9, instead of doing this he proceeded at a speed of 15 or 20 miles an hour, and although approaching a curve where the view from his side of the engine was obscured he did not bring his train under proper control or require the fireman, who was on the inside of the curve, to maintain a proper lookout. Engineman Miller also failed to ascertain the indication of signal 276.1, when as a matter of fact his train could not pass this signal, which was displaying a stop indication, without stopping and getting in communication with the dispatcher.

This accident again serves to direct attention to the necessity for the use of an automatic train-control device which will intervene to stop a train whenever for any reason an engineman fails to see or heed a stop signal. Had such a device been in use, this accident would have been averted.

Brakeman Fair had been in service about 6 weeks, but all the other employees were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of extra 417 had been on duty 13 hours and 10 minutes, and the crew of train No. 76 from 10 hours and 30 minutes to 12 hours, previous to which both crews had been off duty for periods ranging from 17 to 62½ hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.