INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD NEAR WARSAW, N. Y , ON MARCH 7, 1932

May 10, 1932

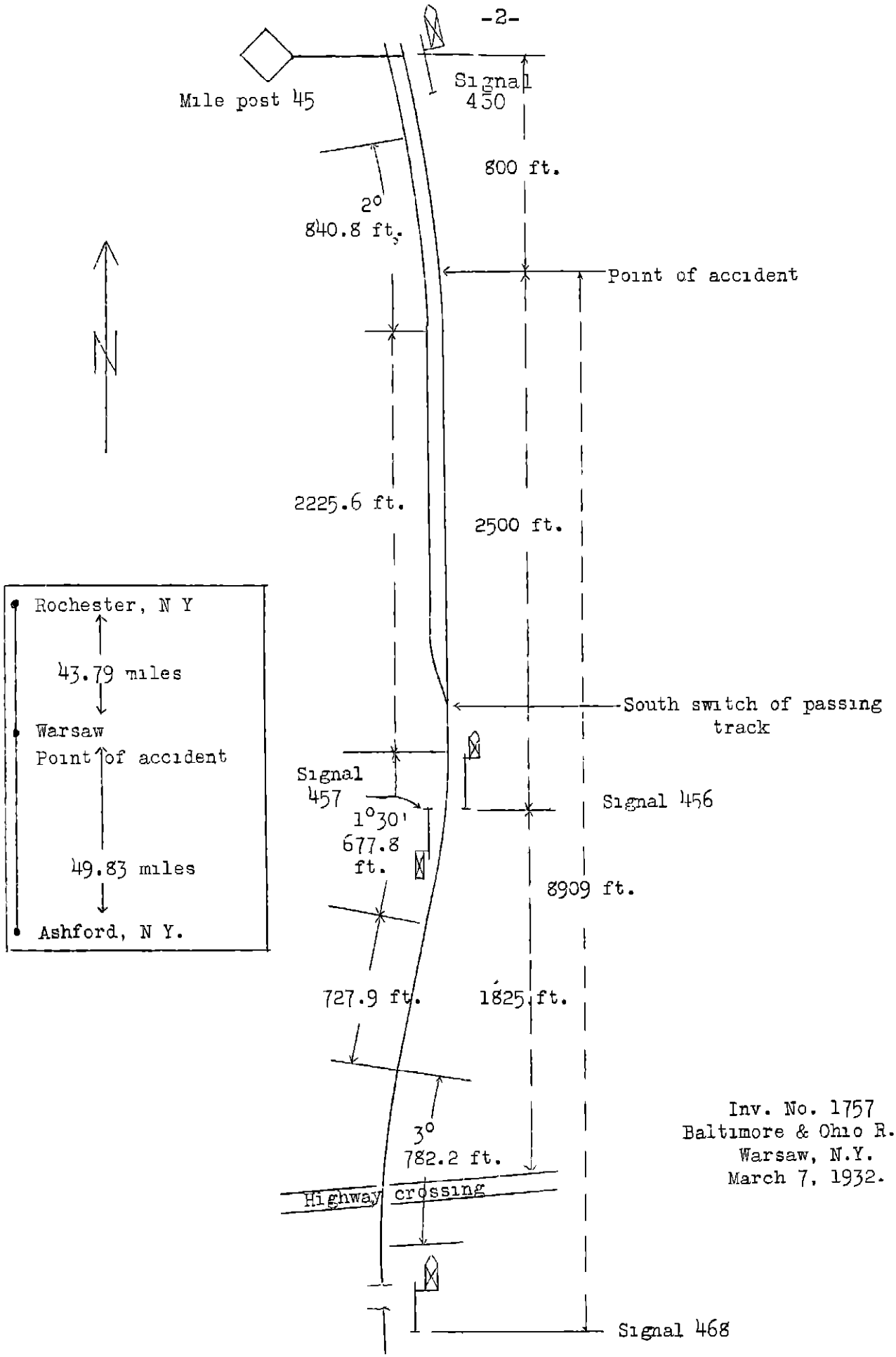
To the Commission:

On March 7, 1932, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on that part of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad formerly known as the Buffalo, Rochester and Pittsburgh Railway, near Warsaw, N Y., which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 7 passengers and 3 employees. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with representatives of the Public Service Commission of New York.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Buffalo-Rochester District extending between Ashford and Rochester, N.Y., a distance of 93.62 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point 800 feet south of mile post 45, which is located 1.21 miles south of the station at Warsaw, approaching the point of accident from the south, there are 2,225.6 feet of tangent track, followed by a 2° curve to the left 840.8 feet in length, the accident occurring on this latter curve at a point approximately 200 feet from its southern end. The grade is descending for northbound trains for approximately 2 miles approaching the point of accident, being 0.95 per cent at the point of accident.

The signals involved in this accident are permissive signals 468 and 456, located 8,909 and 2,500 feet, respectively, south of the point of accident These signals are of the three-position, upper-quadrant, semaphore type. A passing track, 6,900 feet in length, parallels the main track on the west and in the center of this passing track are two crossovers for entering the passing track from either direction. The south switch of the passing track is located about 200 feet north of signal 456.



Inv. No. 1757
Baltimore & Ohio R.R.
Warsaw, N.Y.
March 7, 1932.

It was daylight and a heavy snow was falling, with a high wind blowing from the west at the time of the accident, which occurred about 5 30 p.m.

Description

Northbound third-class freight train No. 56 consisted of 21 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 431, and was in charge of Conductor Dumphy and Engineman Breen. This train departed from Silver Lake Jct., 6.15 miles from Warsaw, at 5.02 p.m., 4 hours and 48 minutes late, and was brought to a stop at the south end of the passing track at Warsaw for the purpose of getting into clear for train No. 6, but due to the heavy drifts of snow over the switch it was decided to proceed to the middle crossover and enter the passing track at that point, and it was while the engine was standing at this latter point that the rear end of the train was struck by train No. 6.

Northbound passenger train No. 6 consisted of 1 mail and baggage car, 1 coach, and 1 cafe-observation car, hauled by engine 5141, and was in charge of Conductor Widner and Engineman Wolf. The cars were of all-steel construction with the exception of the last car, which was of steel-underframe construction. This train departed from Silver Lake Jct. at 5.21 p.m., on time, and collided with the rear end of train No. 56 at Warsaw while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 30 and 45 miles per hour.

The caboose and two rear cars of train No. 56 were badly damaged, the wreckage of the caboose being destroyed by fire which broke out immediately following the collision Engine 5141, of train No. 6, tipped over on its right side, leaning against an embankment on the east side of the track, but the tender remained on the track, coupled to the engine. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 6, and those injured were the fireman and porter of train No. 6 and the conductor of train No. 56.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Breen, of train No. 56, stated that he slowed down at Rock Glen, 3.25 miles south of the point of accident, to unload a small piece of freight and then proceeded to the south end of the passing track at Warsaw, stopped and whistled out a flag, while the

head brakeman started to work on the switch. When Engineman Breen noticed the conditions he decided that the switch could not be thrown and that they would go down to the crossover, where there would not be so much snow on account of the wind having a sweep across at that point They proceeded to the crossover and stopped with the engine about opposite signal 450, and while the brakeman was working on the switch the engineman looked at his watch and noted that it was 5.16 p.m. When he was about ready to enter the siding the train was pushed ahead about 20 feet and he remarked to the fireman that train No. 6 had collided with their rear end. Engineman Breen further stated that the weather conditions were such that he had had to slow down in order to observe the position of signals, although the clear-vision window was not closed at any time during the trip, and that in order to see the signals at times he had to open the side window He had no difficulty in observing the position of signal 456, although there were drifts of snow all the way down there, it being especially bad at the road crossing about 1,825 feet south of signal 456. From Silver Lake Jct. to the point of accident all the signals were in the clear position but of course he could not state whether or not they were working, with the exception of the one at the south end of the passing track - signal 456 - and the one near the crossover switch - signal 450 - which were clear when he approached them and after making stops he observed them in the stop position The weather conditions were such that after the occurrence of the accident he was able to see a fusee about 25 car-lengths to the rear of his engine. The statements of Fireman Dyer practically corroborated those of the engineman, except that he said it was 5.16 p.m. when they stopped at the south end of the passing track and about 5.20 p.m. when they stopped at the middle crossover. While at the south end of the passing track, there were times when he could see the length of the train and other times when he could not see a distance of 15 feet. The worst snow drifts were in the vicinity of signal 456. Fireman Dyer also said that the flagman had not been recalled prior to the occurrence of the accident

Head Brakeman Maloy, of train No. 56, stated that it was difficult to see the position of the signals, making it necessary for the engineman to slow down in order to observe them, signal 456 was displaying a clear indication while the absolute signal for southbound movements was displaying stop, and after their engine had passed these signals he saw both of them in the stop position. About 4 or 5 feet of snow had drifted over

the switch at the south end of the passing track, and after examining the switch he got back on the engine and it was then about 5.17 or 5.18 p.m. He could not state what time it was when his train stopped at the middle crossover, nor did he see train No. 6 approaching, as he was engaged in cleaning out the switches.

Conductor Dumphy, of train No. 56, stated that when the piece of freight was unloaded at Rock Glen the flagman got off and placed torpedoes on the track, and when the stop was made at the south switch of the passing track at Warsaw the flagman got off immediately and went back to flag, this was about 5.16 or 5.17 p.m. They were there but a short time when the engineman whistled off and pulled down to the middle crossover, leaving the flagman behind. Conductor Dumphy stated that while proceeding to the middle crossover he put on his overcoat and mittens intending to go ahead to help clean out the switches, but before he left the caboose he heard train No. 6 whistle for the road crossing south of the south switch, and on looking back he could see the train approaching but did not pay much attention to it as he expected the flagman to stop it When he looked out again, however, he saw that it was approaching at rather a high rate of speed and jumped off when he saw that it was going to collide with his train Conductor Dumphy stated that he thought the flagman went back as far as it was possible for any one to have gone under the weather conditions existing at the time, and he further stated that he saw Brakeman Harper signalling train No. 6 with a red fusee.

Flagman Barentsen, of train No. 56, stated that he placed torpedoes on the track at Rock Glen, and as soon as his train stopped at the south switch of the passing track at Warsaw he got off and went back as fast as possible in order to protect his train His train remained there about two or three minutes and when it started to move northward he saw signal 456 displaying a stop indication, as well as the southbound absolute signal located opposite signal 456, this latter signal being at stop because train No. 6 had left Silver Lake Junction. He continued on southward and when he reached the highway crossing 1,825 feet south of signal 456 he heard train No. 6 whistle for a road crossing He had placed two torpedoes on the rail, opposite one another, lighted a red fusee, and had a red flag in his right hand, which was unrolled, when he first saw train No. 6 it was about 20 car-lengths distant and he began giving stop signals with the fusee and then called to the engineman as the

engine passed him, moving at a speed of about 45 miles per hour and with the engine working steam On account of the storm he was unable to say whether or not any of the cab windows were open, but he said he heard the torpedoes explode, although the sound was muffled on account of the deep snow; he had had to dig snow away in order to place them on the rail After the train had passed him he started northward and met the flagman of train No. 6 near the south end of the passing track. Flagman Barentsen stated that it was 5.16 p.m when his train first stopped at the passing track and he thought it was about 5.25 or 5.26 p.m when train No. 6 passed him, although he did not look at his watch, and it was his opinion that he went back as far as he could under the existing weather conditions, the snow was deep and the wind blowing so hard that it was almost impossible to face it.

Brakeman Harper, of train No. 56, stated that he rode in the caboose from Silver Lake Jct. to Warsaw, and after passing the automatic signals at the south end of the passing track at Warsaw he observed them displaying stop indications. While standing in the doorway of the caboose he thought he heard torpedoes explode. When he first saw train No. 6 approaching it was about 40 car-lengths distant, traveling at a speed of about 45 miles per hour, he lighted a red fusee on the platform of the caboose and started swinging it and continued to do so until it became necessary for him to leave the caboose before the collision, he thought the speed of train No. 6 had been reduced to about 35 miles per hour at the time of the accident. It was daylight and he did not think that the markers on the caboose had been lighted. After the accident he helped Engineman Wolfe, of train No. 6, into the smoker and asked the engineman if he did not pick up their flag south of the passing track, and the engineman replied "I did not see a thing."

Fireman Valk, of train No. 6, stated that approaching the point of accident he was riding on his seat box; the weather was very stormy, but the position of all the signals had been called with the exception of signal 456, which was missed on account of striking a snow drift and filling the engine with snow, which then turned to steam, the fireman had also missed the indication of signal 468, but he said Engineman Wolfe called the signal as displaying a clear indication. After striking the snow drift he realized that they had passed signal 456, but did not know whether or not the engineman was aware of it, and the next thing he knew they were into the

rear end of train No 56. He estimated the speed of their train at the time of the collision to have been between 35 and 40 miles per hour. While it was storming and blowing very hard, he did not notice the engineman reduce speed at any time in order to observe the position of the signals He did not hear any torpedoes explode nor did he see any fusees at any time after leaving Salamanca, adding that if the torpedoes were covered with snow they probably would not have been able to hear them, he did think, however, that he would have seen a lighted fusee. The clear-vision window on his side of the cab was closed, as it would not stay open, it was covered with snow and it was necessary for him to open his side window in order to observe the signals, but he said that the engineman could see through the front window on the right side, which was on the side away from the wind. He thought the engineman had the side window open when they passed signal 468 and that he closed it when they struck the snowdrift near signal 456, even had the window been open, however, he did not think the engineman could have seen signal 456 on account of the snow blowing into the cab. The engineman was in normal condition, and had sounded the whistle signals at the highway crossings, but the fireman was unable to say whether or not the air brakes had been applied prior to the collision.

Conductor Widner, of train No. 6, stated that he was riding in the second car of his train when the accident occurred, he estimated the speed to have been about 45 miles per hour and did not think the brakes had been applied prior to the collision. They had had no delays between Salamanca and Warsaw and were on schedule time. He had had some difficulty in hearing the engine whistle, but did not hear torpedoes explode at any time and was unable to state whether or not the whistle was sounded for the road crossing south of the passing track, subsequent to the accident he observed signal 456 displaying a stop indication. Conductor Widner further stated that the engineman had appeared to be in normal condition and that he considered him to be a first-class engineman; he had talked with the engineman at East Salamanca and remarked to him that it was a very bad day and would require caution and plenty of warning whistles, to which the engineman made no reply.

Flagman Bishop, of train No. 6, thought the brakes were applied about the time the accident occurred He went back to flag immediately following the accident, and met Flagman Barentsen about 5 or 6 telegraph poles north

of signal 456, the signal was in the stop position The snowstorm was so bad at times he could see for a distance of only a few feet, and at other times he could see quite a distance He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident to have been about 30 miles per hour.

Signal Inspector Gavagan and Signal Maintainer O'Keefe stated they tested signals 468 and 456 about 2 a.m. March 9 and found them both working properly, and it was not necessary to make any repairs to either of these signals subsequent to the accident; in fact, the only thing out of order was the track circuit, which had been interrupted due to the rails separating as a result of the accident. Signal Maintainer O'Keefe also said signals 456 and 468 had been inspected by him on January 14 and February 10. No report had been made of a false clear indication of either of these signals except in the case of signal 468, about three or four years previously, when water got into the mechanism, due to a defective gasket, and then froze.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Wolfe, of train No. 6, properly to observe and obey signal indications.

Fireman Valk, of train No. 6, did not see signal 468, but said Engineman Wolfe called it as displaying a clear indication, apparently neither of them saw the indication displayed by signal 456 due to the fact that their engine struck a snow drift at about the time of passing the signal. The evidence is clear, however, that signal 456 was observed properly displaying a stop indication both before and after the accident and that the southbound absolute signal opposite signal 456 also was displaying a stop indication due to train No. 6 having left Silver Lake Junction It also appeared that the only damage to the signal system as a result of the accident consisted of the interruption of the track circuits due to rails having been knocked out of position, and that after track repairs had been made the signal system functioned as intended, the signals also had been inspected by the signal maintainer in January and again in February. Under all these circumstances there is little doubt but that signal 456 was displaying a stop indication when train No. 6 approached it and that on account of

the blizzard-like weather conditions prevailing at the time, the engine crew failed to observe this indication. The engineman of train No. 56 said he had had to reduce speed at times in order to observe signal indications and similar steps should have been taken by Engineman Wolfe, who was operating at schedule speed and apparently did not see either the flagman of train No. 56, the stop indication of signal 456, the fusee being waved by brakemen on the caboose platform, or the rear end of the train itself, for none of the surviving members of the crew of train No. 6 noticed any application of the brakes prior to the occurrence of the accident.

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.