

Application Denied

ON May 28 the Northern Pacific made application (BS-Ap-3408) to the Interstate Commerce Commission for permission to discontinue a staff system and to install automatic block signaling between Blossburg, Mont., and Skyline, and to install remote control switches and signals at Skyline.

The application was opposed by the Order of Railroad Telegraphers, the Order of Railway Conductors and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen. A hearing has been held. On July 16, the Commission denied this application, and the following information is abstracted from this order.

The line from Blossburg eastward to Skyline, about two miles, is single track with a grade of 2 per cent descending eastward. Over this line trains are operated by a staff block system with control points at each of the stations named. In adjacent territory, both east of Skyline and west of Blossburg, trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block signal system. About 600 ft. east of Blossburg is Mullan Tunnel, 3,870 ft. long. Four hundred feet east of the east portal of this tunnel there is a safety switch for protection against runaway trains on the descending grade.

At Skyline there is a passing siding, the switches of which are controlled by the operator at that point. The east switch is power operated by means of a dual-control machine which, with the protecting signals, constitutes a remote-control interlocking. The safety switch is also controlled by the operator at Skyline, and is so connected with the staff system that the switch must be open before an eastbound train can secure the staff to leave Blossburg.

The staff block system is operated by means of staff machines at Blossburg and Skyline which are controlled by the operators at those points. Under this system, a train having possession of the staff has absolute block protection for both opposing and following movements.

Proposed Changes

Applicant proposes (1) to remove the staff system and discontinue the office at Skyline, (2) install dual-control electric switch machines on

the safety switch and the switch at the west end of Skyline siding, and a new "leave siding" signal at Blossburg, and to retain the present arrangement of switches and signals at the east end of Skyline, all of which switches and signals will be controlled from the office at Blossburg, and (3) to extend the automatic block signal system to the line between Blossburg and Skyline, thus making the automatic block signal system continuous in that vicinity.

Traffic Handled

Traffic over the line consists of two regular passenger and six to eight freight trains in each direction daily, with an occasional troop train. The purpose of the proposed changes is to increase safety in train operation. Applicant is of the opinion that the proposed changes will result in eliminating delay to approaching trains as it will no longer be necessary to slow down or stop to pick up the staff, and that improved safety will result because a track circuit will afford some additional protection, and one employee will have complete control over the operation instead of three as at present, thus reducing the probability of error.

Applicant admits that under the present method of operation, if an accident should occur or a train break in two in the tunnel, the train would be protected in both directions without the necessity of a flagman, and that, under the proposed operation, flag protection or special instructions would be required if an accident or break in the train should occur.

Employees, including enginemen, conductors, brakemen, firemen, and a telegraph operator employed in this territory, appearing on behalf of protestants, testified that the existing staff system was safe, and could not be improved upon from a safety standpoint. There was no evidence to the contrary.

The cost of the proposed change would be approximately \$21,000. Three telegraph operators would be displaced. The signals and derail at Skyline, now controlled by operators located at that point, would be remotely controlled by the operator at Blossburg. Applicant's employees testify that the proposed remote control is not as safe or as satisfactory as the

present direct control. Under present practice the staff is attached to a hoop and is handed to a member of the crew while the train is moving into the block. As trains are operated at slow speed in this territory, because of grade conditions, the speed of the movement would not be affected by the proposed change.

Fundamentally, the block system is designed to provide protection against collision even in the case of an error on the part of one of the employees involved. In the present staff system the possession of a staff by a train crew is tangible evidence of the right of that train to occupy the block, and as here used it provides absolute block protection. Because of the prevailing conditions in this vicinity, there is less likelihood of an error under this system than under the proposed system, as, under the latter, the signals would be placed under the control of an operator located a considerable distance away, and the effectiveness thereof would depend upon proper observation of and obedience to wayside signal indications.

We find that existing safety of operation would not be maintained if the changes proposed in the application were made and accordingly the application is denied. An appropriate order will be entered.

Accident on Big Four

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The agent at Yorktown said that throughout a considerable period he has overheard a number of conductors use the telephone at Yorktown, and in most instances they obtained information as to movement of other trains but did not request authority to occupy another main track. In addition, No. 158 moved westward on the eastward main track a distance of 2,700 ft. without protection of any kind. The failure to obey one or more operating rules for a considerable period, as was disclosed in this investigation, indicates lack of proper supervision. Even though the rules involved in the movement in question were not enforced, if the crossover had been electrically locked, this accident would not have occurred.

It is found that this accident was caused by No. 158 occupying the westward main track without authority and by failure to provide flag protection for this movement.

It is recommended that the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis install electric locks on main-track switches in automatic signal territory where movements of the character involved in this accident are made.