

Inv-2159

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
CLEVELAND, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO &
ST. LOUIS RAILWAY

AUGUSTA, IND.

MARCH 15, 1937.

INVESTIGATION NO. 2159

SUMMARY

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Railroad: Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis
Date: March 15, 1937.
Location: Augusta, Ind.
Kind of accident: Derailment after striking automobile
Train involved: Passenger
Train number: 116
Engine number: 4913
Consist: 7 cars
Speed: 70-80 m.p.h.
Track: Tangent
Weather: Slightly cloudy
Time: 1:25 p.m.
Casualties: 2 killed and 40 injured
Cause: Automobile driven on railroad crossing
at grade directly in front of approach-
ing train, in disregard of signals
indicating the approach of a train.

June 8, 1937.

To the Commission:

On March 15, 1937, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis Railway as a result of striking an automobile on a highway grade crossing at Augusta, Ind., which resulted in the death of 2 railway employees, and the injury of 29 passengers, 7 dining-car employees, and 2 railway employees; also the driver of the automobile and a passenger who was riding with him. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Indiana Public Service Commission.

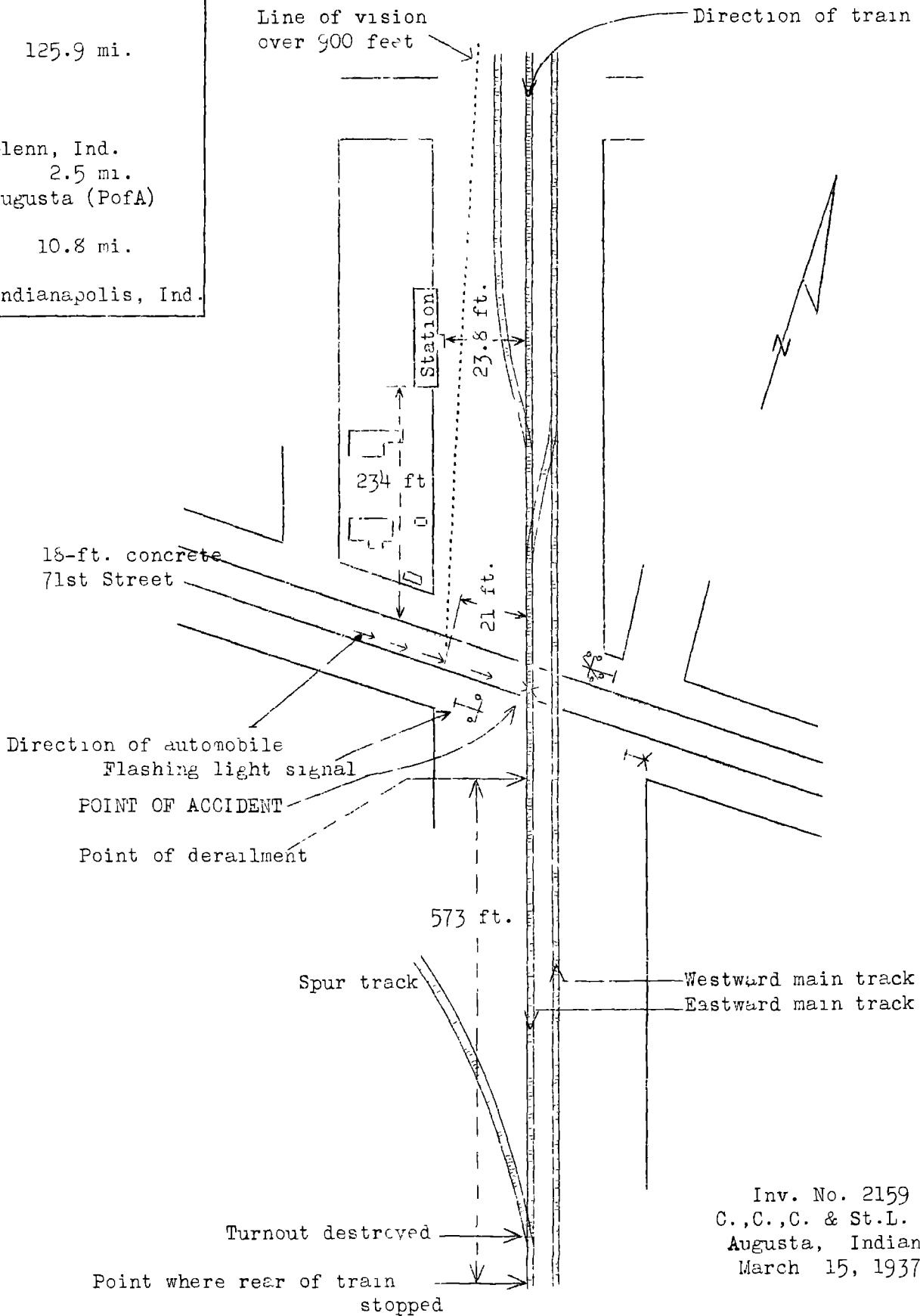
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Indiana Division which extends between Kankakee, Ill., and Indianapolis, Ind., a distance of 139.2 miles, and is a double-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The tracks of the railway extend practically north and south, while the public highway involved runs east and west; timetable directions on the railway, however, are east and west, and these latter directions are used in this report. The point of accident was where the tracks are crossed by a highway known as 71st Street, the center line of which is 286 feet east of the station at Augusta; approaching this point from the west, the track is tangent for several miles, while the grade in the immediate vicinity is 0.40 percent descending. The speed limit for passenger trains is 80 miles per hour. There is a siding on the south side of the main tracks west of the crossing, and at the time of the accident there were 19 cars standing on this siding, the nearest car being 900 feet from the crossing.

The highway involved crosses the tracks at an angle of about 71° ; it is 18 feet in width and is constructed of concrete, with the exception that on the crossing the surface is composed of a mixture of asphalt and crushed stone. It is straight for 1,000 feet when approaching from the south, and is practically level. Protection for highway traffic is provided by means of flashing-light signals located on each side of the tracks. The signal governing north-bound highway traffic is mounted on a mast which is located 6 feet 6 inches from the right edge of the pavement and approximately the same distance from the nearest rail. The centers of the lenses are 7 feet 6 inches above the ground level, and hoods are provided

o Kankakee, Ill.
 125.9 mi.
 o Glenn, Ind.
 2.5 mi.
 x Augusta (PofA)
 10.8 mi.
 o Indianapolis, Ind.

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 Augusta, Indiana
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over the lenses which extend outward a distance of about 9 inches. The operation of these signals is controlled by means of track circuits, the circuit in the eastward track extending to a point 3,178 feet west of the crossing. In addition to the flashing-light signals, there is a cross-bar sign in the northeast angle of the intersection bearing the words, "RAILROAD CROSSING", while under the crossed bars there is another sign horizontally mounted, on which the word "DANGER" is painted.

For north-bound highway traffic there is an unobstructed view of the flashing-light signals for a distance of about 600 feet. The view to be had of an approaching east-bound train is obstructed by various small buildings, including the station, located in the southwest angle of the intersection, but when 21 feet from the nearest rail a clear view can be had when the train is more than 900 feet distant.

The weather was slightly cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1:25 p.m.

Description

Train No. 116, an east-bound passenger train, consisted of one mail car, one baggage car, two coaches, one dining car, one Pullman parlor car, and one Pullman observation car, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 4913, and was in charge of Conductor Klepper and Engineman Andrews. This train passed Glenn, 2.5 miles west of Augusta, at 1:22 p.m., on time, and was derailed after striking the automobile on the crossing at 71st Street while travelling at a speed estimated to have been between 70 and 80 miles per hour.

The automobile was a 6-cylinder Chrysler 4-door sedan, made in 1929, owned by J. L. Bressler, of Lebanon, Ind., and driven by his son, N. D. Bressler, the father being a passenger in the automobile at the time of the accident. This automobile was being driven northward on 71st Street, entered upon the crossing at a speed variously estimated to have been between 10 and 25 miles per hour, without first having stopped, and was struck at the left rear wheel by the engine of Train No. 116.

The first mark of the derailment of the train was at a point 41 feet east of the center line of the crossing, and the engine stopped on its left side, squarely across both main tracks, at a point 1,164 feet east of the first mark. The train was entirely derailed with the exception of two wheels under the last car, but none of the cars was overturned.

The automobile stopped approximately 25 feet north of the point of accident and 10 feet east of the right edge of the pavement, destroying the relay case which housed the mechanism controlling the operation of the flashing-light signals; the body of the automobile was practically destroyed. The railway employees killed were the engineman and the fireman.

Summary of evidence

Traveling Fireman Adair, who was on engine 4913 at the time of the accident, said he was on the drop seat immediately in front of the fireman's seat and that the engineman was in his usual position on the right side of the cab, with the side window open. According to his statements, the engineman sounded one long blast on the whistle as a station signal, when about 2,000 feet from the crossing, and then commenced sounding the usual road crossing signal, the last blast of this signal being sounded as the train was nearing the crossing. When the engine was close to the crossing the engineman began sounding short blasts on the whistle, at the same time applying the air brakes in emergency, and then the traveling fireman heard the crash as the engine struck the automobile. The speed of the train at the time was about 70 or 75 miles per hour. Traveling Fireman Adair did not see the automobile at any time prior to the accident and knew nothing concerning the speed at which it was being operated, or its movements, immediately prior to the accident; he stated, however, that the flashing-light signals were operating.

The statements of Conductor Klepper, Brakeman Wise, and Flagman Shaefer, all of Train No. 116, indicated that their first knowledge of anything wrong was when the brakes were applied in emergency, at which time the speed was between 70 and 80 miles per hour. Conductor Klepper examined the track between the crossing and the point where the train stopped, but did not find anything which could have caused the derailment. Flagman Shaefer saw the driver of the automobile and asked him why he drove on the crossing, and he quoted the driver as saying that he did not know; that he was not thinking about the railroad at all.

Trainmaster Nichols, who was on Train No. 116, said that after the accident he examined the track from the rear of the train back toward the west for a distance of nearly 1 mile, but could find no mark or indication of dragging equipment on the track west of the crossing. The first marks east of the crossing were about 35 feet beyond the leaving end of the crossing and indicated that the engine had been derailed to

the left; these marks continued eastward beyond the trailing-point switch located several hundred feet east of the crossing, while the track was torn up east of the rear end of the derailed cars. Near the point where the first marks appeared there was a small indentation in the left rail which he thought might have been made by the object which caused the engine to become derailed, but he was unable to find anything which in his opinion could have derailed the engine.

N. D. Bressler, driver of the automobile, said he held a driver's license and had been driving automobiles about 15 years. He was proceeding northward on the highway, traveling at a speed between 30 and 35 miles per hour, and when about 100 yards from the tracks he removed his foot from the accelerator and allowed the automobile to drift toward the crossing in high gear. According to his statements he looked to the right, glanced at the flashing-light signal, which showed only a red glare due to the reflection of light, and did not appear to be flashing, and then looked toward the left. Mr. Bressler did not again look at the signal and he did not hear the whistle of the engine, all of the windows of the automobile being closed, and he said the speed of the automobile was down to 10 or 15 miles per hour, with its front end about on the track, when the engine appeared at the corner of the station. Realizing that he would be unable to stop clear of the track, he stepped on the accelerator, but the speed did not increase sufficiently to clear the track. Mr. Bressler also stated that the pavement was dry and the weather cloudy, although the sun would shine occasionally, and that it would be difficult to detect whether the lights were flashing due to light shining on the lenses. Mr. Bressler was familiar with the crossing, having lived in the vicinity a few years previously, yet his statements, taken in the hospital on the day following the accident, indicated that he was considerably confused as to the location of the signals; in fact, he stated frequently that the signal he looked at was on the left side of the highway.

J. D. Bressler said he was sitting on the right side of the driver at the time of the accident. He looked to the right when about 300 feet from the crossing and then looked to the left, but did not see anything of an approaching train. When the automobile was close to the crossing, however, he saw the engine about half way between the station and the crossing, and he estimated that the speed of the automobile at that time was between 20 and 25 miles per hour. Mr. Bressler had not heard the whistle of the engine and did not notice whether the flashing-light signals were operating,

although he would not make a definite statement on this latter point or as to the side of the road on which the signals were located.

Section Foreman Wright said he was working on the eastward track, in front of the station, and that when Train No. 116 approached that point he and his men stepped over toward the westward track. The whistle was sounded as the train approached the crossing and the bell was ringing when the engine passed him; he did not, however, witness the occurrence of the accident. Shortly afterwards he made an examination of the track and saw marks beyond the crossing which showed where one pair of wheels had become derailed, while several hundred feet farther east a rail had been torn out at a switch. He did not find anything on or near the track that could have caused the derailment of the train. Section Foreman Wright further stated that the flashing lights were working properly when Train No. 114 passed at 12:40 p.m., but he did not look at them when Train No. 116 approached. Sectionman Pollard, who was working with the section foreman, said he saw the automobile when it was about one city block distant from the crossing; its speed at that time appeared to be about 40 miles per hour and he remarked that it would be too bad if it went across the tracks. As the automobile neared the crossing, however, its speed was decreased to about 20 miles per hour but it was not brought to a stop, the rear end being struck by the engine about the time the front end had cleared the eastward track. Sectionman Pollard could see the flashing-light signals on the north side of the track and said that they were operating properly.

E. Wilson, who lives near Augusta, stated that the flashing-light signals on the north side of the tracks started to operate just as he was approaching the crossing from that side in his automobile, accompanied by his wife. He stopped the automobile, saw the train some distance away, and then proceeded over the tracks, at which time he heard the whistle being sounded. Just after crossing the tracks he saw an automobile approaching from the opposite direction, it then being about 200 feet from the crossing, but he did not pay any attention to its speed and he did not witness the occurrence of the accident. Mrs. Wilson corroborated the statements of her husband concerning the fact that the flashing-light signals on the north side of the tracks were operating.

Signal Maintainer Redding said he lives at Augusta, starting his day's work at this point, and that he tests the operation of the flashing lights at 71st Street each morning; such a test had been made about 7 a.m. on the day of the

accident and at that time the signals were operating properly. About 30 minutes after the occurrence of the accident he returned to the scene and at that time the signals were not operating, the relay case having been torn down. The statements of the signal maintainer, coupled with those of General Signal Inspector McGill, indicated that both of the flashing-light signals operated properly as soon as the relay case mechanism had been replaced, no changes in the lights themselves being necessary.

Master Mechanic Mitchell and Road Foreman of Engines Davis made a thorough examination of the engine and found it to be in good condition, there being nothing about it which could have contributed to the occurrence of the accident, although the pilot was partly demolished and some of the parts thereof were missing, apparently as a result of the accident.

Examination of the signal equipment by the Commission's inspectors did not reveal anything to indicate that the signals were not functioning properly at the time of the accident, nor did their examination of the track, or of engine 4913 reveal anything which could have contributed to the accident. It was apparent, however, that some part of the automobile, or of the demolished portion of the pilot, had fallen on the rail in such a manner as to cause the derailment of the engine-truck wheels.

A 24-hour check of the highway traffic over this crossing showed that it was used by 947 automobiles and 133 trucks; the peak of traffic was between 3:15 and 4:15 p.m., when 99 automobiles passed over it. During the 30-day period preceding the date of the accident there were 811 trains operated on the railway, an average of about 27 trains per day.

Discussion

The statements of the driver of the automobile involved in this accident indicate that he glanced at the flashing-light signals when a short distance from the crossing and that they showed only a red glare, and did not appear to be flashing. He did not look at them again, while the passenger riding with him would not make a positive statement as to whether the lights were flashing. Neither of these men heard the whistle of the engine of Train No. 116, the windows of the automobile being closed, nor did they see the engine until it had reached or passed the station building, at which

time the automobile was on or extremely close to the eastward track. Not only does this latter statement indicate that full advantage was not taken of the fact that when 21 feet from the nearest rail the driver could have seen the engine when more than 900 feet distant, but it also is to be noted that there is definite evidence that the flashing-light signals were in operation; in view of this fact, and of the further fact that the highway approaching the crossing was straight and the signals in plain view for several hundred feet, with a dry pavement and favorable weather conditions, no sound reason can be advanced for the failure of the driver to stop before reaching the crossing.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by an automobile being driven on a railroad crossing at grade directly in front of an approaching train, in disregard of signals indicating the approach of a train.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.