

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3389
ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD COMPANY
IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR KENTWOOD, LA., ON
FEBRUARY 2, 1951

SUMMARY

Date: February 2, 1951

Railroad: Illinois Central

Location: Kentwood, La.

Kind of accident: Collision

Equipment involved: Track motor-car : Freight train
F-6794

Train number: : Extra 2038 North

Engine number: : 2038

Consist: : Caboose

Estimated speeds: 3 m. p. h. : 30 m. p. h.
(backward
motion)

Operation: Timetable, train orders and auto-
matic block-signal system

Tracks: Double; tangent; 0.36 percent
ascending grade northward

Weather: Cloudy

Time: 3:58 p. m.

Casualties: 2 killed; 1 injured

Cause: Failure to provide adequate pro-
tection for movement of track
motor car

Recommendation: That the Illinois Central Railroad
Company provide adequate protection
for movement of track motor-cars on
its line

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3389

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD COMPANY

April 27, 1951

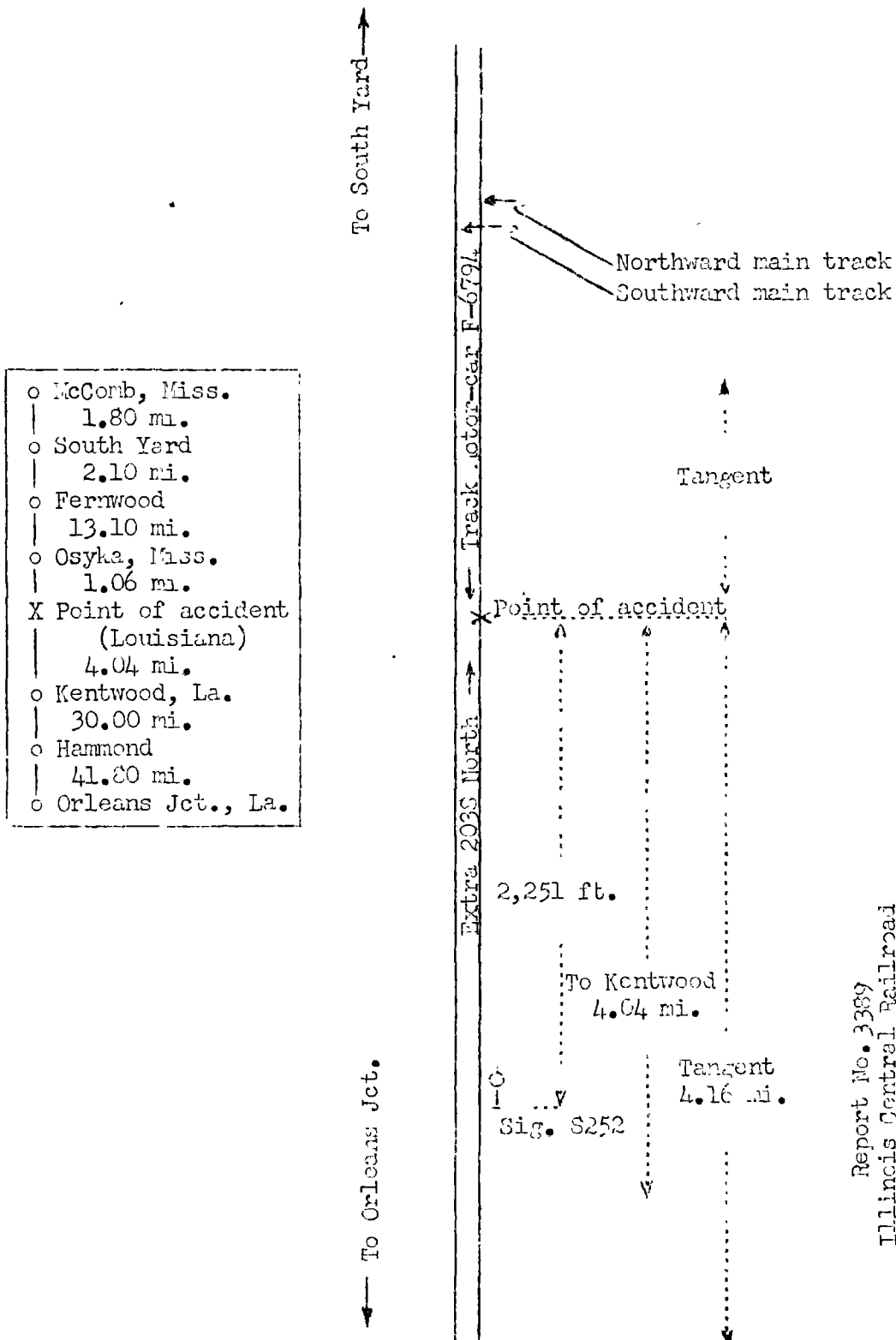
Accident near Kentwood, La., on February 2, 1951, caused
by failure to provide adequate protection for the
movement of a track motor-car.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On February 2, 1951, there was a collision between a track motor-car and a freight train on the Illinois Central Railroad near Kentwood, La., which resulted in the death of one employee and one other person, and the injury of one employee.

¹ Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Patterson for consideration and disposition.



Report No. 3389
 Illinois Central Railroad
 Kentwood, La.
 February 2, 1951

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Louisiana Division extending between Orleans Jct., La., and South Yard, near McComb, Miss., 92.1 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line, over which trains moving with the current of traffic are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred on the northward main track at a point 75.84 miles north of Orleans Jct. and 4.04 miles north of Kentwood, La. The main tracks are tangent throughout a distance of 4.16 miles immediately south of the point of accident and a considerable distance northward. The grade is 0.36 percent ascending northward at the point of accident.

Automatic signal 8252, governing north-bound movements on the northward main track, is located 2,251 feet south of the point of accident. This signal is of the color-light type and is continuously lighted. It displays three aspects.

This carrier's Rules for the Maintenance of Way and Structures read in part as follows:

96. Keep Familiar with Train Movements.--The employe in charge of the operation of a motor car must keep in touch with the movement of trains, securing, if possible, the necessary information from the dispatcher.

97. Train Information.--Before going to work, and as often as necessary thereafter, foremen and other operators of track cars, shall secure information on movement of trains. When necessary to run against traffic on any one of multiple tracks operator should get information about opposing trains.

99. Caution in Use of Track Cars.--Track cars shall move at all times with safety, expecting trains or other cars to appear at any time from either direction without notice. When necessary to operate them * * * where the view is obstructed in any way, * * * special care must be used; and if conditions require, cars must proceed only under flag protection.

102. Insulated cars.--Non-insulated cars must not be used within track circuit limits unless properly authorized.

The maximum authorized speeds were 60 miles per hour for the freight train and 20 miles per hour for the track motor-car.

Description of Accident

Track motor-car F-6794, occupied by a lineman and one section man, departed north-bound from Hammond, 41.8 miles north of Orleans Jct., about 2:05 p. m. A lineman employed by a telephone and telegraph company boarded the track motor-car at Kentwood. The track motor-car then proceeded northward and was stopped at a point about 4.2 miles north of Kentwood. It was immediately started in backward motion and had moved southward a distance of several hundred feet at a speed of about 3 miles per hour when it collided with Extra 2038 North.

Extra 2038 North, a north-bound freight train, consisted of engine 2038 and a caboose. This train departed from Hammond at 3 p. m., passed Kentwood, the last open office, at 3:52 p. m., passed signal 8252, which indicated Proceed, and while moving at a speed of about 30 miles per hour it collided with track motor-car F-6794.

Track motor-car F-6794 was moved northward approximately 1,240 feet to the point where Extra 2038 North stopped. It was not derailed but was considerably damaged. The front end of the engine of Extra 2038 North was slightly damaged.

The two linemen on the track motor-car were killed, and the section man was injured.

The weather was cloudy and the temperature was about 38 degrees above zero at the time of the accident, which occurred about 3:58 p. m.

Track motor-car F-6794 was of the 4-wheel type and weighed 520 pounds. It was powered by a 5-8 horse-power gasoline motor and was equipped with 4-wheel brakes, a windshield, and a rear-vision mirror. It was insulated to prevent it from shunting track circuits.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 21.2 trains.

Discussion

On the day of the accident a sleet storm had caused considerable damage to telegraph and telephone lines between Orleans Jct. and McComb, 1.8 miles north of South Yard. A lineman accompanied by one section man departed south-bound from McComb on track motor-car F-6794 about 7:30 a. m. and arrived at Hammond about noon. The lineman was engaged in inspecting and repairing line wires, and the section man was assisting him in handling the track motor-car and in maintaining a lookout for approaching trains. These employees departed north-bound from Hammond on the track motor-car about 2:05 p. m. A lineman employed by a telephone and telegraph company boarded the track motor-car at Kentwood. A pole line of the telephone and telegraph company parallels the pole line of the railroad company between Kentwood and Osyka, Miss., 5.1 miles north of Kentwood, and the lineman who boarded the track motor-car evidently intended to accompany the lineman of the railroad between these points. A witness to the accident said that the track motor-car was stopped at a point about 4.2 miles north of Kentwood and was then started in backward motion. As the track motor-car moved southward the three occupants were facing eastward and apparently looking for broken wires on the pole line of the telephone and telegraph company. The witness said that as Extra 2038 North approached a rail-highway grade crossing located 3,173 feet south of the point of accident the grade-crossing engine-whistle signal was sounded, and as the train closely approached the track motor-car a warning signal was sounded. He said that each of the occupants of the track motor-car had covered his ears for protection against the cold, and apparently none of them heard or observed the approach of the train until immediately before the accident occurred. The track motor-car had moved southward a distance of several hundred feet and was moving at a speed of about 3 miles per hour at the time of the collision. The surviving employee on the track motor-car was so seriously injured that he could not be questioned during this investigation.

As Extra 2038 North was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 45 miles per hour. The enginemen were on the engine, and the conductor, the front brakeman and the flagman were in the caboose.

The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. Signal 8252 indicated Proceed and the members of the crew had no knowledge that the track ahead was occupied by the track motor-car. The enginemen said that the grade-crossing engine-whistle signal was sounded for the rail-highway grade crossing south of the point of accident. After the train passed the crossing the fireman was engaged in tending the fire and the engineer was maintaining a lookout ahead. The engineer said that because of a northwest wind, smoke and steam trailing along the right side of the engine obscured his view of the track ahead at intervals. The track motor-car was less than 500 feet from the engine when he first observed it. He immediately placed the brake valve in emergency position and sounded a warning on the whistle. The speed of the train had been somewhat reduced when the collision occurred.

The office of the train dispatcher in charge of the district on which this accident occurred is located at Jackson, Miss., 79.7 miles north of South Yard. Because the communication circuits between Jackson and McComb had been disrupted by sleet on the day of the accident, a train master was stationed at McComb to act as train dispatcher on the line between McComb and Orleans Jct. He issued train orders and instructions pertaining to train movements in this district, but he said that he did not issue any line-ups for the operators of track motor-cars during the day. He said that the lineman in charge of track motor-car F-6794 communicated with him by telephone from Fernwood, 2.1 miles south of South Yard, about 8 a. m. and inquired as to the location of a south-bound passenger train. After this conversation, the lineman did not again communicate with him. The operator at Hammond said that before the lineman departed northward he inquired as to what north-bound trains were in the vicinity. At that time the operator was unable to communicate with the train master at McComb by telephone, and he did not obtain a line-up of train movements for the lineman.

The operators of track motor-cars on this line are required to keep informed at all times concerning train movements in the vicinity of their operations. The information received by track motor-car operators concerning train movements usually is contained in line-ups transmitted by the train dispatcher. These line-ups are issued as information only and confer no authority over trains or other track motor-cars. The rules of this carrier provide that track motor-cars must move at all times with safety, but trains or

other track motor-cars may be expected at any time from either direction without notice. The rules do not require operators of insulated motor-cars to obtain authority for their motor-cars to occupy the main track. Train dispatchers and the members of train crews are not informed when a track motor-car is occupying the main track, and track motor-car operators are not informed when another track motor-car is occupying the main track. Track motor-cars operating in automatic block-signal territory are insulated to prevent them from shunting track circuits, and automatic block-signal systems do not indicate that the track is occupied by a track motor-car. The investigation disclosed that the track motor-car operator did not obtain information concerning train movements from any operator between McComb and Hammond or from the train master at McComb after 8 a. m., and that no member of the crew of Extra 2038 North nor the train master at McComb had information that the track motor-car was occupying the main track.

Since January 1, 1944, the Commission has investigated 32 collisions, including the present case, which were caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars. These accidents resulted in the death of 63 persons and the injury of 106 persons.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of a track motor-car.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Illinois Central Railroad Company provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars on its line.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-seventh day of April, 1951.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.