INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3553

NORFOLK AND WESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR WHITE, W. VA., ON

JANUARY 12, 1954

SUMMARY

Date:	January 12, 1954	
Railroad:	Norfolk and Western	
Location:	White, W. Va.	
Kind of accident:	Rear-end collision	
Equipment involved:	Track motor-car	: Engine
Train number:		: Extra 116 East
Engine number:		: 116
Estimated speeds:	Undetermined	: 45 m. p. h.
Operation:	Timetable, train orders, and automatic block-signal system	
Tracks:	Double; 1°53' curve, 0.11 percent ascending grade eastward	
Weather:	Cloudy; snow flurries	
Time:	3:30 p. m.	
Casualties:	1 killed	
Cause:	Failure to provide adequate protection for movement of track motor-car	
Recommendation:	That the Norfolk and Western Railway Company provide adequate protection for movement of track motor-cars on its line	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3553

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

NORFOLK AND WESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY

March 2, 1954

Accident near White, W. Va., on January 12, 1954, caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of a track motor-car.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

JOHNSON, Chairman:

On January 12, 1954, there was a rear-end collision between a track motor-car and an engine on the Norfolk and Western Railway near White, W. Va., which resulted in the death of one signal maintainer.

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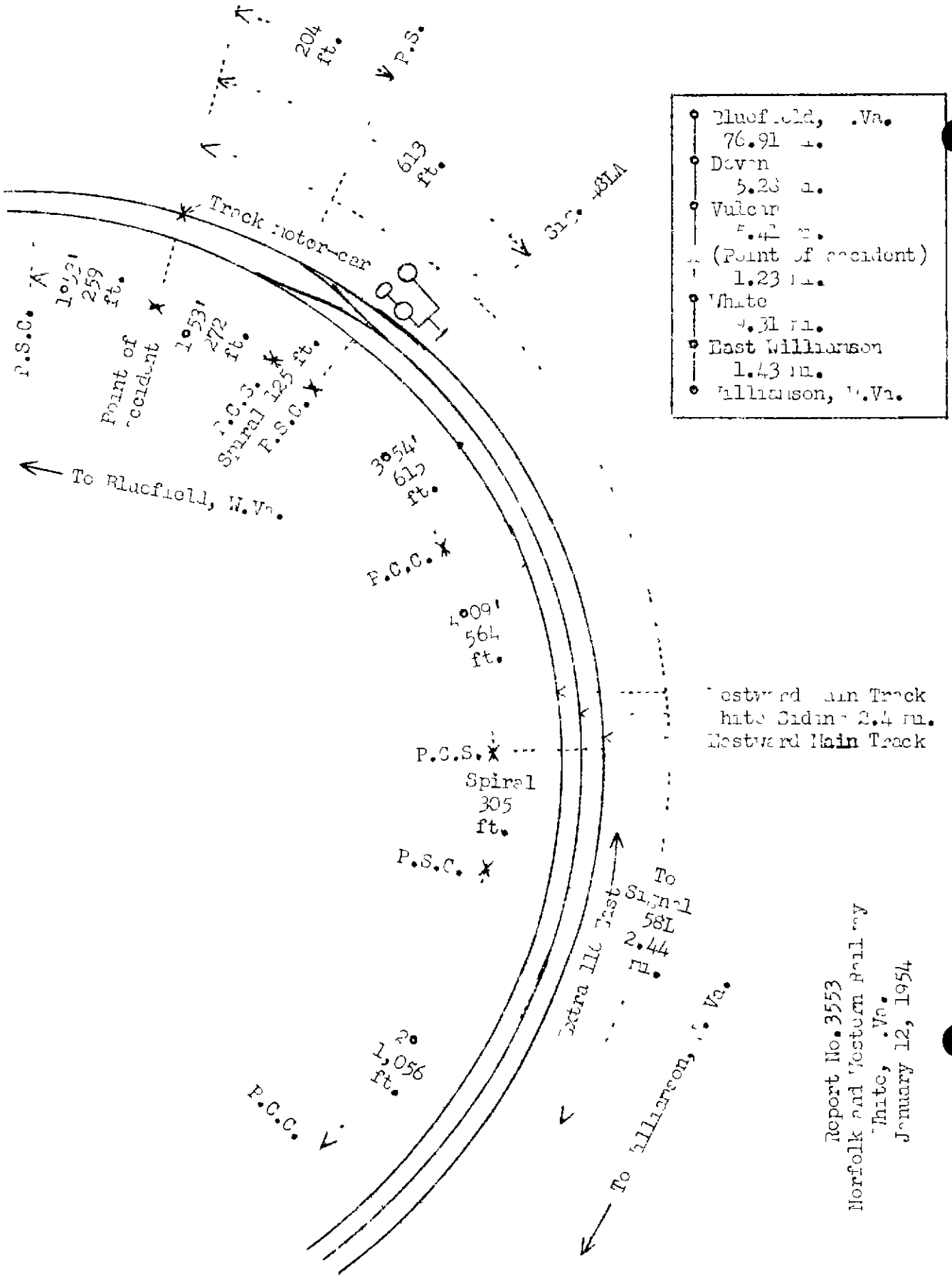
[1] Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Chairman Johnson for consideration and disposition.



Report No. 3553
Norfolk and Western Railway
White, W.Va.
January 12, 1954

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Pocahontas Division extending between Williamson and Bluefield, W. Va., 99.57 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. At White, 10.74 miles east of Williamson, a siding approximately 8.4 miles in length is located between the two main tracks. The east siding-switch in the eastward main track is 11.77 miles east of Williamson. The accident occurred on the eastward main track at a point 204 feet east of the east siding-switch at White. From the west there are, in succession, a 2° curve to the left 1,056 feet in length, a spiral 305 feet, a 4°09' curve to the left 564 feet, a 3°54' curve to the left 615 feet, a spiral 125 feet, and a 1°53' curve to the left 272 feet to the point of accident and 259 feet eastward. The grade for east-bound trains is 0.11 percent ascending at the point of accident.

Semi-automatic signals 58L and 48LA, governing east-bound movements on the eastward main track, are located, respectively, 2.44 miles and 613 feet west of the point of accident. These signals are of the position-light type and are continuously lighted. They are controlled by the operator at Devon, 10.69 miles east of the point of accident.

This carrier's rules for the operation of track motor-cars read in part as follows:

> 691. * * * All occupants of cars, as well as the motor car operator, must keep a constant and sharp lookout in both directions for trains, motor cars or obstructions. Trains or motor cars may be expected to run in any direction at any time. Motor cars must proceed under control and with caution expecting to meet a train or car.
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> 692. When practicable, before starting or a trip, motor car operator must inform himself as to location of all trains and ascertain if traffic is normal by communicating with the nearest telegraph operator or dispatcher.

Dispatchers will give line-ups to parties operating cars when requested. Where there is a telegraph operator on duty, he must obtain this information. Parties receiving these line-ups must understand they are given as a matter of information only and do not in any manner abrogate rules requiring flag protection when or wherever required. Operating conditions may require running of additional trains or light engines at any moment after line-up has been given.

* * *

Necessary precaution must be taken at curves and cuts where the view is obstructed * * *

The maximum authorized speeds were 50 miles per hour for the engine and 20 miles per hour for the track motor-car.

Description of Accident

Track motor-car P-145, occupied by a signal maintainer, departed east-bound from the west end of the siding at White between 3 p. m. and 3 20 p. m. About 3.30 p. m., while it was moving eastward on the eastward main track at an undetermined rate of speed, it was struck by Extra 116 East at a point 204 feet east of the east siding-switch at White.

Extra 116 East, an east-bound steam engine without cars, departed from East Williamson, 1.43 miles east of Williamson, about 3·10 p. m. While it was moving at an estimated speed of 45 miles per hour it struck track motor-car P-145.

The track motor-car was demolished. Extra 116 East stopped approximately 1,000 feet east of the point of accident. The locomotive was not damaged.

The signal maintainer, who was on the track motor-car, was killed.

The weather was cloudy and there were light snow flurries at the time of the accident, which occurred about 3:30 p. m.

Track motor-car P-145 was powered by a two-cylinder gasoline engine and was equipped with four-wheel brakes. It weighed 600 pounds. It was equipped with a canvas windshield and was insulated to prevent the shunting of 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 32.03 trains.

Discussion

Before the accident occurred the signal maintainer was engaged in making adjustments and repairs to signal apparatus in the vicinity of White. The first-trick operator at Devon said that between 3:05 p. m. and 3:10 p. m. the signal maintainer called from the west end of the siding at White and requested a line-up of east-bound train movements. The operator said he called the clerk in the yardmaster's office in the east yard at Williamson and was informed by the clerk that the crew for the next east-bound train was called to report for duty at 4:45 p. m. When the signal maintainer received this information, he told the operator that he would proceed to Vulcan, 6.64 miles east of White, and would call from that station. The second-trick operator at Devon relieved the first-trick operator about 3.10 p. m. About 10 or 15 minutes later an east-bound train entered the approach circuit at White. The second-trick operator called the clerk in the yardmaster's office in the east yard at Williamson and asked him if there was not an east-bound train called before 4:45 p. m. The clerk replied that there was not. A switchtender who was listening to the conversation informed the operator that an east-bound engine had departed from the yard 10 or 15 minutes previously. The operator then lined the route for the engine to proceed on the eastward track. Both operators at Devon were in the office during these conversations. They said that after discussing the advisability of holding the engine at White until the signal maintainer called from Vulcan they decided that sufficient time had elapsed to permit the maintainer to reach Vulcan and that it would not be necessary to stop the engine.

Extra 116 East arrived at the west end of the siding at White before the operator had lined the route for the train. The engine was stopped at signal 58L, which indicated Stop. The fireman alighted and started toward a telephone to call the operator. The indication of the signal changed from Stop to Proceed before he reached the telephone, and he returned to the engine without calling the operator. The engine then proceeded eastward and passed signals 58L and 48LA, each of which indicated Proceed. As this train was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 45 miles

per hour. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from their respective positions in the cab. Because of curvature of the track and a hillside north of the track, the fireman's view of the track ahead in the vicinity of the point of accident was restricted to a distance of about 1,200 feet. The fireman said that smoke and steam trailing along the side of the engine further restricted his range of vision, and he did not see the track motor-car until the engine was about 250 feet west of the point at which the accident occurred. When he saw that the track motor-car was occupying the eastward track he called a warning to the engineer. The engineer immediately made an emergency application of the brakes. The collision occurred before the speed of the engine had been materially reduced. Because of curvature of the track, the engineer did not see the track motor-car before the collision occurred.

The investigation disclosed that when the signal maintainer called for information as to east-bound train movements between Williamson and Devon it was customary for the operator at Devon to obtain this information from the yardmaster's office in the east yard at Williamson. Ordinarily when the crew dispatcher at Williamson calls a crew to report for duty and has found that an engine will be available he notifies the yardmaster's office. This information is recorded in the yardmaster's office for the use of employees there. However, on the day of the accident there was no record in the yardmaster's office of the time that the crew of engine 116 reported for duty. This engine arrived at Williamson on a west-bound passenger train at 1:50 p. m. The enginemen were instructed to return the engine to Bluefield and were told that they could report for duty as soon as the engine had been inspected and serviced. About 2.45 p. m. it was decided that the crew would report at 3 p. m. Between 2:45 p. m. and 3 p. m. the employees in the crew dispatcher's office and the yardmaster's office were being relieved by employees assigned to the second shift, and in the confusion created by the change of shifts no record was made in the yardmaster's office of the time that the engine crew was to report for duty. As a result, when the operator at Devon called the yardmaster's office, the clerk who answered the telephone had no knowledge that the engine crew had reported for duty or that the engine had departed.

The rules of this carrier provide that the operators of track motor-cars must exercise care to avoid collisions with trains or other track motor-cars. They must expect trains to run at any time without notice and are required to operate track motor-cars with the same degree of caution when they have a line-up of train movements as when they do not have one. This method of operation does not provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars. In the instant case, the operator of the track motor-car was not permitted, under the rules, to use the information which he received from the operator at Devon as protection for the movement of his track motor-car. However, the fact that he received information that the first east-bound train would not leave East Williamson before 4:45 p. m. undoubtedly contributed to the fact that his track motor-car was struck by a train which departed from East Williamson considerably earlier than that time.

Since January 1, 1944, the Commission has investigated 46 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 82 persons and the injury of 144 persons. One of these accidents occurred on the line of the Norfolk and Western at Kimball, W. Va., about 61 miles east of White, on April 24, 1950, and resulted in the death of six maintenance-of-way employees. In the reports covering the investigations of these accidents, the Commission repeatedly has recommended that the carrier take measures to provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars on its line.

Cause

This accident was caused by failure to provide adequate protection for the movement of a track motor-car.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Norfolk and Western Railway Company provide adequate protection for the movement of track motor-cars on its line.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this second day of March, 1954.

By the Commission, Chairman Johnson.

(SEAL)

GEORGE W. LAIRD,
Secretary.