

1977

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE LINE OF THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY
NEAR ROSEVILLE, CALIF , ON APRIL 8, 1935.

June 19, 1935.

To the Commission:

On April 8, 1935, there was a head-end collision between a work train and a section motor car with trailer on the line of the Southern Pacific Company near Roseville, Calif., which resulted in the death of 11 employees and the injury of 1 employee.

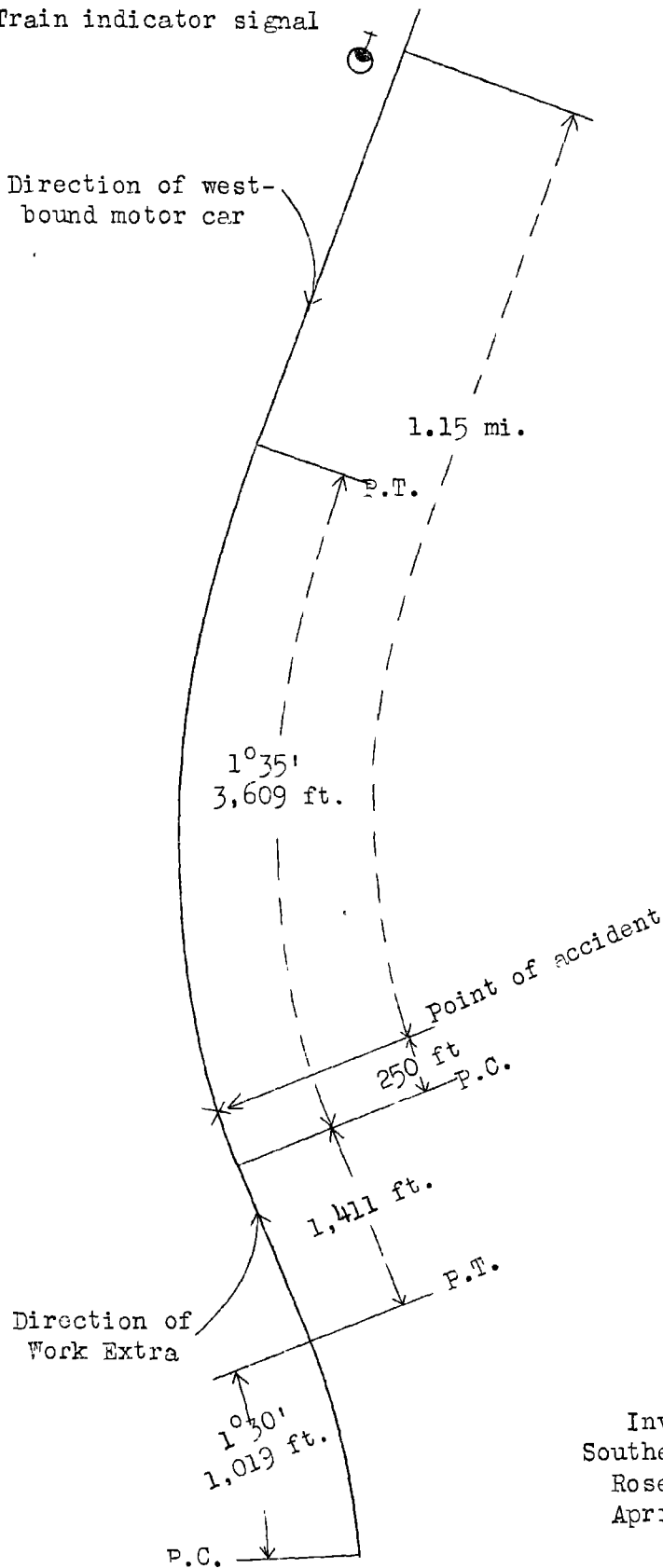
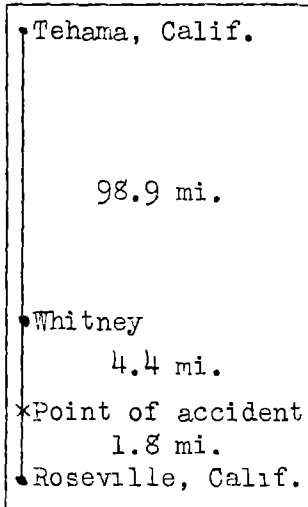
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Sacramento Division which extends between Roseville and Tehama, Calif., a distance of 105.1 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 signals being approach lighted. The accident occurred at a point approximately 1.8 miles east of the station at Roseville; approaching this point from the east, the track is tangent for a distance of approximately 2 miles, followed by a compound curve to the left 3,609 feet in length with a maximum curvature of $1^{\circ}35'$, the accident occurring on this curve at a point about 250 feet from its western end. Approaching from the west, the track is tangent for a distance of 1,411 feet, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for west-bound trains is slightly ascending for a distance of about 750 feet, while for east-bound trains it is descending for more than 1 mile, varying from 0.2 to 0.49 percent.

This line is equipped with train-indicator signals for the purpose of indicating to operators of motor cars the approach of trains where the view of the track ahead is obscured by curves. The signal involved has no light but is equipped with an 8-inch face in the lower half of which there is a hole 2 inches in diameter, and when the signal is actuated a red disc back of the face of the signal drops and gives a red indication through the opening. The signal is on a mast with the face of the signal 4 feet $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches above the top of the rail. The train-indicator signal governing the movement of west-bound motor cars on the curve on which this accident occurred, is located 1.15 miles east of the point of accident; this signal displays a red indication when an east-bound train passes the wye switch leaving Roseville yard, located 1.22 miles west of the point of accident.

Train indicator signal

Direction of west-bound motor car



Inv. No. 1977
Southern Pacific Co.,
Roseville, Calif.
April 8, 1935.

Special instructions contained in the time table restrict the speed of all trains to 35 miles per hour on the line on which the accident occurred. Motor cars are limited to 15 miles per hour, and must reduce speed to 3 miles per hour over all road crossings, frogs and switches.

There was a light rain falling at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8:25 p.m.

Description

Due to heavy rainfall for several days prior to the accident the track had been washed out at several points east of Whitney, located 6.2 miles east of Roseville, necessitating the employment of a work extra and of the entire Roseville gang in addition to other gangs with camp cars. The work train had gone to Roseville for a change of crews and for additional gravel, and at the time of the accident was returning to the point of washout, while the motor car with push car attached was bringing the Roseville section men back to Roseville.

Extra 2315, an east-bound work train, consisted of 10 dump gondolas loaded with gravel and was being pushed by engine 2315, with a caboose coupled to the rear of the engine, and was in charge of Conductor McNeil and Engineman Cirby. This train left Roseville about 8:20 p.m. and collided with the motor car while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 18 and 25 miles per hour.

West-bound motor car 1524, a standard insulated car, with push car attached as a trailer, left Whitney about 8 p.m. with Assistant Foremen Deamantopulos and Apostolos and 9 men riding on the motor car and Assistant Foreman Morales and 2 men riding on the trailer. The car was operated by Assistant Foreman Apostolos, and was traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles per hour when it collided with the first car of Extra 2315.

Extra 2315 stopped with the front end of the first car 1,342 feet east of the point of accident with the wreckage of the motor car jammed under the front end of the car; this car was not derailed. The motor-car trailer, badly damaged, was found on the embankment to the north of the track 340 feet east of the point of accident. The employees killed were the assistant foreman operating the motor car and 10 section men; the injured employee was the other assistant foreman who was riding on the motor car.

Summary of evidence

Conductor McNeil, of Extra 2315, stated that on leaving Roseville he rode on the front end of the lead car with Brakemen Plunkett and Tallon and Trainmaster Fisher. He stood on the right side of the car with his hand hanging over the side of the car holding a lantern; Trainmaster Fisher had his lantern hanging over the front end of the car, and Brakeman Plunkett also had a lantern. The train was traveling at a speed of about 20 mile per hour when he saw red and white lanterns about 200 yards ahead and at first he thought some one was walking along the track. He gave a stop signal to the engineman, who applied the air brakes immediately, and he did not realize that there was a motor car approaching until it was about 50 feet distant. Conductor McNeil stated that on passing through the yard at Roseville he observed that the headlight on his engine was burning, but paid no further attention to it; he also stated that there was no back-up hose on the lead car.

The statements of Head Brakeman Plunkett, Swing Brakeman Tallon and Trainmaster Fisher, of Extra 2315, practically corroborated those of Conductor McNeil, and all of them said they had their white lanterns where they could be seen. They heard the whistle sounded on their engine when in the vicinity of an overhead bridge which is located about 500 feet west of the point of accident and said their vision was not obscured in any way by the rain. Trainmaster Fisher, however, stated that with the wind from the west he thought it would interfere with the vision of the men on the motor car as the rain would be blowing in their faces. Trainmaster Fisher further stated that after the accident he talked with Assistant Foreman Morales, who told him that he had positive instructions from Roadmaster McCarthy to remain at Whitney until the work extra returned, but that Assistant Foreman Apostolos insisted they go to Roseville as the work train would not be out of that point for an hour or more. Assistant Foreman Morales also told him that Apostolos said to him, "I am your boss; I want you to get on the motor car."

Engineman Cirby, of Extra 2315, stated that when he received violent stop signals from the lead car he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, and he thought the train traveled a distance of from 15 to 20 car lengths before it stopped; he estimated the speed to have been between 20 and 25 miles per hour at the time he made the application. The engine bell was ringing and he had sounded the whistle just before entering the curve on which the accident occurred. It also appeared from his statements that the headlight was shining over the tops of the cars; he could not see the trainmen on the lead car but could see three lanterns, two of them being in sight all the time. The statements of Fireman Bell and Flagman Davis brought out nothing additional of importance.

Assistant Foreman Morales, of motor car 1524, stated that on the morning of the accident he operated the motor car to Whitney, Section Foreman Lenihan and five men accompanying him. At the end of the day's work, before the train had returned to Whitney, Roadmaster McCarthy told him that the work extra would go to Roseville to get gravel and that he and his men should not go to Roseville on the motor car until the work extra returned, which would be about 8:30 p.m.; the roadmaster also told him that the other assistant foreman would ride back on the train. They all rode on the train toward Whitney, but Assistant Foreman Morales stated that as the train was passing the washout just east of Whitney the train was going slowly and he got off in order to get their raincoats; he then walked to Whitney, where he found all of the section men. Both Apostolos and Deamantopulos asked him what instructions the roadmaster gave him and he told them that they were to wait for the return of the work train. Some of the men in the gang of Assistant Foreman Apostolos then went back to the washout to get their coats and after they returned and made an unsuccessful effort to obtain supper in the camp car outfit, a push car was obtained and Apostolos gave the order to place the motor car on the track. Assistant Foreman Morales protested, but the car was put on the track and they started out. He heard Deamantopulos say that when they reached the west switch of the passing track they could pull in on that track and on passing the west switch the speed was reduced and Morales heard the other assistant foremen talking in Greek, but he could not understand them. The speed was then increased, without stopping, and on approaching the train-indicator signal, Morales told Apostolos to stop to ascertain its indication, and had a fusee ready to light, but the motor car continued without stopping. Assistant Foreman Morales then saw lights swinging ahead, heard someone say a train was coming, and jumped off; the motor car was equipped with one red and one white lantern, and at the time of the accident was traveling from 15 to 20 miles per hour. Assistant Foreman Morales further stated that there was no need to get a line-up as he knew the train would be returning, and when asked why he let the other assistant foremen take charge, he replied that he did not want to fight with the men.

Assistant Foreman Deamantopulos stated that Roadmaster McCarthy instructed him to return to Roseville on the motor car, and to obtain a push car, as the motor car could not carry all the men. The roadmaster also told him that the work train would return to Whitney but if there was time they were to follow the work train to Roseville. After obtaining a push car, about 1/4 mile east of Whitney, they placed the motor car on the track, coupled the push car, and started toward Roseville, Deamantopulos sitting on the front left side of the motor car and Apostolos operating the car. On reaching the west passing-track

switch, about 2,000 feet beyond, Deamantopulos told Apostolos to stop at the switch, as he did not think they would have time to reach Roseville before the work train started back, but Apostolos said that someone told him the work train would not come out until 9 p.m. and he continued without stopping. Assistant Foreman Deamantopulos said he knew the location of the train-indicator signal, but did not mention it nor did he hear anyone else mention it. He could not see for more than 100 feet ahead as they approached the point of accident, and when he first saw the train it was practically on top of them and he jumped off immediately; the motor car was traveling about 8 or 10 miles per hour at the time of the accident, and he said that he did not see any light on the train. On being questioned several times as to whether or not Morales said anything about waiting for the work train to come back, he finally admitted that Morales told him before the motor car was placed on the track that Roadmaster McCarthy had instructed them to wait until the work train returned to Whitney.

Section Laborer Havermann, a member of Assistant Foreman Apostolos' gang, stated that when they returned to Whitney between 7:30 and 8 p.m., he heard Roadmaster McCarthy give instructions that all those who rode out on the train were to go back to Roseville on the train, but he and a few of the others told the roadmaster that they were going back to where they had been working in order to get their lunch buckets and coats, and when he returned, about 15 minutes later, he went to the motor car, as the train had gone. His further statements corroborated those of Assistant Foreman Morales as to what took place; he heard Morales say that they were to wait for the work train to return and said every one understood that these were the instructions, but that Apostolos ordered the car to be placed on the track, and on passing the west switch he heard Deamantopulos use the word "stop" when he was talking in Greek to Apostolos. Section Laborer Havermann further stated that he was sitting next to Apostolos on the motor car and heard plainly when Morales said to stop at the train-indicator signal, but he did not know whether Apostolos heard him.

Section Foreman Lenihan stated that when Roadmaster McCarthy instructed the Roseville gang to ride back on the train to Roseville, Apostolos, who was on the same car in the train with Lenihan, got off and called to Deamantopulos and asked him if he was going, and when Deamantopulos said that he was not, Apostolos did not get back on the train, in spite of Lenihan telling him to do so. Foreman Lenihan stated that it is the practice when one assistant foreman is handling a motor car to leave him in charge, and on being questioned as to how he accounted for Morales' action in allowing Apostolos to take charge of the motor car, he answered that he did not know, but that Apostolos did

not like Morales. Foreman Lenihan stated that he had instructed the assistant foremen on motor car operation and he had confidence in allowing them to go out on jobs alone, although he had cautioned Apostolos about running too fast. He further stated that while the rules require a foreman to stay with his men, the roadmaster gave him permission to go back on the train; this permission, however, was given before they knew that the men were getting off the train.

Roadmaster McCarthy stated that on arriving at Whitney at the end of the day's work he at first instructed the men that had ridden out on the train to return on the train and told Morales that if he could leave immediately he was to follow the train on the motor car with the men he had brought out. When he saw that all the men had gotten off he inquired why his instructions were not being followed and was told they had to go back for their coats and lunch buckets, he then told them they could get a push car and ride back on the push car and motor car, but that they would have to wait until the train had returned to Whitney from Roseville; he explained the exact movement to be made by the train, that it would pick up cars at the west end of the siding at Whitney, proceed to Roseville, take water and change crews, and then would return, and that the section men were to stay there and not to take any chances. He stated that he gave these instructions to the three assistant foremen, and that while these three men are of equal rank, it is the practice that when a man operates a motor car, as Morales did when he operated it to Whitney, he is charged with the responsibility for the return trip, and that it was Morales' duty to operate the car on the trip on which the accident occurred. The instructions governing the operation of motor cars are in the main verbal instructions and the foremen and assistants are given written examinations at intervals. He also stated that there were no written instructions relative to train-indicator signals. On being questioned as to instructions relative to carrying lights on motor cars at night, Roadmaster McCarthy stated that a red and a white lantern must be displayed where they can be seen from the front; the rules, however, state that they must be placed where they can be seen in both directions.

Superintendent Hack said there was no rule or instruction, other than verbal, which required operators of motor cars to call the dispatcher and obtain a line-up of trains before operating a motor car on the main track outside of yard limits; however, paragraph 1 of a bulletin issued in 1927, covering instructions to users of motor cars, provided as follows:

Users of motor cars must keep in touch with the movement of all trains on their district, bearing in mind at all times that trains and light engines may be expected to pass over the road at any time.

In regard to the meaning of this paragraph, Superintendent Hack stated that it is the intention that users of motor cars must keep in touch with all trains on their districts by communication with the dispatcher.

Discussion

Although some of the details were conflicting, the investigation developed that Assistant Foreman Morales informed the other assistant foremen of the instructions given by Roadmaster McCarthy that they were to wait until the work train returned from Roseville. Assistant Foreman Apostolos took charge, however, and ordered the motor car to be placed on the track. The three assistant foremen were of equal rank, but Assistant Foreman Morales was in charge of the motor car, having operated it to Whitney earlier in the day, and he stated that the reason he allowed Apostolos to take charge for the return trip was because he did not want to fight. It appeared that Deamantopulos, who finally admitted that Morales gave them the roadmaster's instructions, used the word "stop" when talking with Apostolos as they reached the west end of the passing track and apparently wanted to stop at that point but that Apostolos continued on by the switch without stopping; it also appeared that on approaching the train-indicator signal, Morales asked Apostolos to stop in order to see its indication, but that Apostolos disregarded his request..

An important factor in this accident was the failure of Foreman Lenihan to remain with his men, for had he done so, there would have been no such dissension as occurred. Rule 1084, of the rules and regulations for the maintenance of way and structures, provides that foremen must remain with their men and personally superintend and engage in all work of the gang and must never absent themselves from duty without consent from their superior officers. While Foreman Lenihan had received permission to ride on the train to Roseville, this permission was given by Roadmaster McCarthy when he also instructed Assistant Foremen Apostolos and Deamantopulos and their gangs to return on the train. Before the work train left Whitney, however, Foreman Lenihan learned that his men were not going to Roseville on the train, but without further instructions he remained on the train.

It appeared that the lunch buckets and raincoats of some of the men had been left a short distance east of Whitney where they had been working earlier in the day, and the failure to make some provision for them to obtain their possessions was the reason they did not ride on the train. Had a proper understanding been had between these men and their superior officers, it would not have been necessary for them to remain behind.

Attention is called to the fact that while train-indicator signals had been installed to safeguard the movement of motor cars on curves, nothing but verbal instructions had been issued relative to their use, location and purpose, and apparently the employees were not particularly impressed with their importance. The attitude of two of the assistant foremen toward the road-master's instructions, the dissension among them, the failure to make provision for the men to obtain their belongings, the failure of the section foreman to remain with his men, and the ignoring of the train-indicator signal, indicate the existence of confusion and a lack of discipline which does not do credit to responsible supervising officials. Such a condition might reasonably be expected to result eventually in an accident of this character and points to the necessity of adopting more adequate protective measures to safeguard the movement of employees on motor cars.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by improper supervision and a lack of discipline which resulted in the movement of a motor car and trailer in direct violation of verbal instructions to wait for the return of a work train.

Recommendations

It is recommended that when employees are to be transported on motor cars, under circumstances such as obtained in this case, consideration be given to the desirability of making such movements upon train order authority so that they may be properly and adequately safeguarded.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.