

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE

ST. LOUIS SOUTHWESTERN RAILWAY OF TEXAS

GRANBY, TEX.

NOVEMBER 18, 1936

INVESTIGATION NO. 2116

SUMMARY

Railroad: St. Louis Southwestern Railway of Texas

Date: November 18, 1936

Location: Granby, Tex.

Kind of accident: Rear-end collision

Trains involved: Freight : Freight

Train numbers: 343 : 19

Engine numbers: 567 St.L.S.W. : 896 T.& N.O.

Consist: 24 freight cars, 1 : 17 cars and
deadhead coach, caboose
and caboose

Speed: 3-5 m.p.h. : 10-15 m.p.h.

Track: Tangent; 0.94 percent ascending grade

Weather: Foggy

Time: 11:33 p.m.

Casualties: 1 killed and 3 injured

Cause: Failure of T&NO crew to wait 10 minutes as required by rule after departure of preceding train; failure of StLSW conductor to afford proper flag protection

2116

December 31, 1936

To the Commission:

On November 18, 1936, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the St. Louis Southwestern Railway of Texas at Granby, Tex., which resulted in the death of 1 person carried under contract, and the injury of 3 employees.

Location and method of operation

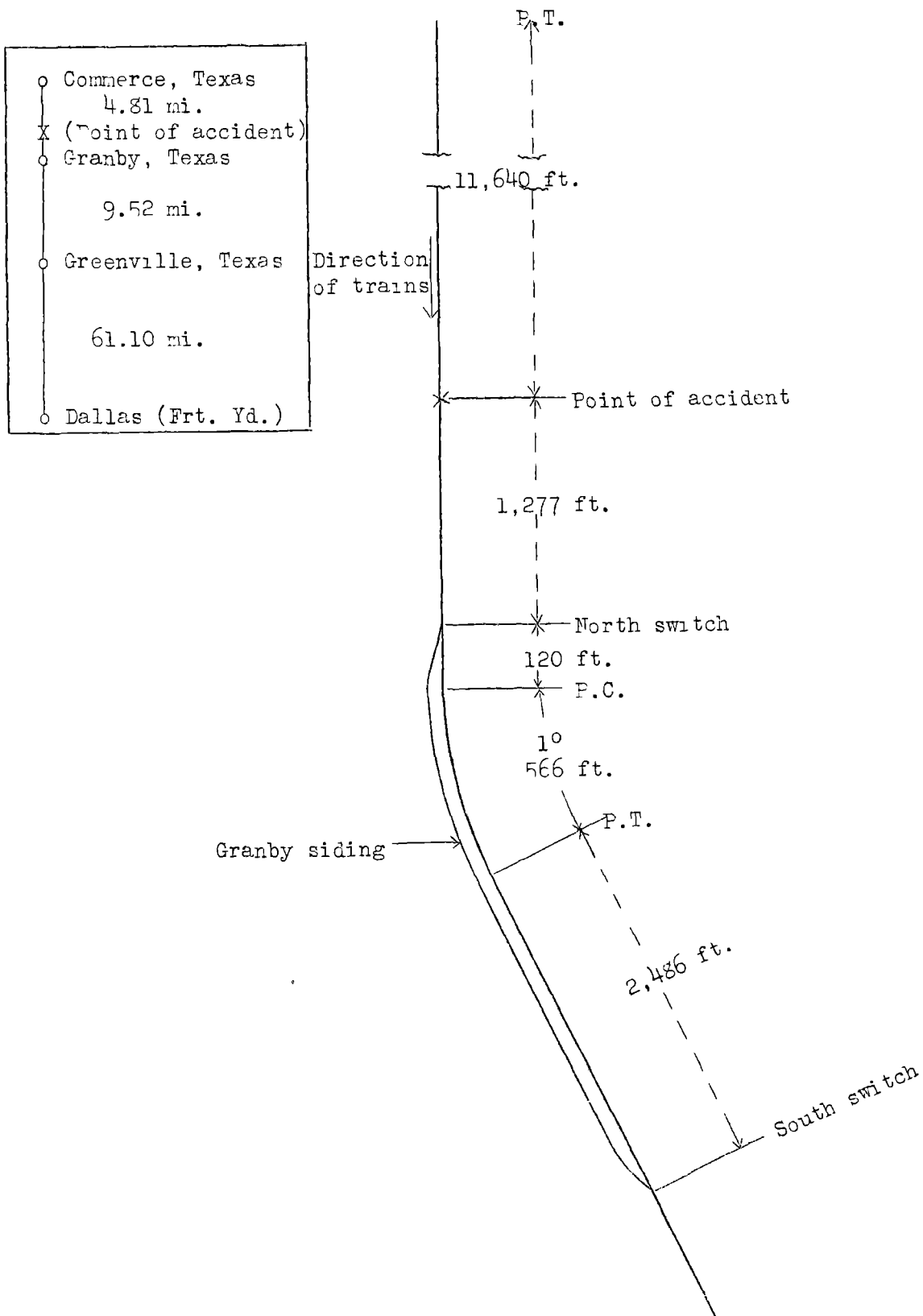
This accident occurred on that part of the Dallas Subdivision of the Texas Division which extends from Commerce to Dallas, Tex., a distance of 75.43 miles, the track from Commerce to Greenville, Tex., a distance of 14.33 miles is operated jointly by the St. Louis Southwestern Railway of Texas, hereinafter referred to as the St. L. S. W. Ry. of Tex., and the Texas and New Orleans Railroad, hereinafter referred to as the T. & N. O. R.R., the operation of trains being handled by the former company.

The junction switch at Commerce, where T. & N. O. R.R. trains enter the joint track, is located 114 feet south of the south switch of the St. L. S. W. of Tex. Railway's passing track at the south end of the yard. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The passing track at Granby is 3,172 feet in length and parallels the main track on the west, the accident occurring at a point 1,277 feet north of the north switch of this passing track. Approaching the point of accident from the north, the track is tangent for a distance of 13,037 feet, followed by a 1° curve to the left 566 feet in length, the accident occurring on the tangent track 1,397 feet from its southern end. The grade between Commerce and the point of accident is undulating; immediately preceding the point of accident the grade southward merges from a vertical curve to a maximum of 1.10 percent descending for a distance of 2,500 feet followed by a vertical curve merging into a maximum of 0.941 ascending for a distance of 3,000 feet, the accident occurring near the center of this ascending grade.

The weather was foggy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:33 p.m.

Description

Train No. 343, a south-bound St. L. S. W. Ry. of Tex. freight train, originating at Commerce, consisted of 24 freight cars, 1 deadhead coach and a caboose, hauled by engine 567,



Inv. No. 2116
St. L. & N. O. R.R.
and T. & N. O. R.R.
Granby, Texas
Nov. 18, 1936

and was in charge of Conductor Farrow and Engineman Draper. This train departed from Commerce, 4.81 miles north of Granby, at 11:22 p.m., according to the statement of the crew, 3 hours 26 minutes late, after having received a copy of train order 298, form 19, reading "Extra 566 north wait at Granby, until 11:40 p.m. for No. 343 engine 567"; the train proceeded southward and was running at an estimated speed of between 3 and 4 miles per hour preparatory to heading in on the passing track at Granby, when it was struck from the rear by T. & N. O. R. R. freight train No. 19.

Train No. 19, a south-bound T. & N. O. R. R. freight train, consisted of 17 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 896, and was in charge of Conductor Moore and Engineman Williams. This train departed from Commerce, Tex., at about 11:28 p.m. according to the statement of the crew, 18 minutes late, after having received a copy of train order 300, form 19, reading "Extra 566 north wait at Granby until 11:40 p.m. for No. 19, engine 896." Train No. 19 proceeded southward and collided with the rear end of train No. 343 at a point 1,277 feet north of the north switch while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 10 and 15 miles per hour.

The superstructure of the caboose of train 343 was demolished and the coach was turned over on the west side of the track, badly damaged. The front end of engine 896 of train 19 was slightly damaged. A stockman riding in the caboose of train 343 was killed and the employees injured were the fireman, head brakeman and a student brakeman of train 19.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Farrow, of Train No. 343, stated that his train started to pull out of the yard at Commerce at 11:22 p.m. and he thought that it was about 11:23 p.m. when the rear end passed the south switch of the passing track, after which he entered the caboose and began working at his desk; the weather was slightly foggy but the fog was not dense enough to cause him any uneasiness. His flagman was on the engine and except for a stock attendant Conductor Farrow was alone in the caboose. His train maintained an average speed of about 40 miles per hour between Commerce and a point about one-half mile north of Granby, where it began to reduce speed and he did not look out of the caboose until that time. He did not consider that his train was running under circumstances in which it might be overtaken by another train and knew that under the rules a following train should not leave Commerce until 10 minutes after his departure and he said that by the time any such following train could reach Granby, his own train would have been into clear at least 5 minutes. As his train began to reduce speed

approaching Granby siding, he went to the rear platform of the caboose and saw a headlight, which appeared to be about one-half mile away, approaching from the north. He lit a fusee and gave stop signals from the caboose platform and upon realizing that the headlight was getting close, he called a warning to the stockman and jumped off, still holding the burning fusee, the accident occurring immediately afterward. He estimated the speed of his train to have been about 5 miles per hour and the speed of the following train to have been between 25 and 30 miles per hour at the time of the collision which occurred at 11:33 p.m. He had not heard any whistle signals of any kind prior to seeing the approaching headlight and he stated that the marker and cupola lights on his caboose were burning and were properly focused and displayed. He thought that his train was fully protected by the 10 minute spacing rule but added that this rule did not relieve him from properly protecting his train when protection was required.

Engineman Draper, of Train No. 343, stated that his train departed from Commerce at 11:22 or 11:23 p.m., after the arrival of Extra 782 north. The rear brakeman had lined the switch for Extra 782 to enter the south end of the yard and in order to avoid moving slowly to permit him to board the caboose, the rear brakeman was told to ride the engine to Granby where they were going for an opposing freight train. The weather was somewhat cloudy at Commerce and heavier fog was encountered in the dips and sags after leaving that point; he was able to see a distance of but two or three pole lengths in the sags but could see the passing-track switch at Granby for a distance of three or four pole lengths. His train maintained a speed of about 40 miles per hour until he applied the brakes when about ten or twelve pole lengths from Granby siding for the purpose of heading in and his train was moving at a speed of about 3 or 4 miles per hour when he felt a jar and the brakes were applied in emergency from the rear.

Statements of Fireman Hathaway and Head Brakeman Chapman brought out no additional information of importance.

Rear Brakeman Long, of Train No. 343, stated that before leaving Commerce at 11:22 p.m., someone called to him to get on the engine and the engineman told him that they were going to Granby for Extra 566 north and that the conductor knew he was on the engine, although the brakeman had had no understanding with the conductor to that effect. He said that it was not unusual for the rear brakeman to ride the engine leaving Commerce, upon instructions from the conductor, when there was work to be done at Greenville. The train ran at a speed of about 30 miles per hour between Commerce and Granby and Brakeman Long could see the switch light at the north end of

Granby siding when twenty car lengths away. The first he knew of anything wrong was when the head brakeman said the T. & N. O. train was right after them and that he believed they were going to hit. Upon looking back Brakeman Long saw the marker lights of his own train and the headlight of the following train. His train had not come to a complete stop when it was struck, at 11:33 p.m.

Engineman Williams of Train No. 19 stated that an air brake test was made before his train left Paris and another test was made after cars were picked up at Commerce; the brakes worked satisfactorily during these tests and also while en route. Train No. 343 cleared the T. & N. O. junction at 11:23 or 11:24 p.m. and his own train started southward on the joint track at 11:28 p.m.

The weather was foggy between Commerce and Granby and the visibility was from 10 to 15 car lengths on the hills and not over 10 car lengths in the dips or sags. The headlight of his engine was burning and the speed of the train did not exceed 36 miles per hour at the top of the hill north of Granby where he closed the throttle and permitted the engine to drift, when suddenly a red light, which he took to be a fuse, flared up about 12 or 14 car lengths ahead of his train and the fireman called a warning at about the same time. Engineman Williams did not see the marker lights on the caboose ahead; he immediately placed the brake valve in emergency position and opened the sanders at which time the speed of his train was between 20 and 25 miles per hour, and he remained on the engine until the accident occurred, at which time the speed had been reduced to about 10 or 12 miles per hour. He said the accident occurred at about 11:35 p.m. The normal running time between Commerce and Granby is 7 or 8 minutes. According to train order 300 he believed he had until 11:40 p.m. to clear at Granby for extra 566 as it was his understanding that under the order it was not necessary to clear the time of this train 5 minutes; if he had spaced his train the full 10 minutes at Commerce, he said he still would have gone to Granby on the order.

Fireman Dobbs, of Train No. 19, stated that as train 343 was leaving Commerce, his own engine was standing on the T. & N. O. track, just south of the passenger station; when about half of train 343 had passed his engine, he looked at his watch and it was 11:18 p.m. and immediately after that train cleared the junction switch, his own train started to pull out upon the joint track. After entering the joint track, a stop was made to line up switches and to receive a proceed signal from the rear and he distinctly saw the markers of the preceding train disappearing around the curve about one-half mile ahead. The

first indication he had of anything unusual was when he saw a dim marker light about 500 feet ahead, and then a lighted fusee on the rear platform of a caboose at which time his train was running at a speed of about 30 miles per hour. He called these signals to the engineman who immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position and the speed was reduced to about 15 miles per hour when he jumped off, the accident occurring immediately afterward. Fireman Dobbs stated that the spacing of trains leaving Commerce is done mostly by guess rather than by actual check and that but little attention is given by following crews, between Commerce and Greenville, to the rule which requires trains to be spaced 10 minutes apart.

Head Brakeman Williams of Train No. 19 stated that he was at the junction switch when the caboose of train 343 passed that point and as soon as the caboose had gotten about two car lengths beyond he threw the switch for his train to enter the joint track. He boarded his engine when it passed him and when it was about ten or twelve car lengths over the switch he looked at his watch and it was 11:27 p.m. The weather was somewhat foggy; the headlight on his engine was burning and he could see about 20 car lengths. His train was running at a speed of about 25 or 30 miles per hour when he first saw the markers of the caboose ahead and the speed had been reduced to about 10 or 12 miles per hour when he got off the engine just before the collision.

Conductor Moore of Train No. 19 stated that his train arrived at Commerce on the T. & N. O. tracks at 10:55 p.m. and was cleared by the operator at the yard office at 11:13 p.m. Among others, he received a copy of train order No. 300 which required a superior north-bound extra train, engine 566, to wait at Granby until 11:40 p.m. for his own train. After a north-bound freight had cleared the switch at the south entrance to the yard at 11:20 p.m., Train No. 343 left immediately, at which time his own engine was standing on the T. & N. O. tracks close to the junction switch. He delivered a copy of his orders and clearance card to the engineman of his train at 11:25 p.m. and the train entered on the joint track and stopped while the switch was being closed. He looked at his watch while the switch was being closed and it was 11:27 p.m. and his train left immediately. He stated that it was his understanding that he had until 11:40 p.m. to clear at Granby on train order No. 300 and that it was not necessary to clear the train 5 minutes ahead of the time stated in the order, and that as the usual running time between Commerce and Granby was about 7 or 8 minutes, he had plenty of time in which to reach Granby and clear for Extra 566. His train maintained a speed of between 35 and 40 miles per hour between Commerce and Granby and the first intimation he had of anything wrong was when the

brakes were applied in emergency while his train was moving about 40 miles per hour; the collision immediately followed. He said the accident occurred at 11:33 p.m.

Statements of Swing Brakeman Dale and Flagman Lowey who were on the caboose of Train No. 19, gave no additional information.

Operator Sparkman stated that due to the location of the office at Commerce he cannot always get the exact time of departure of south-bound trains but gets such information from the yardmaster or from figures given him by conductors regarding the probable departing time of their trains. There is no train order signal at his station and for this reason he cannot space trains as required by Rule 221-f; it has not been the practice to fill in the space provided on clearance cards showing at what time trains may depart and he does not show this information unless he knows the actual departing time of the train ahead or knows that it has departed.

Rules Examiner Hoffman, of the St. L. S. W. Ry., stated that during the past 9 years, he has instructed employees of both railroads operating over the joint track, that the time of opposing superior trains must be cleared 5 minutes and that trains in the same direction must be spaced 10 minutes apart except in closing up at stations.

Discussion

While there is some uncertainty regarding the exact time the trains involved left Commerce, it is evident that Train No. 19 followed Train No. 343 immediately after the departure of the latter train and the weight of evidence indicates that this was about 5 minutes later. The weather was somewhat foggy, especially so in the low spots or dips between Commerce and Granby.

Rule 91 reads:

Unless some form of block signal is used, trains in the same direction must keep at least ten minutes apart, except in closing up at stations.

The engineman of Train No. 19 was aware of the time that Train No. 343 left Commerce and also of the prevailing weather conditions, yet he followed that train immediately after its departure and in violation of the requirements of Rule 91, and maintained the usual rate of speed for freight trains between Commerce and the point of accident; it further appears from the

investigation that but little attention is given to the requirement of rule 91 by crews operating over the joint track between Commerce and Greenville.

Rule S-89 reads in part as follows:

At meeting points between trains of different classes the inferior train must take the siding and clear the superior train at least five minutes.

Extra 566 north, a superior train by right, was required to wait at Granby until 11:40 p.m. for Train No. 19, and under this rule if Train No. 19 cleared at Granby, it was required to do so not later than 11:35 p.m., yet both the conductor and the engineman of Train No. 19 understood that they had until 11:40 p.m. to reach Granby and clear; in view of this requirement Train No. 19 left Commerce with insufficient time to reach Granby and clear for the opposing train, but notwithstanding this fact Engineman Williams stated that he would have proceeded to Granby for Extra 566 north even if he had waited at Commerce until 10 minutes after the departure of Train No. 343.

In order to avoid delay, the flagman of Train No. 343 rode the engine leaving Commerce and there was no member of the crew on the rear end except the conductor, who became engaged at his desk and gave the operation of his train no attention until speed was being reduced preparatory to entering the siding at Granby. Upon going to the rear platform of his caboose he then saw the headlight of the following train and immediately lit a fusee and gave stop signals but this was done too late to avert the accident. In explanation of his failure to provide rear-end protection sooner, Conductor Farrow of Train No. 343 stated that prior to the reduction in speed approaching the siding at Granby his train was not moving under circumstances in which it might be overtaken by a following train; also, according to the rules no following train should leave Commerce until 10 minutes after his departure, which would afford his train time to clear at least 5 minutes before a following train could overtake his train. This explanation is not a substantial one; he saw the T. & N. O. train standing at the junction switch when he passed and he was fully aware of the weather conditions; in view of these facts he should have afforded the protection required by Rule 99.

The investigation of this accident has disclosed a lack of proper understanding, as well as lack of proper compliance with rules by employees, for which the operating officers of the St Louis Southwestern Railway Company of Texas are responsible.

This accident once more illustrates the weakness of the time interval system of spacing trains which has been discussed in a number of previous reports issued by this Bureau. During the 30-day period immediately preceding the date of this accident an average of 14.4 trains were operated daily over the territory involved; traffic of such density warrants serious consideration by operating officials of the necessity for installing some form of block system on this line.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure of the crew of Train No. 19 to comply with the rule which requires trains in the same direction to keep at least 10 minutes apart, where no form of block system is in use; a contributing cause was failure of the conductor of Train No. 343 to provide adequate protection for the rear of his train.

Recommendations

It is recommended that operating officials of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway of Texas take necessary steps to see that operating rules are properly understood and obeyed.

It is further recommended that serious consideration be given to the need for an adequate block-signal system on this portion of the railway.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.