

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR ~~OF THE~~ BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE FORT WORTH & DENVER CITY RAILWAY NEAR TWIST,
TEXAS, ON DECEMBER 9, 1928.

February 20, 1929.

To the Commission:

On December 9, 1928, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Fort Worth & Denver City Railway near Twist, Texas, which resulted in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 38 passengers, 2 Pullman porters, 4 employees on duty and 1 employee off duty.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Texline and Amarillo Sub-division extending between Texline and Amarillo, Texas, a distance of 117.2 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point about 6,500 feet north of the north passing-track switch at Twist, approaching this point from the north the track is tangent for a distance of 2.2 miles followed by a 1° curve to the right 2,500 feet in length and then tangent track for a distance of 22 miles, the accident occurring on this latter tangent at a point about 1,900 feet from its northern end. The grade is 0.58 per cent ascending for northbound trains.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 2.15 a. m.

Description

Southbound passenger train first No. 2 consisted of one baggage car, one business car, two coaches and three Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 505, and was in charge of Conductor Gowdy and Engineman Robinson. The first and last four cars were of all-steel construction, while the second car had a steel-underframe and steel sidings and the third car had a steel-underframe, with steel ends and steel sidings. This train left Dalhart, the last open office, 4.5 miles from Twist, at 2.10 a. m., six minutes late, and collided with extra 5288 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 30 and 40 miles per hour.

Northbound freight train extra 5288 consisted of 19 loaded cars, 40 empty cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 5288, and was in charge of Conductor Carlyle and Enginemen Vollesworth. At Channing, the last open office, about 26 miles south of the point of accident, the crew received a copy of train order No. 25, form 19, reading as follows:

"Second No. 2 eng. 353 wait at Matlock until 2 45 a. m. Dalhart until 2.57 a.m. for extra 5288 north."

Extra 5288 left Channing, according to the train sheet at 1.10 a.m., and collided with train first No. 2 north of Twist while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 30 miles per hour.

Engine 505 telescoped engine 5288, both engines remaining upright, the boiler of engine 505 was stripped from its frame and came to rest with the tender underneath it, the cab and firebox resting on the roof of the first car, which was considerably crushed and later caught fire due to fire dropping down from the firebox, practically destroying this car and also the second car. The second car telescoped the third car a distance of 9 feet, the other four cars sustained no damage. The tender of engine 5288 was derailed and thrown to the right of the track after telescoping and demolishing the first car in the freight train. The first 10 cars in this train, with the exception of the second car which had been thrown clear of the track, were destroyed by fire which was quickly spread by the igniting of gasoline in the fourth car, the eleventh and twelfth cars were badly burned, while six empty cars in the middle of the train buckled and were derailed. The employees killed were the engine crew of train first No. 2 and ^{the} enginemen of extra 5288.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Gowdy, of train first No. 2, stated that he was taking up tickets in the fourth car when he felt a heavy application of the air brakes, the accident occurring immediately afterwards. He estimated the speed of his train to have been between 30 and 40 miles per hour at the time of the accident, but it was not until three or four minutes after the accident that he looked at his watch and he said it was then 2.20 a.m. Conductor Gowdy also stated that at Texline he received only the running orders, an annulment of train No. 2 of December 8, and a slow order, and he did not receive any orders at Dalhart, the first station stop after leaving Texline. He

also stated that the car inspectors at Texline inspected the train and found the air brakes to be working properly. The statements of Flagman Suiter and Train Porter Holman of first No. 2 practically corroborated those of Conductor Gentry.

Head Brakeman Roberts, of extra 5288, stated that at Channing he received train order No. 25 from the operator, read it and handed it to the engineman. He understood its contents and later when he compared time with Fireman Ross at 2 02 a.m. he made the remark that they did not have time to make Dalhart for train first No. 2, to which the fireman replied "nor Metlock either for the second man"; he did not, however, know the location of his train at this time. Brakeman Roberts stated that he expected his train would wait at Twist for train first No. 2 but he did not see the switch lamps and did not know they had passed that station, his first knowledge of anything wrong being when he saw train first No. 2 as it was rounding the curve, he notified the engineman who immediately applied the air brakes in emergency. He also stated that both of the classification lights and the headlight on engine 5288 were burning, and also the headlight of train first No. 2, and that the weather conditions were such that the view was not obstructed in any way. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident to have been about 25 miles per hour. Brakeman Roberts further stated that the engineman and the fireman had a discussion over the number of the engine mentioned in the order, but that the engineman made no other comments about it, although about 15 or 20 minutes after they left Channing the engineman read the order again. Brakeman Roberts was an experienced man, but was making only his third trip in this territory.

The statements of Fireman Ross, of extra 5288, practically corroborated those of Brakeman Roberts, he added that he did not see the order but that the engineman read it to him and he understood it thoroughly. He also stated that due to the fact that the mechanical stoker was not working properly he had to devote most of his attention to firing and did not look out to ascertain the location of his train, and he admitted that he depended upon the engineman and brakeman to clear train first No. 2. It also appeared from his statements that the engineman did not sound the station whistle signal when approaching Twist.

Rear Brakeman Maneeley, of extra 5288, stated he received train order No. 25 from the operator at Channing; he read the order to Conductor Carlyle and the conductor in turn read it back to him, and it was under-

stood between them that their train could make Twist for train first No. 2. Brakeman Manceley stated they both then got up in the cupola, he was riding on the right side and remained there except at Duncan and Hartley when he went to the rear platform of the caboose to give proceed signals. At Hartley which is 9.8 miles from Twist, he looked at his watch and it was then 1.40 or 1.45 a.m. and at about that time Conductor Carlyle left his seat in the cupola, making the remark that he would fix up the bills for cars that were to be set out at Dalhart that he would go to the head end of the train at Twist and that possibly they could get out of Dalhart for train second No. 2. Brakeman Manceley had just made the remark that they ought to be getting close to Twist, and the conductor had started up into the cupola, when the accident occurred. It further appeared from Brakeman Manceley's statements that he had the cupola window open only at intervals, when he was smoking, and what observations he made from the cupola were made through the front window, although he was a promoted man on this railway, and was watching for the switch lamp at the south switch of the passing track at Twist, yet he did not see it, neither did he see the section house or tool house, located near the south switch, nor did he know the train had passed the station until the accident occurred, and he was unable to say whether the whistle was blown for Duncan, Hartley or Twist. Immediately after the accident he went back to flag and observed that the north switch lamp was burning at that time. He placed torpedoes on the rail at a point about half way between the two switches and said he could not observe the south switch from that point. Brakeman Manceley estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident to have been between 25 and 30 miles per hour.

The testimony of Conductor Carlyle substantiated that of Brakeman Manceley. Conductor Carlyle added, however, that he was depending on Brakeman Manceley to keep a lookout while he was doing his desk work north of Hartley and was unaware of their location until after the accident. He also stated that he heard the station whistle blown at Hartley and looked at his watch at that point and saw that it was 1.43 a.m., but he did not look at his watch after that time.

Superintendent McLe stated that he went to the scene of the accident on a special train from Amarillo and as his train approached Twist at about 6 a.m. he stepped out on the rear platform of the caboose and looked ahead and could see the switch lamp burning at the south pass-

ing track, and he thought when he made this observation he was about 1,000 feet south of the switch, both switch lamps were burning brightly.

A statement was obtained from the flagman of train No. 1, which passed Twist at about 12 01 a.m., to the effect that the switch lamps at the north and south ends of the passing track were burning brightly, Section Foreman McDonald also made the statement that the switch lamps were burning about 11 p.m. on the night of December 8 and also when he examined them on the afternoon of the accident.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of extra 5288 to clear the time of a first-class train, for which the entire crew is responsible

The evidence clearly indicates that all the members of the crew of extra 5288 had a clear understanding of train order No. 25, and knew that their train could not go beyond Twist for train first No. 2. The engineer was killed in the accident, but Head Brakeman Roberts and Fireman Ross had compared time at 3 02 a.m. and commented on their inability to make Delhart for train first No. 2, yet neither of them paid sufficient attention to keep informed as to their location or to warn the engineer when they passed the last point at which they could clear the opposing passenger train. Head Brakeman Maneeley was riding in the cupola where he could observe the operation of the train, yet it passed Twist without his observing the switch lamps, station board and other landmarks which would have indicated his location, while Conductor Carlyle admitted that he depended on Brakeman Maneeley to keep watch while he was doing clerical work.

The employees involved were experienced men and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director