

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED AT
THE INTERSECTION OF THE TRACKS OF THE NEW YORK
CENTRAL AND THE MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAILROADS AT
GIBSON, IND., ON OCTOBER 7, 1926

November 16, 1926.

To the Commission:

On October 7, 1926, there was a side collision between a New York Central gasoline motor car and a Michigan Central passenger train at the intersection of the tracks of these two roads at Gibson, Ind., resulting in the death of four employees and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

At the point of accident both railroads had double-track lines, movements over the crossing being protected by an interlocking plant. The tracks of the Michigan Central Railroad extend practically east and west over the crossing, and are tangent for a considerable distance approaching from the east, while the tracks of the New York Central Railroad extend from northeast to southwest over the crossing; approaching from the north on the tracks of the New York Central Railroad there is a 6° curve to the right, followed by about 550 feet of tangent extending to the crossing. The interlocking tower is located in the northeast angle of the crossing, at a point just east of the New York Central tracks and about 40 feet north of the crossing. There is a derail on the New York Central northbound track at a point about 512 feet north of the crossing. At the time of the accident there was a freight train, consisting of about 60 cars, standing on the southbound track of the New York Central Railroad, on the curve, the engine being about 500 or 600 feet north of the tower, and on this account the motor car was obscured from the view of the towerman as it rounded the curve on the northbound track against the current of traffic. The view across the northeast angle of the crossing from the New York Central Railroad is slightly broken by small buildings, a tool house and two hand car houses, but with these exceptions a clear view can be had of the Michigan Central tracks for a distance of about one-half mile east of the crossing.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 11.35 a. m.

Description

Southbound New York Central gasoline motor car 651 was being used by a carpenter force of six men, who had been laying a plank walk at Indiana Harbor, Ind., about 4 miles north of Gibson, and at 11.10 a. m. the carpenters started south to Gibson for dinner. On account of the freight train standing on the southbound track the motor car was lifted over to the northbound track and proceeded against the current of traffic. Arriving at the interlocking plant the derail was found set against the motor car, the route over the crossing being lined for Michigan Central passenger train No. 41. The motor car, however, was lifted over the derail and continued southward and just as it reached the crossing, traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 12 miles an hour, it was struck by Michigan Central passenger train No. 41.

Westbound Michigan Central passenger train No. 41 consisted of seven passenger cars, hauled by engine 8484. This train was running 13 minutes late approaching Gibson, being due at that point at 11.22 a. m. It received clear distant and home signals for the crossing and on reaching the crossing, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 40 miles an hour, struck the New York Central gasoline motor car.

The motor car was demolished, while the pilot of engine 8484 was broken and the right front cylinder cock damaged. The employees killed were carpenters who were riding on the motor car at the time of the collision.

Summary of evidence

Merrill Turner, of the New York Central carpenter force, was the only one on the motor car not killed or so seriously injured he could not be interviewed. He stated that the carpenters left Indiana Harbor at 11.10 a. m., and as there was a freight train standing on the southbound track at Gibson the motor car was lifted over to the northbound track and proceeded against the current of traffic. It was then lifted over the derail, and just after passing the tower Mr. Turner saw the Michigan Central passenger train approaching, shouted a warning of danger and jumped. He estimated the speed of the motor car to have been about 12 miles an hour at the time of the accident. He said he had been riding on the west side of the motor car and had been looking toward the west when approaching the crossing

and that he did not see the passenger train approaching from the east until the motor car had passed the tower, when he happened to turn around and look towards the east. He also said that the other carpenters on the motor car were looking ahead as the car moved against the current of traffic on the northbound track, and that the operator of the motor car, who was on the east side, was in a better position to have observed the approaching train. Mr. Turner further stated that the brakes on the motor car were in good condition.

Carpenter Foreman W. L. Turner, of the New York Central Railroad, stated that at the time of the accident he was in the dining car, located about one-quarter mile south of the crossing. Before the motor car departed from Gibson in the morning he had assigned Walter Legg, of the carpenter force, to operate the car and had cautioned him to take no chances with trains.

Engineman Allen, of Michigan Central train No. 41, stated that he was unaware of anything wrong until the motor car suddenly appeared from behind the tower, traveling at a good rate of speed, the accident occurring immediately afterwards. He was looking out of the front cab window approaching the crossing and estimated the speed of this train to have been about 40 miles an hour at the time. Fireman Lute was unaware of anything wrong prior to the accident. He said that the engine whistle was sounded for Kennedy Avenue road crossing, located about 500 feet east of the railroad crossing, and that the automatic bell ringer was in use approaching the point of accident and that the bell was still ringing after the accident occurred.

Towerman Lambert, stationed at Gibson, stated that the freight train obscured his view of the motor car as it rounded the curve on the northbound track, moving against the current of traffic. He first observed the approaching motor car when it was about 200 feet distant and knowing that the passenger train was getting close to the crossing he threw up his hands in an endeavor to warn the carpenters on the motor car of the impending danger, then jumped up and ran to the side window of the tower but the accident occurred just as he reached the window. He said that from the vicinity of the derail the carpenters could have seen the approaching train for a distance of about one-half mile. He said that it is customary for men on motor cars to ~~wave~~ ^{wave} their hands in friendly salutation as they pass the tower, such a signal as is usually given by crews of passing trains, and he was of the opinion that when he ~~waved~~ ^{waved} to the carpenters in an endeavor to warn them of danger

his signal was mistaken either for a proceed signal or for a friendly salutation, as no effort was made to stop the motor car. Towerman Lambert also said that quite a number of motor cars pass over the crossing, transporting signalmen, carpenters, water service men, telephone men, Western Union employees, etc., and that with the exception of Western Union employees the crews of such motor cars usually will wait at derails only a short time, provided the derails are set against them, and then if the derails are not lined for them they will lift the motor cars over them and proceed, when taking such action they usually proceed over the crossing without looking for a signal from the towerman, but maintain a lookout for their own safety.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by New York Central gasoline motor car 651 proceeding on a railroad crossing at grade directly in front of an approaching passenger train, Michigan Central train No. 41.

The signals and derails were set against movements on the New York Central tracks for the purpose of allowing Michigan Central train No. 41 to pass, but when the motor car reached the derail the carpenters lifted the car over it and continued toward the crossing. Towerman Lambert testified that when he first saw the approaching motor car it was about 200 feet north of the tower and knowing that the Michigan Central passenger train was getting close to the crossing he threw up his hands in an endeavor to warn the carpenters of the impending danger, but none of them seemed to realize the danger until it was too late to avert the accident. Had they been maintaining a proper lookout they could have seen the approaching train in ample time to have stopped before reaching the crossing.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.