

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2940
PACIFIC ELECTRIC RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR ATHENS, CALIF., ON
OCTOBER 19, 1945

SUMMARY

Railroad: Pacific Electric
Date: October 19, 1945
Location: Athens, Calif.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Freight : Passenger
Train numbers: Extra 1628 North : 401
Engine numbers: Electric motors : Electric motor
1628, 1618 4601
Consist: 15 cars : Motor-car, trailer
Estimated speed: Standing : 20 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; tangent; 1.419 percent
ascending grade northward
Weather: Dense fog
Time: 6:33 a. m.
Casualties: 1 killed; 99 injured
Cause: Inferior train occupying main track
on time of opposing superior train
Recommendation: That the Pacific Electric Railway
Company install an adequate block
system on the line on which this
accident occurred

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2940

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

PACIFIC ELECTRIC RAILWAY COMPANY

November 26, 1945.

Accident near Athens, Calif., on October 19, 1945, caused
by an inferior train occupying the main track on the
time of an opposing superior train.

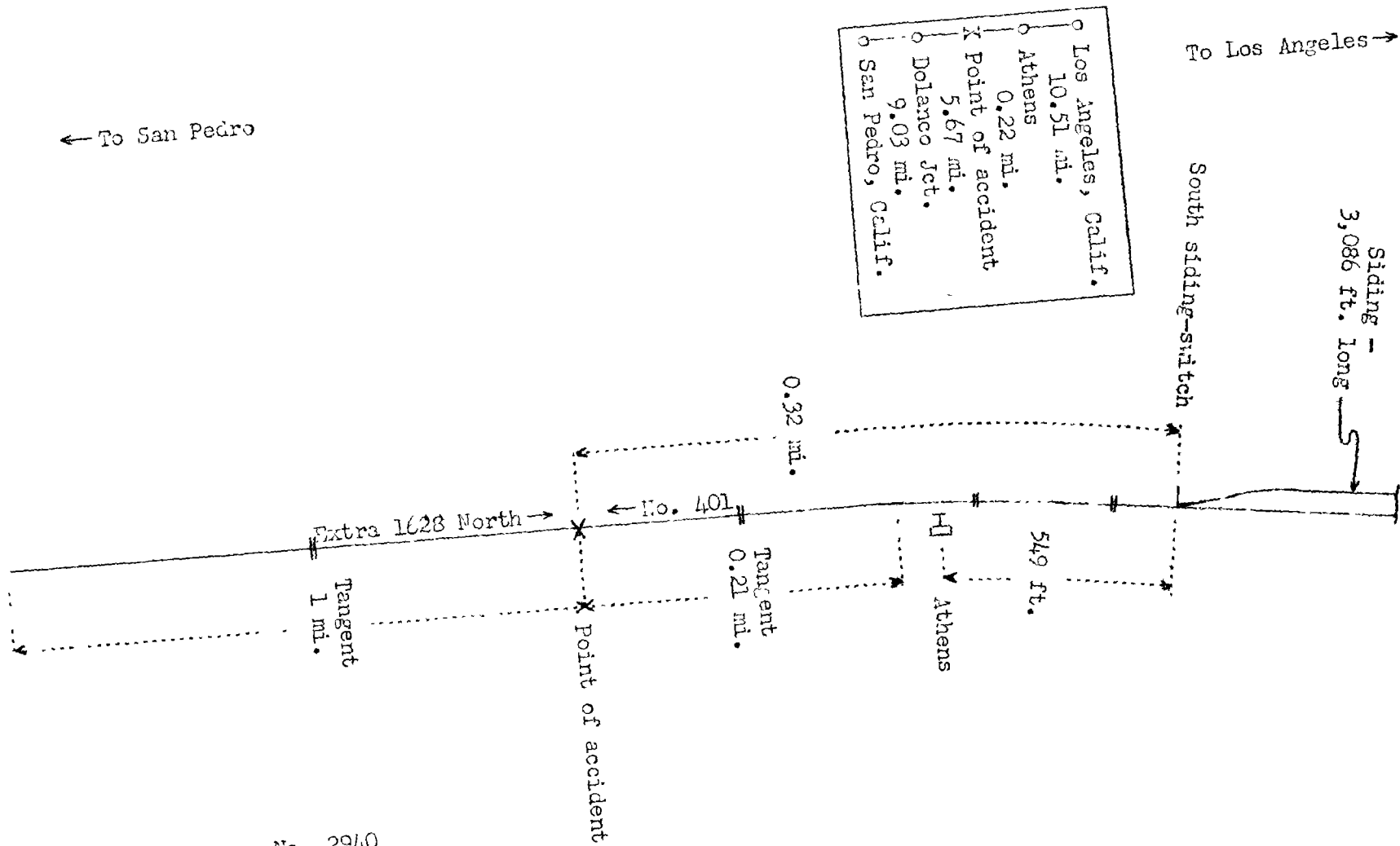
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On October 19, 1945, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the Pacific Electric Railway near Athens, Calif., which resulted in the death of 1 train-service employee, and the injury of 96 employees off duty, 1 train-service employee on duty and 2 train-service employees off duty. This accident was investigated in conjunction with representatives of the Railroad Commission of California.

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

← To San Pedro



Inv. No. 2940
Pacific Electric Railway
Athens, Calif.
October 19, 1945

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Southern District extending between Los Angeles and San Pedro, Calif., 25.43 miles, a single-track line in the vicinity of the point of accident, equipped with an overhead trolley system for the electric propulsion of trains, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. At Athens, 10.81 miles south of Los Angeles, a siding 3,086 feet in length parallels the main track on the west. The south switch of this siding is 549 feet north of the station. The accident occurred on the main track 0.32 mile south of the south siding-switch. The main track is tangent throughout a distance of about 1 mile south of this point and 0.21 mile northward. The grade is 1.419 percent ascending northward.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

76. The following signals must be used by flagmen:

* * *

Night Signals--A red light,
a white light,
torpedoes and fusees.

99. (a) When a train stops or is delayed under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the conductor or flagman will go back immediately and quickly, with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection. * * *

* * *

(e) When necessary to protect the head end of a train, signal appliances will be used in the same manner as prescribed for the protection of the rear of train.

* * *

405. The time applies clear of the switch where an inferior train enters the siding; * * *

407. * * *

* * *

Extra trains are inferior to regular trains.

* * *

416. * * *

(b) * * * freight * * * trains must clear first class trains five minutes. * * *

* * *

(g) * * * Trains failing to clear main track, as provided in this rule, must be protected as per Rule 99.

* * *

The maximum authorized speed for all trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 30 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 1628 North, a north-bound freight train, consisting of electric motor 1628, 15 cars and electric motor 1618, in the order named, departed from Dolanco Jct., 5.89 miles south of Athens, at 6 a. m. Because of moisture on the rails and an obstruction in the sand pipes of motor 1618, the train stalled on the ascending grade, and it stopped about 6:30 a. m. on the main track 0.32 mile south of the south siding-switch at Athens. About 3 minutes later this train was struck by No. 401.

No. 401, a south-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of electric-motor passenger-car 4601 and passenger trailer-car 4624, in the order named. These cars were of all-steel construction. This train passed the south siding-switch at Athens at 6:32 a. m., 2 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 20 miles per hour it collided with Extra 1628 North.

The front end of the motor of No. 401 was crushed inward about 5 feet. The trailer-car of No. 401 and the front end of the first motor-car of Extra 1628 were considerably damaged.

There was a dense fog at the time of the accident, which occurred about 6:33 a. m.

The motorman of No. 401 was killed, and the motorman of Extra 1628 North was injured.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 16.9 trains.

Discussion

The rules governing operation in the territory involved provide that an inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains, and freight trains must clear the time of first-class trains not less than 5 minutes. If an inferior train fails to clear the time of an opposing regular train, flag protection must be provided.

No. 401, a south-bound first-class train, was due to leave Athens at 6:30 a. m. The south switch of the siding at Athens is 549 feet north of the station, and, under the rules, the schedule time of regular trains at this point applies at the switch where an inferior train enters the siding. No. 401 passed the south siding-switch at Athens about 6:32 a. m., 2 minutes late, and about 6:33 a. m. it collided with Extra 1628 North at a point 1,712 feet south of the south siding-switch.

As No. 401 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 20 miles per hour. The crew of this train consisted of a motorman, a conductor and a flagman. No train order restricting the authority of No. 401 to proceed with respect to Extra 1628 North had been issued. The first the conductor and the flagman were aware of anything being wrong was when the brakes were applied in emergency immediately prior to the collision. These employees said that because of dense fog in this vicinity visibility was restricted to a distance of about 50 feet. The motorman was killed in the accident, therefore, it could not be determined when he first became aware that Extra 1628 was occupying the main track.

Extra 1628 North departed from Dolanco Jct., 5.89 miles south of Athens, at 6 a. m. The crew understood that if their train proceeded to Athens for No. 401 it was required to be into clear on the siding not later than 6:25 a. m., and that flag protection was required to be furnished if their train was not clear of the main track at the required time. The members of the crew had compared time, and there was a variation of only a few seconds in their watches. The motorman of the first motor said that because of moisture on the rails on the 1.419-percent ascending grade throughout a distance of about 2,700 feet immediately south of the point where the accident occurred and because an obstruction in the sand pipes of the second motor prevented sand from being deposited upon the rails from the sand compartment of this motor, sufficient speed could not be maintained for the train to reach the siding at Athens soon enough to clear at the required time. However, the train was permitted to proceed until the first motor stalled, then the train stopped about 1,700 feet south of the south siding-switch at Athens at 6:30 a. m., which was 5 minutes later than the time this train was required to be into clear at Athens if it proceeded to that

station to meet No. 401. When Extra 1629 North stopped, the motorman of the first motor told the conductor, who was in the rear compartment of the first motor, and the front brakeman, who was in the control compartment of the first motor, to furnish flag protection against No. 401. Soon afterward the brakeman proceeded northward. He said he was about 50 feet north of the first motor of his train and was preparing to light a fusee when No. 401 passed him. The conductor of Extra 1629 said that he was engaged in clerical work and did not realize that his train was occupying the main track on the time of No. 401 until the motorman requested flag protection. The motorman of the rear motor and the flagman, who was on the rear motor, were not aware of anything being wrong until after the accident occurred.

Trains are operated in this territory by timetable and train orders only. If an adequate block system had been in use, these opposing trains would not have been permitted to occupy the same block simultaneously.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by an inferior train occupying the main track on the time of an opposing superior train.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Pacific Electric Railway Company install an adequate block system on the line on which this accident occurred.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-sixth day of November, 1945.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.