

March 5, 1914.

In re Investigation of Accident on the Michigan  
Central Railroad near Michigan Air Line  
Crossing, Mich., on January 26, 1914.

On January 26, 1914, there was a head end collision on the Michigan Central Railroad near Michigan Air Line Crossing, Mich., resulting in the death of 3 passengers and 1 employee, and the injury of 8 passengers and 4 employees. One of the injured passengers subsequently died.

After investigation of this accident the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

Southbound passenger train No. 70 consisted of one baggage car, one smoking car and two coaches, all of wooden construction, hauled by locomotive No. 5906, and was in charge of Conductor Wedell and Engineman Johnson. This train was a regularly scheduled passenger train running Sundays only from Bay City, Mich., to Jackson, Mich., and on the day of the accident left Bay City at 6:00 p. m., passed Van Horn, 4.07 miles north of Michigan Air Line Crossing, at 9:53 p. m., and at 9:59 p. m., while running at a speed of 35 miles per hour, collided with northbound freight extra 7701 at a point about 1-1/4 miles north of Michigan Air Line Crossing, or 3-1/4 miles north of Jackson.

Extra 7701 consisted of 28 loaded and 11 empty cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 7701, and was in charge of Conductor Cooney and Engineman Bush. This train was bound from Jackson to Grand Rapids, and at Jackson at 2:11 p. m. received a copy of train order No. 316, reading as follows:

"Eng. Seven Seven Naught one 7701 runs extra Jackson Jct. to Grand Rapids, does not register at River Jct. At Nine ten 9:10 P.M. all overdue trains have arrived at and left Jackson and River Jct. Sidings at Chester, Bowen and Penoy Switch are blocked with cars."

Extra 7701 left Jackson Junction, about one mile from the station at Jackson, at 9:50 p. m., and at 9:59 p. m., while running at a speed of about 12 miles per hour, collided head-on with train No. 70, as above stated.

Both locomotives were derailed but remained upright. The baggage car telescoped the smoking car practically its full length, both cars being destroyed. Three freight cars were destroyed, while slight damage was sustained by the two rear coaches and two freight cars. Both locomotives were equipped with oil headlights; at the time of the accident there was a heavy snow, materially obscuring the view of the engine crews.

The division on which this accident occurred is a single-track line. Trains are operated by train orders and time-card rights, telephones being used for dispatching. The manual block signal system in use affords protection for following movements only.

Approaching the point of collision from the north there is a ten-degree curve 1,400 feet in length, followed by 2,000 feet of tangent. Approaching from the opposite direction there is a tangent nearly 4,000 feet in length. At the point of collision the track is on a slight fill; the grade is slightly descending for southbound trains.

Enginesman Bush, of Extra 7701, stated that after reading train order No. 318 he consulted his time-table and reached the conclusion that trains Nos. 78 and 106, due in Jackson at 8:20 p. m. and 8:30 a. m., respectively, were the first trains he would have to meet. He admitted that he overlooked train No. 70. Approaching the point of collision the head brakeman called his attention to a light ahead; at first he thought it was a light on the electric interurban line which parallels the track of the Michigan Central Railroad and at the point of collision is 80 feet distant therefrom, not realizing that it was another train until it was but a short distance away. He barely had time to shut off steam and jump before the collision occurred.

Fireman Dietrich was working on his fire and his first intimation of danger was when the enginesman called to him to jump, which he did. Before starting on this trip he tried to secure a time-table at the engine-house, but was told that there were none. He was a comparatively new man and had never been on this division on Sunday, and so he had no time-table he did not know of the existence of train No. 70.

Conductor Cooney stated that after comparing time with the enginesman and giving him a copy of train order No. 318, he started toward the rear end of his train, having had no conversation with the enginesman as to what trains they would have to meet. He handed his copy of the order to the rear brakeman, looked at his time-table and remarked that trains No. 78 and 106, due in Jackson at 1:05 a. m. and 3:20 a. m. respectively, were the first trains to be met. He admitted overlooking train No. 70, due at 10:05 p. m., his only excuse being that it was a train which was run only on Sunday.

Head Brakeman Kilwell stated that when he got on the engine after seeing that the switches were lined up, the enginesman gave him the train order, and after he had read it said to him that the first trains to be met were Nos. 78 and 106. Soon after passing Michigan Air Line Crossing he saw a light ahead and at first thought it was some kind of a light on the electric road. He then saw the light wavering and asked the enginesman what it was, and when the latter started

to get down from his seat he at once jumped from the engine. He had intended to look at his time-table, but when the engine-man said that trains Nos. 78 and 106 were the first trains to be met he took it for granted that the engine-man knew what he was talking about.

Rear Brakeman Howley did not have his time-table on this particular run on account of being called to attend switches instead of to go out on the road. After the train had started he asked if there was a time-table around. The conductor then looked at his time-table and said that trains Nos. 78 and 106 were the first trains to be met.

Fireman Champion of train No. 70 stated that after his train had reached the straight track approaching Michigan Air Line Crossing, Engineman Johnson called to him and on looking ahead he saw a light, but was unable to tell whether it was on the electric line or on the railroad until it was close enough to enable him to see the classification lights. At about this time Engineman Johnson shut off steam and applied the brakes. Fireman Champion then jumped, the collision occurring almost immediately thereafter. Engineman Johnson was killed in the collision.

This accident was caused by extra 7701 occupying the main track on the time of a superior train.

There can be no excuse for such carelessness in train operation as was evidenced in this case, particularly upon the part of Conductor Cooney and Engineman Bush, who were directly responsible for the safety of their train, and upon whom two of the other members of the crew were dependent for information as to trains to be met, owing to the fact that they did not have time-tables.

In the statements of Engineman Bush it will be noted that he thought the first trains to be met were trains Nos. 76 and 106, due at Jackson at 6:30 p. m. and 2:20 a. m. respectively. Had he been giving proper attention to his duties it is difficult to understand how he reached this conclusion, for not only was train No. 76 not run on Sunday, but its scheduled arriving time at Jackson was 8:30 p. m. and according to train order No. 316 all overdue trains had arrived at and left Jackson at 9:15 p. m., which was before extra 7701 left its terminal.

Engineman Bush was employed as a fireman in 1904 and was made an engineman in 1913. Conductor Cooney was employed as a brakeman in 1899 and in 1900 was made a conductor. Brakeman Kidwell and Howley were employed as such in 1907 and 1912, respectively, while Fireman Dietrich was employed in August, 1913. The records of all of these employees were good. None of the employees involved in this accident had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.