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LONDON MIDLAND AND SCOTTISH RAILWAY

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT,  
Metropole Buildings,  
Northumberland Avenue,  
London, W.C.2.  
18th December, 1939.

SIR,

I have the honour to report for the information of the Minister of Transport, in accordance with the Order of the 3rd November, 1939, the result of my Inquiry into the circumstances of the accident which occurred at 5.0 a.m. on 31st October, 1939, at Hindley, on the London Midland and Scottish Railway.

The Horwich Works fire brigade train consisting of an engine and three vehicles was returning to its depot at 5 a.m., after extinguishing a fire at Ince Moss refuse dump, and was approaching Hindley from the west, on the up loop line, with the engine at the trailing end, when it came into violent contact with the buffer stops, at the end of the over-run to that track. The buffer stops were demolished and the train came to rest against the abutment of an overline bridge a short distance beyond.

The leading van, in which the brigade was travelling, was wrecked, and I regret to state that Richard Harrison, the captain of the brigade, who was also acting as guard of the train, sustained injuries to which he succumbed some 30 hours later. Of the eight members of the brigade who were with him, four were seriously injured and were detained in hospital, while the remainder sustained only minor injuries and were able to return to their homes after treatment.

The weather at the time of the accident was fine; but the sky was overcast, and it was very dark. Driver John Young, admits that he mistook the line upon which he was travelling and acted upon a signal, which had been cleared for a train on the adjoining track.

The train which was being propelled by a 2-4-2 radial tank engine, travelling with the bunker leading was made up as follows. A water tank wagon, with its full complement of 4,740 gallons of water, was marshalled next to the engine and behind a covered goods van, which was adapted for, and contained a petrol motor fire pump. The third vehicle was a 6-wheeled brake compo which had been refitted as an equipment and travelling van, with lockers, which served as seats, arranged along each side. In addition to the original side windows of clear glass, this van was provided with three windows in the end facing the direction of travel, the centre one of which was fitted with opaque glass. The side windows were provided with curtains which, at the time of the accident, were drawn, but the two clear glass windows at the end were not screened in any way. A blue 24-watt lamp, situated in the centre of the roof, provided the only light in the van at the time of the accident.

The train was fitted throughout with automatic vacuum brakes with blocks acting upon all wheels, except the non-coupled wheels of the engine, and the middle pair of the equipment van. There was the usual type of guard's brake valve in the equipment van, within easy reach of a man standing at either of the clear glass end windows. The total length of the train, including the engine, was 118 ft. 1¼ ins. and the approximate weight was 111 tons.

*Description.*

Hindley Station is approached from the west by two routes, namely the main line of four tracks from the direction of Wigan, and a two track branch line from De Trafford Junction, which lies to the north-west. The two routes merge at Hindley No. 2 signal cabin, from which point the tracks become six in number by the addition of two loop lines, which extend as far as Hindley No. 1 cabin, a distance of some 500 yards. These six tracks are in the following order from the north. Up loop, up and down slow, up and down fast and down loop, the first of which is provided with an overrun of 68 yards beyond the outlet points to the up slow line.

*Report.*

The train left Ince Moss, with the engine leading, at 4.37 a.m. and after taking water at Fir Tree House Junction, arrived on the down line at De Trafford Junction at 4.57 a.m. It was there crossed on to the up line and left a minute later with the engine propelling the train along the up branch towards Hindley.

On leaving De Trafford Junction the Hindley No. 2 branch signals controlling the entry to the up slow and up loop lines come quickly into view, but owing to the curve of the branch line they are first seen from the left, or in this instance, the fireman's side of the footplate. Young, therefore, asked his fireman to look out for these signals, but the latter replied that he did not know the road. Young thereupon crossed the footplate and observed the signals for himself, while the fireman concerned himself with footplate duties and did not see them. Young is emphatic that the smaller and slightly lower left hand signal was in a clear position, indicating to him that his train was being turned on to the loop. As both the branch and loop lines are on a sharp rising gradient he kept the regulator open, and entered the loop, some 70 yards beyond this signal, fully prepared to stop at the outlet signal, which he saw was at danger. This outlet signal has a miniature arm and light 13 ft. 9 ins. above rail level, and is carried on a post situated to the left of the loop line a few feet short of the facing points leading on to the up slow line. Almost opposite this post there is another, on the right hand side of the loop, carrying Hindley No. 1 up slow home signal, with a full-sized arm and light at a height of 30 ft. above rail level.

Young states that as he entered the loop he caught sight of the outlet signal showing a red aspect, and also noticed that the up slow line home signal was cleared. He is emphatic that he was then under no misapprehension either with regard to the track he was on, i.e., the loop, or the significance of the two signals ahead. He maintains that, after proceeding about 200 yards along the loop, the front of the train cut off his view of the outlet signal, with the result that he was left with only the green light of the up slow line signal in sight, and suddenly, for some unexplained reason, formed the erroneous opinion that he was on the track to which this signal applied. He consequently allowed the train to continue running under steam until it was some 20 yards from the signal when, in response to a red hand signal from Hindley No. 1 cabin, he made an emergency application of the brake. By that time, however, the leading end of the train was within 50 yards of the buffer stops at the end of the over-run, and the brake had little time to take effect.

Judging by subsequent damage, the train must have been travelling at a considerably higher speed than the 15 miles an hour, as estimated by Young. After colliding with, and demolishing the buffer stops, the equipment van swerved to the right, struck the abutment of a bridge, 11 yards beyond, and finally came to rest in an upright position fouling the up slow line. The vehicle following overrode the main frame of the equipment van, carrying away the body work, some of which was thrown as far as the down slow line. The leading wheels of the tank wagon were derailed, but the engine remained on the track and was practically undamaged.

The light construction of the body work of the equipment van probably saved the men occupying it from still more serious injuries as, when the sides along which they were sitting crumpled, they were thrown outwards and were easily extricated from the wreckage. Unfortunately Harrison, who was standing close up to the left hand window at the end of the van, with his face turned in the direction of travel, was trapped by the steel-work of the buffer stops, which had been carried forward against the abutment of the bridge, rendering rescue work slow and difficult, otherwise he too might have escaped with his life.

Medical aid was rendered by two Doctors who were already in attendance when the Police arrived with an ambulance at about 5.20 a.m., and the breakdown train reached the scene of the accident about an hour later. By that time the light wreckage had been removed from the down slow line, allowing traffic to be resumed thereon at 6.25 a.m. and normal working was restored on the up slow and loop lines at 4.35 p.m.

*Conclusion.*

Young frankly admits that he took the clear aspect of the Hindley No. 1 up slow line home signal as applicable to his train, and I accept his explanation for so doing, namely that he was under the impression that he was on that

track. I cannot, however, agree with his statement that in the first instance he thought he was entering or travelling along the loop. There is evidence that the train entered the loop at a speed which caused Thomas Partington, the signalman in Hindley No. 2 cabin, to have grave doubts as to whether it was going to stop at the far end or not, and, acting with commendable promptitude, he telephoned to the cabin ahead. He was thus responsible for the red hand-signal which was exhibited from that point, and lessened, to a certain extent, the force of the impact. Again, Young admits that his fireman was firing as the train entered the loop, and he made no attempt to stop him, which would have been a more natural course for a man to take, if he had been expecting to be stopped by signal within 500 yards.

Young had worked the fire brigade train from Ince Moss to Horwich only once before, on which trip it was turned on to the up slow line at Hindley No. 2, and this may have led him to expect to follow the same route on this occasion. As a result of such anticipation, I am of opinion that he misread the bracket signal, and concluded that he was proceeding along the up slow line. In any case the responsibility for the accident rests upon Young; he is 49 years of age, has been driving in the district for nearly 14 years, and holds a good record.

I consider that the blackout conditions resulting from the war contributed to the accident, for had the tracks been illuminated, as in normal times, by the lights in Hindley No. 1 cabin, which is situated between the down slow and the up fast, Young would probably have seen the two lines between his train and the cabin, as he approached it, and realised that he was travelling along the loop. He was also unfortunate in having with him a fireman who was not conversant with the signals and it is to be regretted that, apparently, he did not receive any assistance from Harrison in his capacity as guard of the train.

Harrison, formally a workshop employee at Horwich, has also been a member of the Fire Brigade for many years and was promoted Fire Brigade captain, a whole time occupation, in October, 1923. At the same time he was passed for guards duties to enable him, as leader of the Brigade, to act in that capacity. Being a member of the Chief Mechanical Engineer's staff he was not subject to yearly examinations, which are required of guards in the Traffic Department; nor was he called upon to sign route cards indicating the areas or sections of the line with which he was conversant. In consequence, the extent of his knowledge regarding the various routes is an unknown factor.

The extensive area covered by the Horwich Fire Brigade includes remote points such as Carlisle, Bradford, Leeds and Goole, and it would not have been possible for Harrison to have been conversant with all the intervening routes. Seeing that there is no record of his ever having asked for a pilot guard, it is doubtful whether he was fully alive to his responsibilities with regard to the knowledge of the routes traversed by his train. I hesitate, therefore, to criticise him for failing to realise on this occasion that the driver of the train was not preparing to stop at the danger signal ahead. At the same time, had there been a guard looking out at the leading end, who was conversant with the locality, the accident would, in all probability, have been avoided.

#### *Recommendation.*

The propelling of fire brigade trains appears to be inevitable, on occasions, to meet the exigencies of the service. There is, however, no authority for doing so, and while I have no reason to suggest that the practice is being abused, it should be restricted as far as possible.

In addition, instructions should be issued to ensure that, in the event of a train being propelled, a constant look-out is maintained from the leading end, by a man conversant with the route which is being traversed. Means should also be provided whereby this man can give audible warning of approach to anyone he may see on the line.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

J. L. M. MOORE.

The Secretary,  
Ministry of Transport.