



MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

RAILWAY ACCIDENTS

REPORT ON THE COLLISION
which occurred on
13th May 1950 at
WHITEHOUSE WEST JUNCTION
Nr. Preston
in the
LONDON MIDLAND REGION
BRITISH RAILWAYS

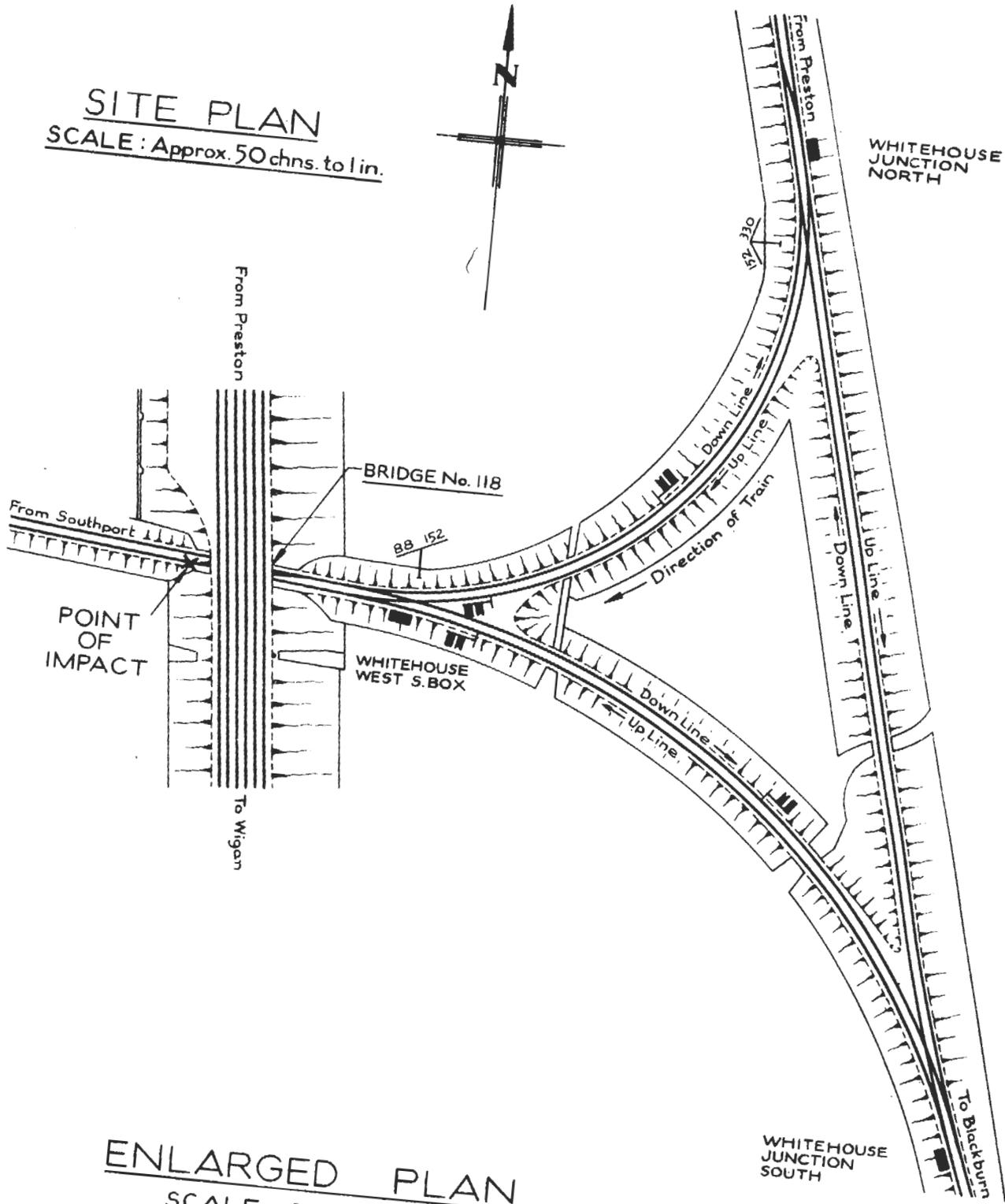
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1950

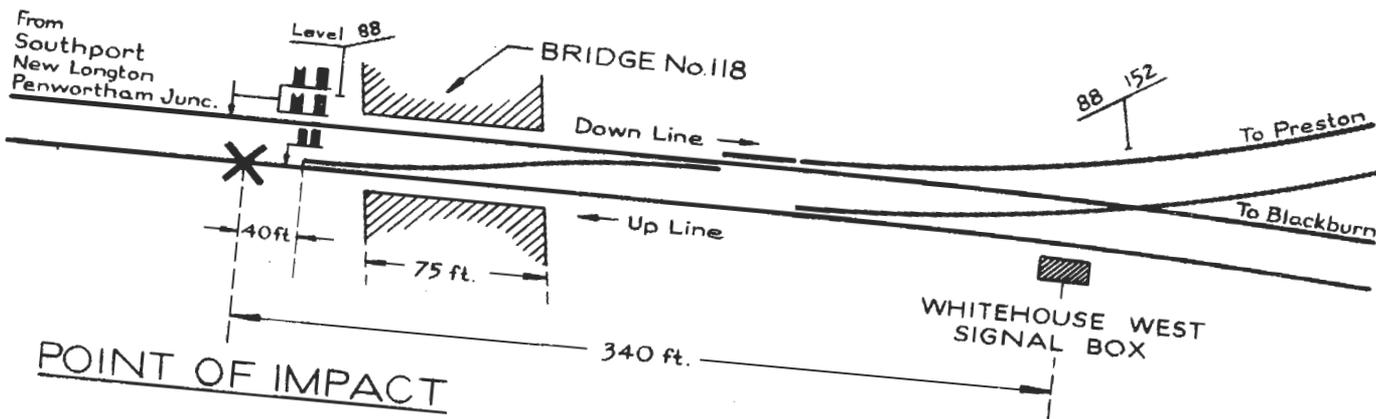
SIXPENCE NET

LONDON MIDLAND REGION
 Collision at Whitehouse West Junction, Preston
 13th May, 1950

SITE PLAN
 SCALE: Approx. 50 chns. to 1 in.



ENLARGED PLAN
 SCALE: 80 ft. to 1 in.



LONDON MIDLAND REGION
BRITISH RAILWAYS

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT.

Berkeley Square House,
London, W.1.

4th October, 1950.

SIR,

I have the honour to report for the information of the Minister of Transport, in accordance with the Order of 15th May 1950, the result of my Inquiry into the collision which occurred at 10.30 p.m. on 13th May at Whitehouse West Junction, near Preston, in the London Midland Region, British Railways.

The 10.20 p.m. Up Passenger train from Preston to Southport was travelling under clear signals at about 20 m.p.h., when it collided with a stationary light engine, which had been waiting for over 10 minutes at the west end of the junction to cross to the Down line.

There were some 80 passengers in the train, of whom 8 were seriously injured, 15 others were treated in hospital but not detained, and 40 received minor injuries or suffered from shock; 5 railway servants were also injured. The local railway staff, the police, fire brigade, ambulances, doctors, and others were quickly on the scene and all the injured had been removed to hospital or given first aid within an hour.

The passenger train comprised four non-corridor bogie coaches; it was hauled by a Class 3 mixed traffic tank engine, 2-6-2 type with left-hand drive, travelling bunker first. The overall length of the train was 285 feet and its total weight, including engine, was 185 tons. The steam brake operated on the coupled wheels of the engine and the vacuum brake on all wheels of the coaches, giving a combined brake power of 122 tons, equivalent to 66% of the total weight. The coaches had steel underframes and were fitted with shock absorbing buffers. The two leading vehicles had wooden bodies and the two rear coaches were of composite construction with steel panels on wood framing.

The passenger train engine was derailed and badly damaged. The bunker and the back of the cab were driven in, the rear end of the frame was bent upwards, the trailing pony truck was destroyed and the front buffer beam was bent. None of the coaches was derailed, but the rear of the first and the front of the second were each telescoped for approximately two compartment lengths; both underframes were bent and bodywork was extensively damaged, and a number of door and window lights were broken. The other two coaches were practically undamaged.

The light engine was a Class 8F 2-8-0 with left-hand drive, 63 feet long, and weighed 126 tons in working order; it was facing towards Southport with its brakes off, and was driven forward 140 feet by the force of the collision. It was not derailed and suffered remarkably little damage. The rear of the tender was holed in several places and its buffers were locked to the train engine.

The permanent way was scarcely disturbed and only a few chairs were broken; the two-armed dwarf signal controlling movements over the Up and Down crossover was demolished.

The Down line was partially obstructed by the leading coach but after removal of debris it was found possible to pass trains at low speed. The Up track was cleared and normal working on both lines was resumed at 7.0 a.m. the next morning. Buses were provided to take uninjured passengers to their destinations and also to convey passengers into Preston from a Down train which had been stopped at New Longton.

The night was fine and clear.

DESCRIPTION.

1. The double line from Preston to Blackburn runs South through Whitehouse North and South Junctions as indicated on the diagram. The Southport route diverges to the right at the first-named junction and passes round a 12 chain curve to Whitehouse West Junction, where it is joined by a loop (known as the Fork line) from Whitehouse South, thus forming a triangle which is used for turning engines. The gradient from the North Junction falls at 1 in 152 to a point nearly opposite the West box, where it changes to 1 in 80 and then to level at the crossover trailing points. The formation at the West Junction is on a 20 feet embankment, and at the west end there is a 75 feet long overbridge carrying six railway tracks, including the main lines to the North via Preston. A 20 m.p.h. speed restriction is imposed through the Whitehouse North and West diverging junctions.

Relevant distances from the point of collision are :--

Preston Station	1½ miles
Whitehouse North signal box	600 yards
Whitehouse West Up Home	166 ..
Whitehouse West signal box	113 ..
East end of overbridge	42 ..
West end of overbridge/	17 ..
Up trailing points of crossover	13 ..

2. Whitehouse West signal box is conveniently located on the Up side overlooking the junction and the floor of the box is approximately 7 feet 6 inches above rail level. The trailing crossover, which is under the overbridge, can be clearly seen from the box, as can an engine waiting on the Up line at the Southport end, provided it does not pass the trailing points by more than an engine length. If it moves further towards Southport it is somewhat obscured by the overbridge, though it can be seen for a long distance by leaning out of the signal box window. All running signals are of the upper quadrant type, mechanically operated. The junction is protected in the normal way by Home signals, but Starters have only been provided on the two Down lines to Preston and Blackburn respectively. There is no Starting signal for the Up line to Southport nor are there any track circuits. A two-armed dwarf signal located in the six foot space at the west end of the overbridge controls shunting movements over the Up to Down crossover.

All lines are worked with three-position block instruments fitted with mechanical train waiting slides which lock the commutator at "Train on Line". The adjoining signal box in the Southport direction is Penwortham Junction, which is only opened for one shift per day. When this box is closed, as was the case at the time of the accident, the section extends to New Longton. The routine for crossing light engines at Whitehouse West, when Penwortham Junction is closed, is to accept them up to the Home signal at Danger. On arrival there, the engine is called forward either verbally or by a green hand signal in order to shunt ahead past the crossover points, in accordance with Rule 38(b) Exception (ii). When Penwortham Junction is open, absolute Block Regulation 35 is enforced whereby the "Shunting into Forward Section (3—3—2)" signal must be sent and acknowledged before the engine may pass the Home signal, which is kept at Danger until the driver has been verbally instructed as to what he is required to do.

Traffic through Whitehouse West Junction at the present time averages 30 Up and 32 Down trains each weekday and in addition about 12 engines are turned around the triangle daily.

EVIDENCE.

3. Driver J. Savage explained how he had been instructed to turn his engine round the Whitehouse triangle. After passing the South Junction he saw the West Junction Home signal "Off" and ran through on the Up line to the Southport end of the crossover, where he came to a stand with his tender about 10 yards beyond the trailing points. He took off the brake as the line was level and whistled for the crossover to be reversed. In the meanwhile his fireman changed the head and tail lights. Savage said he crossed to his fireman's side to look at the points, which he noticed were reversed for the Down line after about two minutes. He expected the ground signal to be cleared for him, but after waiting for a further three minutes he noticed the points were put back to normal. He said that on both occasions he could see "the shine and glitter of the metals as they moved". Shortly after this, his fireman got down to walk to the box, but before he reached it he came running back shouting that a train was approaching on their line. Savage said he had no time to take any action and was thrown out on to the six foot way by the shock of the impact. He was quite sure that the ground signal was not cleared for him though he saw the points move twice. He admitted that he had not been looking out of the cab all the time and that he and his mate had a drink of tea while they were waiting; he did not realise that he had been standing for over ten minutes.

4. Fireman J. Chapman of the light engine generally confirmed his driver's evidence. He said that as soon as they stopped at Whitehouse West Junction he got down, changed the head and tail lights, and then returned to the cab. While he was mounting the footplate steps, he also noticed the points come over, but did not see the shunt signal change. Two to three minutes later the points were put back so he thought he had better go to the signal box. Just as he reached the Down line trailing points he saw the passenger train approaching and ran back at once to warn his mate. Chapman also had not realised they had been standing for over ten minutes before the collision and said that during this time he had been talking to his driver who had come over to his side of the footplate.

5. Driver J. Hale of the passenger train said he left Preston ten minutes late. His engine was in good order and there were 21 inches of vacuum showing on the gauge. They were travelling bunker first so he was on the right-hand side in the direction of travel. He had a clear run with all signals "off" and he passed through the North Junction at about 20 to 25 m.p.h. When they were opposite the West Junction signal box his fireman suddenly shouted that there was an engine in front and Hale saw it almost at the same time. He promptly applied his brakes and felt them begin to take effect; he thought he had reduced speed to a little less than 20 m.p.h. by the time they hit the light engine.

6. Fireman J. H. Bannister gave similar evidence. He said he had been looking out on his side since leaving Preston, and all signals, including Whitehouse West Home, were "off." They had passed this signal and reached the box when he saw the headlight and outline of the light engine. He shouted to his mate and then felt the bite of the brakes. Guard J. Gornall also felt the brake applied just before the collision occurred ; he confirmed that he tested it before leaving Preston.

7. Tests made under similar conditions after the accident showed that the Down trailing points of the crossover were not visible from the driver's side of the light engine but they might possibly have been seen moving, as described by Driver Savage, by a person looking out for them on the fireman's side, though he would have had difficulty in distinguishing the movement in the prevailing light. The shunt signals were clearly visible from the fireman's side and their back lights could be seen from the signal box. The light on the tender of the stationary engine could also be seen easily from there but the driver or fireman of a train approaching from Preston could not be expected to identify the obstruction until he was opposite or even a little past the signal box.

8. Signalman E. Brennan of Whitehouse West Junction said he had spent the last 12 months in that box and he was quite familiar with the arrangements for turning engines round the Whitehouse triangle. He came on duty at 3.0 p.m. on the day of the accident and had already crossed one or two light engines before he accepted Driver Savage's engine from the South Junction at 10.13 p.m. He cleared his Home signal and two minutes later received "Train Entering Section". The engine arrived at 10.17 p.m. and ran past his box to the west end of the crossover before stopping. He obtained "Line Clear" on the Down line from the North Junction, and, as soon as he saw the engine tail light stop moving, he reversed the crossover and pulled the shunt and starting signal levers. Having seen the engine lights change from red to white he left the window and went back to his desk to have a cup of tea. Whilst he was drinking it, a train on the main line passed over the bridge above the box and Brennan assumed it was the light engine, though he did not see it, nor did he observe the tail light. He said he glanced through the bridge opening and as he saw nothing he was quite sure the engine had left. He thereupon replaced the shunt signal, and after allowing time for the engine to pass the Starter, he returned it to normal and then reversed the crossover. He entered in his train register that he obtained "Line Clear" at 10.19 p.m. and gave "Train Entering Section" at 10.20 p.m., but he agreed that he might not have sent this signal.

At 10.25 p.m. he was offered the Up passenger train from the North Junction and promptly accepted it without further thought. He then obtained "Line Clear" from New Longton and cleared his Home and Inner and Outer Distant signals. Two minutes later he received "Train Entering Section" from the North Junction and a minute or so later, the train passed his box. He was about to give "Train Entering Section" to New Longton when he heard a "bang" followed by another. As soon as he realised there had been a collision he sent "Obstruction Danger" to New Longton and also advised the Control.

9. Signalman A. Hamer at Whitehouse South said he obtained "Line Clear" for the light engine at 10.14 p.m. ; it passed at 10.16 p.m. and he received "Train Out of Section" from Whitehouse West at 10.18 p.m. Shortly after this he closed his box. Signalman R. J. Roberts of the Whitehouse North, told how he accepted the light engine from the West box at 10.18 p.m. but he did not receive "Train Entering Section" for it. At 10.23 p.m. he obtained "Line Clear" from Signalman Brennan for the Preston-Southport passenger train but it did not pass his box till 10.28 p.m. Later he heard Brennan informing someone on the telephone that the passenger train had run into a light engine.

10. During the Inquiry it came to light that Signalman Brennan had failed to record movements of several light engines, and as a result of detailed examination of the Train Registers it was revealed that on the day of the accident he had committed the following irregularities :—

- (a) Failed to record the crossing of three out of eight light engines which passed round the Whitehouse triangle during his tour of duty before the arrival of Driver Savage's engine.
- (b) Failed to book any entries for the 4.10 p.m. Southport to Preston and the 8.15 p.m. Preston to Southport passenger trains.
- (c) Failed to report that the driver of a light engine held at the Fork Line Up Home signal from 3.30 p.m. to 3.37 p.m. did not comply with Rule 55.
- (d) Violated Absolute Block Regulation 4(c) by crossing a light engine from the Up to the Down Main line after he had accepted the 5.7 p.m. Southport to Preston passenger train from New Longton.

On the day before the accident he had also failed to record the movements of the two passenger trains and four light engines. These were not isolated instances and it was found that for over two months previously he had been committing similar irregularities, including failure to observe Block Regulation 35 and to report drivers who did not carry out Rule 55.

The Train Register book was last examined on 10th May, three days before the accident by District Signalmen's Inspector H. Christian. He and his assistants had also examined this book from time to time during their periodical visits, while the Preston Station Master or his assistant had seen it on alternate weeks when they visited the box. None of the irregularities were noticed ; it would not have

been possible, however, to check omissions of light engine movements without a reference to the entries in the books of the signalmen in the adjacent boxes, and failure to record passenger train entries might also have been missed unless a special investigation was made.

Inspector Christian said that he had never checked to see whether any entries had been missed and Signalman Brennan's continual slackness in this respect came as a great surprise to him, especially as he had been a booking lad before being promoted to signalman. There was nothing in the working of Whitehouse West box which could have led a signalman to miss bookings and Inspector Christian had not received any complaints from Brennan or the other signalmen regarding conditions there.

CONCLUSION.

11. This accident was primarily due to the gross negligence of Signalman Brennan, who accepted the passenger train without making any proper attempt to satisfy himself that the line was clear. He said he had heard a train passing on the line overhead and assumed this was the light engine, but he saw neither the engine nor its tail light. He had also acted incorrectly when he failed to stop the light engine at the Home signal and did not call the driver forward in accordance with the Rules. The mistakes which led up to this accident were the culmination of a series of other irregularities which Brennan had committed that day and during the two previous months. He is a young man of 22 years of age with two years' clear record as a signalman, but in view of the serious deterioration in his work which has now been disclosed, he is, in my opinion, no longer fit to remain in such an appointment.

12. I do not consider that sufficient care was exercised in the examination of the train registers at Whitehouse West Junction and the importance of checking them does not seem to have been fully appreciated. Entries in these books not only provide a record of train and engine movements, but they also can be of great assistance to the signalman himself, especially when delays occur or trains are running out of course. Furthermore, they give a good indication of the signalman's method of working. Signalman Brennan clearly did not realise the importance of these duties and having become negligent in this respect, became negligent in other ways also. Prompt correction of his initial errors might well have deterred him and I cannot but conclude that supervision was inadequate in this case.

13. Driver Savage must also bear some share of responsibility for failing to carry out Rule 55. Both he and his fireman had been talking and drinking tea, and both of them failed to realise how long they had been waiting. It was Driver Savage's responsibility to send his fireman to the box immediately after he had been detained at the crossover, and it is clear that he was not paying sufficient attention to his duties. He is 48 years old with 32 years' service, and has been a driver for the past 10 years; he has a clear record.

REMARKS.

14. Although the provision of a starting signal, track circuits and modern block controls on the Up line would undoubtedly have prevented this accident, I am not prepared to recommend this work be given priority when there are so many other places where these most desirable safety measures are more urgently needed. Whatever safety appliances may be installed, reliance must always be placed primarily on the integrity of the signalman. This accident was clearly due to the inexcusable neglect of fundamental safety rules by a man who had become thoroughly unreliable and whose slack methods of working had not been noticed. The importance of proper supervision, especially of young members of the staff, should need no emphasis.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

C. A. LANGLEY,

Brigadier.

The Secretary,
Ministry of Transport.

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