

Report of Inquiry

into

Accident on Railway System of Córas Iompair Éireann

near

Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

on

5th December, 1963

Department of Transport and Power,
Dublin.

Report of Inquiry into a Railway Accident near Mullingar on 5th December, 1963.

1. The Minister for Transport and Power by Order dated the 6th day of January, 1964, directed that an Inquiry be made by T.L. Hogan, B.Sc., B.E., M.I.C.E.I. into an accident which occurred on the Coras Iompair Éireann railway system near Mullingar, County Westmeath, on 5th December, 1963.

2. I took evidence in public at 45, Merrion Square, Dublin, on 5th and 6th February, 1964. The evidence was not taken on oath.

I have the honour to report as follows:

Representatives

3. The following persons attended at the Inquiry:

- Mr. B.d'A. Patterson; Coras Iompair Éireann.
- Mr. F.C. Coules; Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.
- Mr. F. Smyth, National Association of Transport Employees.
- Mr. Coleman; Irish Transport & General Workers Union.

Persons who gave Evidence

4. The following persons gave evidence at the Inquiry:

- Bernard Geraghty, Driver, Athlone,
- Denis Walsh, Driver, Canal Street,
- Thomas Killian, Porter, Westland Row,
- Martin O'Neill, Guard, Athlone,
- Christopher Kelly, Driver, Athlone,
- Michael Harkins, Ticket Collector, Athlone,
- James Cullinane, Driver, Athlone,
- Patrick Molloy, Labourer, Athlone,
- William Glynn, Maintenance Foreman, Mullingar,
- J.C. Pemberton, Asst. to Mechanical Engineer, Maintenance.
- J.J. Johnson, Asst. Mechanical Engineer (technical),
- R. Martin, Running Superintendent, Galway,
- John Shanley, Signaller, 46th Mile Box,

John Mc Dermott, Signaller, Mullingar, No. 1 Cabin,

Joseph Geraghty, Running Foreman, Mullingar,

Patrick Quinn, Station Master, Mullingar,

Brendan Kenny, Road Freight Inspector, Mullingar,

Patrick Mc Namee, Locomotive Inspector, Mullingar,

Liam Tierney, District Manager, Athlone,

Patrick Burke, Rail Control Office, Amiens St.

Summary

5. On 5 December, 1963, the 3.00 p.m. passenger train, Westland Row to Westport, stopped in the section 46th mile Box-Mullingar owing to failure of the locomotive. A relief locomotive coming from Mullingar to the assistance of the train collided with it. Fifteen passengers were injured and considerable damage was caused to the two locomotives and a brake van.

3.00 p.m. passenger train

6. The 3.00 p.m. passenger train consisted of a brake van, 5 bogie coaches, a heating van and a brake van in rear and was drawn by diesel electric locomotive No. A.17. The driver of the locomotive was Mr. Bernard Geraghty. The train also carried a Guard (Martin O'Neill) and a Ticket Collector (Michael Harkins). Travelling in the locomotive with Driver Geraghty were Driver Denis Walsh, who was there to gain road knowledge, and Porter Thomas Killian who acted as "snatcherman" to exchange the staffs at stations. There were 66 passengers on the train, including Driver C. Kelly who was returning as a passenger to his home at Mullingar.

Events on 3 p.m. Train to time of break-down

7. The 3.00 p.m. train left Westland Row on time. At Killucan and again near 46th mile Box the engine of the locomotive stopped but was restarted. Passing 46th mile Box the train was travelling very slowly and Driver Geraghty told the signaller (John Shanley) that he would require assistance at Mullingar. After leaving 46th mile Box the engine stopped again and would not re-start and the train stopped with the locomotive about 40 yards on the Dublin side of the 47 1/2 mile post at about 4.13 p.m.

Events when Train Stopped

8. When the train stopped the engine was examined by Drivers Geraghty and Walsh and it was found that a water joint had burst. This could not be repaired on the spot. About 12 minutes after the train stopped, Driver Geraghty sent Porter Killian with the train staff to Mullingar to report the incident and obtain assistance. The evidence of what took place during the interval between the stopping of the train and the sending of Killian to Mullingar was confusing and conflicting. According to Driver Geraghty, he remained on the locomotive with Messrs. Walsh and Killian, examining the engine for about 10 minutes. He then sent Killian to Mullingar, 3 1/2 miles away, with the staff to get a pilot engine to bring the train to Mullingar. About 5 minutes after Killian left, Geraghty got down onto the permanent way and met Guard O'Neill who was just then coming up to the locomotive.

According to Driver Walsh, he and Driver Geraghty got down onto the permanent way 5 to 10 minutes after the train stopped, leaving Killian in the cab. They walked back along the train to meet the Guard and met a railway official in uniform, a 'traffic man'. Walsh, a stranger to the line, did not know if he was the Guard or not. The three of them had a conversation about getting assistance. The 'traffic man' suggested that assistance should be obtained from Mullingar. Walsh suggested that they should send to 46th Mile Box instead. His suggestion was not well received and Geraghty and the 'traffic man' decided to send to Mullingar. Walsh then returned to the cab, Geraghty remaining on the permanent way. Killian left the cab and joined Geraghty on the permanent way and shortly afterwards walked off towards Mullingar. According to Ticket Collector Harkins, he got out of the train soon after it stopped and went forward and met Driver Geraghty on the permanent way beside the locomotive. Driver Geraghty, who was alone, told him that he had sent Killian with the staff to Mullingar and instructed him (Harkins) to tell the Guard to take a message to 46th Mile Box. According to Guard O'Neill, he met Harkins on the permanent way and received Geraghty's message. He then went forward and spoke to Geraghty who was in the locomotive cab with Walsh.

It is impossible to reconcile the various accounts, but it is common ground that Driver Geraghty was responsible for the decision to send Killian with the staff for assistance and to send him to Mullingar rather than to the nearer 46th Mile Box, and that Guard O'Neill was not consulted.

The train was not moved from the time it stopped at about 4.13 p.m. until the collision.

Protection of the Train

9. After Guard O'Neill and Driver Geraghty had spoken to one another, O'Neill left to protect the rear of the train and to inform the signalman at 46th Mile Box of the circumstances and Driver Geraghty sent Driver Walsh forwards to protect the front of the train. O'Neill protected the rear of the train by placing one detonator on the track $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the train, one at $\frac{1}{2}$ mile and three, 10 yards apart, at $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. Walsh, on the specific instructions of Geraghty, placed 3 detonators on the line about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile ahead of the train.

When Walsh returned from placing the detonators, Geraghty took a red hand lamp, lit it and went out to the place where the detonators had been placed to wait for the relief locomotive. After he had left, Walsh switched on a red light on the front of the locomotive.

Arranging of Relief Locomotive

10. When Driver Geraghty told Signalman Shanley at 46th Mile Box that his engine was giving trouble, the latter informed Mullingar, and Athlone Locomotive Depot was immediately asked to have a locomotive ready to come to the assistance of the 3.00 p.m. train if required. When the train was overdue at Mullingar the Athlone depot was, at 4.35 p.m., asked to send the relief locomotive and it arrived at Mullingar at about

5.10 p.m. and stopped near No. 1 Cabin.

Assisting
Locomotive
preparing to
set out

11. A few minutes after 5.10 p.m. Killian arrived at No. 1 Cabin. He handed the staff from the 3 p.m. train to Signaller McDermott who returned it to him and instructed him to give it to Driver Cullinane in the assisting locomotive, A.42. Killian then entered the cab of A.42, and in reply to a question from Driver Cullinane, told the latter that the 3.00 p.m. train was stopped at the 47½ mile post. Cullinane asked him was it near Kerryman's Lodge, a local landmark, and Killian replied that it was "round about there". Kerryman's Lodge is near the 47th mile post. Cullinane asked Killian if he had put down detonators ahead of the 3. p.m. and Killian replied that he had not but he was sure that Driver Geraghty would have done so.

Journey of
Assisting
Locomotive

12. The assisting locomotive A.42 left Mullingar at 5.14 p.m. It was then dark and the weather was fine. In the cab of A.42 were the driver, Cullinane, sitting in the left hand seat, Foreman Glynn standing behind him, Molloy, the acting guard, sitting in the right hand seat and Killian standing behind him. The distance to be travelled to reach the stranded train was approximately 3 miles.

The speed of A.42 was variously estimated at between 30 and 40 mph. All four men on board heard the detonators exploding. The driver made a partial brake application after passing over the detonators but did not make a full application until just before the collision. No check in speed was felt by the passengers in the cab before the collision occurred.

The red light on the locomotive of the 3 p.m. was seen by Driver Cullinane and all persons in the cab just before or at the time that the detonators exploded.

Driver Geraghty, standing on the line near the detonators and holding a red handlamp, was not seen by anyone on the locomotive.

Collision,
Damage
and Injuries

13. The impact of the collision was severe. The two locomotives were damaged but not derailed. The van marshalled next to Locomotive A.17 was wrecked and the next two passenger coaches received some damage.

Fifteen passengers were injured. The injuries were not serious and only one passenger was detained in hospital. Injuries to railway employees were of a minor nature.

Removal of
Rear of
Train

14. It was arranged by Rail Control, Amiens Street, by telephone with Mullingar Cabin and 46th Mile Box that the undamaged portion of the train should be drawn back to 46th Mile Box and Killucan.

The 3.10 p.m. goods, N. Wall to Mullingar, reached 46th Mile Box at 6.15 p.m. The wagons were placed in a siding. Driver Cullinane with the staff reached Mullingar on foot about 6.50 p.m. A staff was then released at the 46th Mile Box end of

the section and the locomotive of the 3.10 goods entered the section at 7.05. The rear van and 3 undamaged coaches containing all the passengers were coupled to the locomotive and left the scene of the accident about 7.40, arriving at Killucan at about 8.05. A doctor and ambulance came to Killucan to attend to the injured and buses were sent there to convey the passengers to their destinations.

Removal of
Front Portion
of Train

15. A breakdown train was waiting at Mullingar to deal with the damaged front portion of the train. When the rear portion had been removed, a staff was released by 46th Mile Box to Mullingar at 7.43 and the breakdown train entered the section at 8.00 p.m. The breakdown train returned, hauling the damaged vehicles, at 10.15 p.m. The line was then inspected and re-opened to traffic at 11.05 p.m.

Examination
of Brakes on
A.42

16. The brakes on locomotive A.42 were examined at Mullingar on 6th December and were tested as fully as possible having regard to the condition of the locomotive. No defects were found except some leaks in the pipework and some bending of rods, which defects were attributable to damage sustained in the collision. There is no reason to think that the brakes were defective prior to the collision.

Medical
Assistance

17. Ticket Collector Harkins reported by telephone to the Stationmaster at Mullingar at about 6 p.m. that some persons had been injured in the collision and that medical assistance was required. The Stationmaster, Mr. Quinn, informed the hospital at Mullingar that doctors and ambulances might be required and instructed Road Freight Inspector Kenny to go to the scene of the accident in his van and, on the way, to call for a doctor and bring him there. Mr. Kenny did not call for the doctor as instructed, but requested another railway officer to give him the message. The doctor to whom this officer telephoned was not at home and no further action appears to have been taken at the time. Although the train remained at the scene of the accident, three miles from Mullingar, for more than two hours, no doctor was brought there and a doctor and ambulance were not available until the passengers arrived at Killucan, almost three hours after the accident.

Later, all the passengers were examined at Athlone by a doctor provided by C.I.E.

Attention
to
Passengers

18. It appears that the only members of the Board's staff to enter the train after the collision to see whether passengers were injured and required attention and to give them information about the occurrence were Ticket Collector Harkins, Porter Killian and Labourer Molloy. Harkins went along the train after the collision, helped to turn off steam escaping from damaged heating pipes, saw that some passengers were injured and went to 46th Mile Box to report the matter and ask for a doctor to be sent. He then returned to the train and remained with the passengers until the coaches were brought to Killucan. Killian got onto the train after the collision, told passengers what had happened, helped to deal with the steam leak and helped a passenger to attend to injured passengers. Molloy went through

the first coach after the collision, spoke to the passengers to reassure them and left when he saw that Harkins was on the train.

Guard O'Neill was returning from 46th Mile Box when the collision occurred. He met Harkins, who was then on his way to 46th Mile Box to call for a doctor, and Harkins told him that some passengers had been injured. Guard O'Neill did not himself go through the passenger part of the train after the collision but remained on the permanent way and spent some time working in the forward parcel van. He said that he did not go through the train to see the state of affairs because a passenger advised him to stay on the line to protect the train as the passengers were afraid that another collision would take place.

Road Freight Inspector Kenny, who was aware that passengers had been injured and that a doctor was required, arrived at the scene of the accident without a doctor and did not enter the passenger portion of the train to find out the state of affairs.

Rules and Regulations

19. The accident took place on a single line operated by electric train staff. The Regulation applicable to the circumstances of the accident (Regulations for Train Signalling on Single Lines; Regulation 14, clauses (a) and (i)) (1) provides that the train is to be protected in the direction of the nearer token post by the Driver and in the direction of the farther token post by the Guard. The manner of protecting the train is specified by reference to Rule 179 (2) "place detonators on the rail as laid down in Rule 179".

It was submitted on behalf of C.I.E. that the intent and meaning of Regulation 14, clause (a), is that a train obstructing a single line should be protected in each direction by detonators placed as described in Rule 179, clause (a); that is to say one detonator at $\frac{1}{4}$ mile, one detonator at $\frac{1}{2}$ mile and 3 detonators 10 yards apart not less than $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the train. It was submitted on behalf of Driver Geraghty that Rule 179 was not applicable to the circumstances of the accident because it related only to operations on double lines and placed the duty of protecting the train only on the Guard.

It is clear from the context that Rule 179 relates to the case of a train stopped on a track on which traffic normally travels in one direction only (such as one track of a double line). On a track where traffic normally travels in one direction, the rear of the train only is exposed to danger and the application of provisions of clause (a) of the Rule is limited, therefore, to the rear of the train.

On a single line, where trains may travel on the same track in either direction, the same degree of protection is necessary at both ends of a disabled train and it was no doubt the intention of the framers of Regulation 14, clause (a), to stipulate for each end of a train the type of protection set out in Rule 179, clause (a). I think that the Regulation is generally interpreted in that sense by the Railway Staff. Nevertheless, elements of doubt and confusion are introduced by the reference in the

Regulation to Rule 179. Rule 179 relates to double, whereas Regulation 14 relates to single line working and there are important differences between the two modes. Furthermore, the reference in Regulation 14 is to Rule 179 as a whole, not to clause (a) of the Rule, the clause which contains the provisions in question. Again, Rule 179, by reference to Rule 183(g), makes provision for the protection of the front of the train in the case where assistance is to be obtained from the front. Rule 183(g) provides that where an assisting engine is to be brought from the front, the train is to be protected by 3 detonators, 10 yards apart, not less than 100 yards ahead of the train. Rule 179, therefore, contains two different provisions for the protection of a train; the first is given in clause (a) and applies to the rear of the train, the second is given by reference to Rule 183(g), and applies to the front of the train.

When a train or light engine enters an obstructed section, aware of the existence of the obstruction and under caution to proceed carefully, distances for the placing of detonators of less than $\frac{1}{4}$ mile are recognised as acceptable. The provisions of Rule 183(g) have been referred to above. Rule 183(c) makes similar provisions. Regulation 14B states that when a driver takes forward portion of a train and is then to return for the remainder, detonators are to be placed not less than 100 yards ahead of the portion left behind. The Regulations for working by one engine in steam provide (Regulation 5) that a disabled train shall be protected by detonators placed not less than $\frac{1}{4}$ mile ahead.

On the above considerations I am not satisfied that the placing of detonators about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile ahead of the disabled train was in breach of the Board's Rules and Regulations as written or that it gave inadequate protection to the disabled train in relation to the assisting locomotive.

Cause
of the
accident

20. I consider that the accident was caused by the failure of James Cullinane, driver of assisting locomotive A.42, to drive carefully, keeping a good lookout, and to have his locomotive under control so that it could be stopped clear of the disabled train.

I consider that the detonators placed a quarter of a mile ahead of the train gave sufficient warning to enable the assisting locomotive to be stopped safely clear of the disabled train if it had been carefully driven.

Mr. Cullinane retired on reaching the age of 65 years in December, 1963. He had had over 44 years service with the railway, including 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ years as a driver. A medical examination made shortly after the accident indicated that his health and eyesight were good.

Porter Killian, who had accepted a special responsibility for conducting the assisting locomotive and Foreman Glynn who was also on board might have prevented the accident if they had kept a better lookout and had cautioned Driver Cullinane more effectively.

I am satisfied that Driver Geraghty was standing beside the line near the detonators holding a lighted red lamp. He was not seen by anyone on the assisting locomotive, but I think that he should have been seen by them if they had been as alert as the circumstances required.

21. Other matters, which did not contribute directly to cause the accident, require comment:-

Driver Geraghty was in breach of the Rules and Regulations in making arrangements to obtain assistance instead of waiting for the Guard to do so and in failing to bring the staff himself to the nearer token station (46th Mile Box). Mr. Geraghty said that he acted as he did in an endeavour to cause the least possible delay to the train, and it was suggested that it was within his discretion to act himself if consultation with the Guard would cause delay. Rule 187(e) was cited in support of this contention but I consider that that Rule is not applicable to the circumstances of the accident since it deals with the action to be taken in the event of failure or accident to a train in motion.

Mr. Geraghty is aged about 52 years and has had about 33 years service with the railway including 9 years as Driver.

Porter Killian, although a former member of the footplate staff, was not a proper person to bring the staff to Mullingar and to conduct the assisting locomotive.

Guard O'Neill should have been more prompt in going to consult with Driver Geraghty after the train had stopped.

General Comments

22. I consider that insufficient attention was given to the welfare of the passengers on the train by the Guard and other officers of the Board who were at the scene of the collision.

There was avoidable delay in bringing medical assistance to the injured passengers. It was fortunate in the circumstances that only two persons were in need of hospital treatment, and that their injuries were not serious.

Recommendations

23. (a) It is desirable that one person should be in charge of all operations, including the welfare of the passengers, at the scene of an accident. It appears that no one was in overall charge at the Mullingar accident.

It is recommended that arrangements be made to ensure that in future a responsible person will be designated to assume full charge of operations at the site in such cases.

(b) It is considered that the Board's Rules and Regulations relating to the action to be taken when trains are stopped on the line by failure or accident and to the protection of such trains are in need of revision and clarification and it is recommended that this work be undertaken as early as possible.

It is understood that the Board are at present engaged in a general review of the Rules and Regulations.

(c) It is recommended that the arrangements for the distribution of First Aid Kits be reviewed with the object of ensuring that passenger trains never travel without them.

(Sgd.) T.L. Hogan
Railway Inspecting Officer

References

- (1) Coras Iompair Éireann, "Regulations for Train Signalling on Double and Single Lines", January, 1952, with numerous amendments.
- (2) Great Southern Railways, "Rules for Observance by Employees", January, 1933, with numerous amendments.