R-293

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 12, 1980

Forwarded to:

Honorable John M. Sullivan
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
400 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-80-36

On November 17, 1979, Union Pacific Freight Train LAM 16, traveling westbound at about 50 mph, struck a displaced bridge at Devils Slide, Utah, and derailed. Five locomotive units, 56 train cars, and parts of the bridge were damaged or destroyed. Damage was estimated in excess of $5 million.
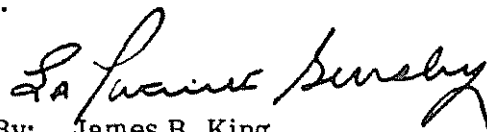
The westbound span of the bridge, which was over a county road, had been displaced about 30 inches laterally by a piece of heavy construction equipment that was too large to pass beneath the bridge. Although the bridge was displaced, the circuitry for the signal system was still intact and the preceding signal displayed a clear aspect. The engineer on westbound LAM 16 noticed the bridge displacement, but he did not have sufficient time to stop the train before entering the bridge structure.

In April 1978, a four-barge tow collided with a fixed span railroad bridge on the Southern Pacific Railroad near Berwick Bay, Louisiana. The collision knocked the span from its supporting piers into the river. Fortunately, an on-duty bridge tender alerted the railroad concerning the displaced bridge span. However, since many railroad bridges do not have tenders, the Safety Board believes that the potential exists for a catastrophic railroad accident due to a railway bridge being displaced unless some type of electro/mechanical warning mechanism is installed.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Railroad Administration:

> Study the feasibility of installing a mechanism which can be incorporated
> in the automatic block system to indicate when bridges are displaced.
> (Class II, Priority Action) (R-80-36)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

By: James B. King
Chairman

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