

**PUBLIC DOCUMENT. NO.2.
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
RAILROAD COMMISSIONER, MADE
TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AT
ITS JANUARY SESSION, 1891**

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Public Document. No.2. Annual Report of the Railroad Commissioner, Made to the General Assembly, at Its January Session, 1891 by Various

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PUBLIC DOCUMENT.] APPENDIX.

[No. 2.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

RAILROAD COMMISSIONER,

MADE TO THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

AT ITS

JANUARY SESSION, 1891.

PROVIDENCE:

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1890.

REPORT.

To the Honorable General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island:

As required by Section 6 of Chapter 758 of the Public Laws, I present the following report of the condition of the steam railroads, also the street railroads, organized or doing business under the laws of this State.

The law in relation to the time of making the annual returns of the several roads to the Commissioner, was changed by the General Assembly by act passed April 25, 1890, in order to correspond to the requirements of the United States Interstate Commerce Commission, and also to be uniform with the laws of the adjoining States.

The statistics are made up from the returns received, and are for the year ending June 30, 1890.

The list of accidents and all other matter of the report is for the year ending December 31, 1890.

The past year has been one of general prosperity to the majority of the railroads throughout the United States. A general improvement has gone on in rolling stock, road-beds, bridges, etc., while many new roads have been opened. There are, however, some roads that have been built or extended in advance of the needs of the sections through which they pass, that have hardly earned running expenses, while there are others in some of the Western States which have been crippled by too much legislative interference, particularly in fixing rates for passengers and freight. This has been carried to such an extent in some cases as to require roads to transport freight for less than its actual cost; the result has been that several roads have gone into the hands

of receivers, others have reduced their dividends very largely, and others still have passed their regular dividends. In the case of one road it showed an actual deficit (short of paying operating expenses and fixed charges) of \$450,000. This is made up by its business on other parts of its system in other States, so that instead of the people of that State being taxed for transportation, the people of other States adjoining had to pay the \$450,000 of deficit which had been caused by legislative action.

Another result of such reducing of rates by those who have but little practical knowledge of the business, has been to force the railroads to neglect more or less their road-beds, bridges and rolling stock, spending as little as possible upon these items, which has not been conducive either to the convenience, comfort or safety of the travelling public.

Rates of transportation of passengers and freight which might be reasonably remunerative in the thickly settled regions of the Eastern and Middle States are insufficient in the large and comparatively thinly settled States of the West and North-West, but many of the legislators of those States think differently.

In this State the railroads generally have had a prosperous year and are in good condition, and yet there are several small roads that have never paid a dividend to the original stockholders, and there is but little prospect that they will for some years to come.

STATISTICS.

There are in this State fifteen Railroad Corporations; six of these, however, are leased to or operated by other corporations. The capital stock is \$49,269,560. Miles of track, 269. They own 503 locomotives, 922 passenger train cars and 11,872 freight cars. These figures show an increase of \$1,714,720 in capital stock, 14 locomotives, 45 freight cars, and a decrease of 49 in passenger train cars.

The funded debt of these roads amounts to \$34,225,925, floating debt \$1,433,864.35, making a total indebtedness of \$35,659,789.35; an increase of indebtedness over last report of \$70,530.25.

The number of passengers carried was 35,908,421, an increase of 1,390,591. The number of tons of merchandise transported was 8,008,853, an increase of 473,576 tons. Every road reports an increase in number of passengers carried except the New York & New England, which shows a decrease of 22,944. Four roads show a decrease in freight, viz: the Providence & Springfield, 9,125 tons; Narragansett Pier, 7,497 tons; Wood River Branch, 473 tons; Fall River, Warren & Providence, 3,736 tons.

The total receipts from all sources were \$18,916,128.77; expenditures, \$16,218,564.60; net earnings, \$2,697,564.17. Increase in receipts, \$980,657.29; in expenditures, \$729,071.66; in net earnings, \$251,586.53.

The returns made by the companies for the year ending June 30, 1890, show that 3 passengers were killed, and 3 injured; that 10 employees were killed and 12 injured; that 1 person was killed and 3 injured at grade crossings; that 15 persons were killed while walking on or crossing the track and 4 injured. These figures show an increase of 3 in passengers killed and 1 in passengers injured; the number of employees killed was the same as during the previous year, and the number injured 22 less. The number of persons killed while walking on the track was 4 less, and the number injured 2 less; at grade crossings the number killed was 3 less and the number injured 5 less.

There are five street railways; three operated by horses, one by electric motors, and one by cable. They have 77½ miles of track, with a paid up capital of \$2,122,100; they own 1,809 horses, 16 motor or grip cars and 361 other cars. This is an increase in capital stock of \$323,100; in horses, 229; in cars, 55. Their funded debt is \$59,000; floating debt, \$114,651.50; total indebtedness, \$173,651.50. The receipts were \$1,002,131.89; expenditures, \$814,433.72; net earnings, \$187,638.17. An increase in receipts of \$77,940.43; in expenditures of \$60,900.54; in net earnings of \$17,039.89. These roads all report an excess of receipts over expenditures except the Newport Street Railway Co. which shows a deficit of \$2,365.32.

The number of passengers carried was 19,562,891, an increase of 1,728,764. The Union Railroad Company of Providence shows an increase of 461,907 passengers, notwithstanding the fact that the Cable Tramway Co. was in operation for the last six months of the year and carried 778,931 passengers.

There was one passenger killed and six injured; and one person was fatally injured by attempting to cross the track in front of a grip car of the Cable Tramway Co. The small number of passengers killed or injured by these street railways which carried over nineteen and one-half millions of passengers, speaks well for the care exercised in their management.

GRADE CROSSINGS.

The returns from the several railroad companies show 234 grade crossings in the State; this is nineteen more than were reported last year, though there has not been a *single new grade crossing* established this year. The discrepancy arises from the carelessness with which some of the returns are made up, as one road this year reports seventeen more crossings than it did in its return for the previous year. When the attention of its officers was called to the discrepancy they asserted that the returns this year were right and that the mistake was in the previous returns. In addition to regular highway grade crossings there are numerous farm and private crossings, driftways, etc., which are only slightly less dangerous than highway crossings. There are far too many grade crossings; as an example, on one road, eight and one-half miles long, there are fourteen highway crossings, eight farm crossings, and one crossing to a public cemetery.

Any attempt, however, to do away with a grade crossing is at once met with opposition on the part of those who are personally accommodated by its use, or who fear that the value of their property may be injured by its abolishment.

The legislatures of many of the States have adopted measures for the gradual removal of existing grade crossings, and the prevention of

any new ones except in cases where it seems almost impossible to build the road without them.

At its last session the Legislature of Massachusetts passed "an act to promote the abolition of grade crossings," which provides among other things that whenever the authorities of a city or town or the directors of a railroad company desire to do away with a grade crossing, substituting therefor a bridge, a commission of three persons shall be appointed by the superior court who shall examine into the case and if said commission shall decide that the proposed alterations "are necessary for the security and convenience of the public, it shall prescribe the manner and limits within which such alterations shall be made, and shall determine which party shall do the work, or shall apportion the work to be done between the railroad companies and the city or town. The railroad companies shall pay sixty-five per centum of the total cost of the alterations, including in such cost the cost of the hearing and the compensation of the commissioners and auditors for their services, and all damages; and the said commission shall apportion the remaining thirty-five per centum of said cost between the Commonwealth and the city or town in which the crossings are situated; *provided, however,* that not more than ten per centum of such cost shall be apportioned to such city or town; *provided, further,* that the Commonwealth shall not be charged any part of the expenses of abolishing grade crossings which are established after the passage of this act."

The act further provides that the amount to be paid by the Commonwealth shall not exceed *five hundred thousand dollars* in any one year, and the total amount appropriated shall not exceed *five million dollars*.

The State of Connecticut some seven years ago passed an act forbidding any railroad to locate or construct a railroad across any highway, turnpike or street, at grade, except by the direction of the railroad commissioners, and they are not to give such direction except for special reasons to be placed upon their records. It also provided that no new highway or new portion of a highway should be constructed across a railroad at grade, but should pass over or under the same.

One-half the expense of constructing said crossing to be borne by the railroad company and one-half by the town, city or borough which constructs such highway or portion of a highway.

At its last session it passed an act providing for the gradual doing away of existing grade crossings. The first two sections of this act are as follows :

Sec. 1. The selectmen of any town, the mayor and common council of any city, the warden and burgesses of any borough within which a highway crosses or is crossed by a railroad, or the directors of any railroad company whose road crosses or is crossed by a highway, may bring their petition in writing to the Railroad Commissioners, therein alleging that public safety requires an alteration in such crossing, its approaches, the method of crossing, the location of the highway or crossing, the closing of a highway crossing and the substitution of another therefor, not at grade, or the removal of obstructions to the sight at such crossing, and praying that the same may be ordered ; whereupon the Railroad Commissioners shall appoint a time and place for hearing the petition, and shall give such notice thereof as they judge reasonable to said petitioner, the railroad company, the municipalities in which such crossing is situated, and to the owners of the land adjoining such crossing and adjoining that part of the highway to be changed in grade ; and after such notice and hearing, said Commissioners shall determine what alterations, changes, or removals, if any, shall be made and by whom done ; and if the aforesaid petition is brought by the directors of any railroad company, or in behalf of any railroad company, they shall order the expense of such alterations or removals, including the damages to any person whose land is taken, and the special damages which the owner of any land adjoining the public highway shall sustain by reason of any change in the grade of such highway, in consequence of any change, alteration, or removal ordered under the authority of this act, to be paid by the railroad company owning or operating the railroad in whose behalf the petition is brought, and in case said petition is brought by the selectmen of any town, the mayor and common council of any city, or the warden and burgesses of any borough, they may, if the highway affected by said determination was in existence when the railroad was constructed over it at grade, or if the layout of the highway was changed for the benefit of the railroad after the layout of the railroad, order an amount not exceeding one quarter of the whole expense of such alteration, change, or removal, including the damages as aforesaid, to be paid by the town, city, or borough in whose behalf the petition is brought, and the