

Policy on level crossings

Level crossings

A level crossing is where a railway line is crossed by a road or right of way without the use of a tunnel or bridge. There are almost 9000 level crossings in Great Britain. Over 7000 are managed by Network Rail. The rest are located on heritage railways, metro systems and industrial railways.

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Policy on level crossings

Our policy is to work with the rail companies to improve safety on level crossings. Where appropriate we will use our powers to ensure that rail companies, and other relevant organizations, keep to their legal obligations concerning level crossings.

Our aims

- except in exceptional circumstances, no new level crossings on any railway therefore creating no new risks; and
- to make level crossing users more aware of what affects safety at level crossings.

What we will do

- we will use current laws on creating and using level crossings to support good practice; and

- We will work closely with Network Rail and other rail companies to help improve safety at level crossings, and be directly involved in working groups and committees where appropriate.

Facts & figures

The UK's level crossing safety record is among the best in the world.

The ongoing safety of level crossings ultimately depends on you, the users recognizing the hazard and obeying instructions.

- Over a third of all accidents involving a train are at a level crossing.
- 95% of the train accident risk arises from incorrect use of crossings by road vehicle drivers, such as attempting to 'beat the barriers' or run red lights.
- Less than 5% of train accidents at level crossing are as a result of a level crossing failure.
- Pedestrian fatalities and major injuries are most associated with footpath crossings and automatic half barriers (a type of level crossing).

Legislation

The law applying to level crossings has evolved over the past 160 years. Currently, laws relating to the highways, railways and health and safety apply.

Duties are placed on a number of bodies and individuals including:

- railway infrastructure managers,
- level crossing operators,
- highway and traffic authorities,
- employers,
- train and freight operators (*transport undertakings in ROGS terminology*),
- road users, and
- Other crossing users.

No single government department controls all level crossing legislation.

We have particular involvement in level crossing safety through the:

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974,
- Level Crossings Act 1983,
- Transport and Works Act 1992,
- Level Crossings Regulations 1997,
- Railways Act 2005, and
- Road Safety Act 2006.

These Acts can be found in the [UK statutory law database](#)

Consultation

The first stage of an ORR-led review of level crossing legislation was completed in December 2006. Following this consultation, the Law Commission is considering whether to review the existing legislation.

We are leading a review of the guidance on level crossings, in particular the [Railway Safety Principles and Guidance Part 2 Section E](#). The aim is to ensure that the guidance is comprehensive, relevant and reflects recent developments in good practice. The review will be undertaken in close collaboration with duty holders and other stakeholders.

Further details on current industry activity to reduce level crossing risk, including research and publicity campaigns are available on www.networkrail.co.uk and www.rssb.co.uk.

Types of level crossings

Crossings are categorized into two main groups:

- Protected (Active) Crossings - where you are warned of the approach of a train through closure of gates or barriers, or by warning lights and/or sound; and
- Unprotected (Passive) Crossings - where you are not given warning that a train is approaching.

For unprotected crossings, specific design issues must be met and instructions for safe use, with appropriate signage, must be provided at each crossing location.

Over time, the total number of level crossings has reduced. If you are interested in further detail on level crossings, please read the [Annual report on railway safety](#).

Safety performance

Safety performance analysis is conducted by the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) in their annual Level Crossings Performance Report.

Level crossing safety performance has been broadly the same for the past ten years. This is despite significant increases in road and rail traffic over the same period.

2005 was a 'typical' year. Excluding suicides and suspected suicides, nine pedestrians were killed at level crossings, the highest annual total since 2001. This figure includes two teenage girls struck and killed in the same incident at Elsenham station foot crossing as they crossed the line to board a train.

There were 17 collisions between trains and road vehicles (excluding cycles) at all forms of level crossing, including one on the 380mm gauge Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway (RHDR). Five of the collisions had fatal consequences. In four on the national network the driver of the road vehicle was killed. The RHDR incident resulted in the derailment of the train and the death of the train driver. A similar fatality occurred on this railway in 2003. In addition two cyclists were killed in separate incidents at crossings.

The incidence of reported near miss and crossing misuse is steadily increasing. In 2005 there were over 1000 incidents of misuse involving vehicles and 179 near misses, and almost 1400 misuse and 244 near miss incidents involving pedestrians.

<http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.8569>