

## National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

### **Presentation: Rail Crossings and Public Rights of Way**

Bristol Conference:

Darren Ward, Commercial Scheme Sponsor, Network Rail  
Chris Williams, Level Crossing Manager (and ex-ROW officer), Network Rail

Durham Conference:

Phil Graham, Commercial Scheme Sponsor, Network Rail

### **Summary**

Network Rail is undergoing a closure programme of level crossings for safety reasons. They experience various issues with misuse, problems with sighting distances along the railway, carelessness from members of the public (lack of attention, use of headphones). There are now spoken warnings at some locations.

Of the 6,500 level crossings 2,547 are crossed by footpaths. Level crossings represent the largest single risk (excluding suicides and trespassers). There are dedicated personnel to look after about 100 crossings each. 76% are in the passive category, meaning people have to look, listen and judge whether it is safe to cross.

Crossings can be over roads and there are many rights of way crossings. They have achieved 750 closures across the country in the last 3-4 years, with some having been bridged or taken through underpasses, and others have been diverted to existing nearby crossings. In some cases one bridge has accommodated two at-grade crossings, in order to save money. In this time, £30 million has been spent towards closing crossings and £100 million on safety improvements.

Last year they installed 34 new footbridges, with some being ramped to accommodate disabled access. This can be problematic as ramps are shallow and can take up space that's often not available.

The budget for level crossing closures for 2014-19 is £100 million.

### **Question and Answers**

Q: Do NR seek their bridges to be adopted by the local authority for future maintenance?

A: Solution is not always a bridge. Solution is site specific and decided during the negotiation phase. Responsibility for maintenance depends on a number of factors, but NR retains maintenance for structures.

Q: What about closures on community and heritage railways?

A: They help with strategy and advice, but are not involved with these lines.

Q: What is the position where the alternative route of a public footpath diversion is taken along a highway verge, which might be perceived as equally dangerous? How would a LAF engage with NR to discuss this?

A: It's all about negotiation and risk assessment. They will always try to resolve a situation by negotiation to find the optimal solution. NR will engage with relevant stakeholder groups and have to make application for closure to the highways authority who will also undertake consultation.

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*Observation: a LAF member had experience of working on the west coast mainline, and wanted to say the public usually perceive railway crossings as safe, and they don't take account of the high risks, especially the speed of approaching trains.*

Q: What is NRs policy on consulting with the local community and handling customer relations?

A: There are teams of staff that support the closure process in each area. The team will find the best way to engage with the community, to get them on board with the scheme and foster good relationships.

Q: How many cases a year involve crossings with rights of way?

A: No data available on this.

Q: Are the bridges suitable for mobility scooter users?

A: If they have a ramp and are DDA compliant

Q: Are NR able to compensate landowners for diverting rights of way across their land to the nearest crossing point, for example, to a cattle creep or underpass that does not hold public rights?

A: Yes, providing there is a proven need to take the public off the line, money can be made available to compensate landowners.

*Observation: A horse rider likes the phone system at level crossings – thinks these work well. Reassured that they won't be got rid of where effective.*

Q: How flexible would NR be in allowing a ROW within the fences of NR's property?

A: Yes flexible, and has happened at Tallington.

Q: Will faster lines (e.g. HS2) increase the distance people must go to level crossings?

A: HS2 will not have any level crossings, because they cannot be where a train exceeds 125mph

Q: What are the prospects of reinstating paths if they have been closed due to level crossings?

A: Prospects good if a level crossing is being replaced, but not if the closure was in the past – the safety budget would not be eligible.

Q: The LAF was involved with the Doncaster underpass – will LAFs always be consulted in such instances?

A: Yes

Q: As deaths are very low on level crossings, how is it possible to come up with predictive figures as statistically very small?

A: Partly by using a complicated formula, and partly because near misses are counted. Questioner concerned that removal of risk elsewhere might make more risk, which would be hard to analyse due to low figures.

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*Observation: Concern that barriers which inconvenience the public might make people more reckless.*

*Observation: Agreed that the LAF profile needs to be raised, but added that LAFs were now on Network Rail's radar.*