



OFFICE OF RAIL REGULATION

## Policy on level crossings

### Introduction

There are approximately 9000 level crossings in Great Britain.

Each year people die in accidents involving trains at level crossings.

Around 7700 level crossings are on the national rail network. These present the biggest risk of train accidents that could kill passengers.

Despite this, the record of safety at level crossings in Great Britain is one of the best in Europe.

### We recognise the following

- There are particular problems for rail companies because they cannot control the actions of drivers and pedestrians at level crossings.
- Rail companies, highway authorities and others need to co-operate to manage safety at crossings.

### What we believe

- Except in exceptional circumstances, there should be no new level crossings on any railway.
- It is not effective or efficient for only rail companies to be responsible for managing safety at level crossings.
- Decisions about level crossings must involve rail companies, highway authorities and other relevant organisations as early on as possible.
- Everyone whose actions may affect level crossings must be more aware of what affects safety at level crossings.
- Relevant authorities must recognise the wider benefits that safety improvements at level crossings (for example, replacing them with bridges) can bring about, particularly for road users. If wider benefits can be achieved, the appropriate funding bodies should contribute to the cost of safety improvements.

### What we expect from rail companies

- Keep to all legal requirements that apply to level crossings.
- Adopt a consistent approach, based on risk, to inspecting and assessing level crossings, and reviewing the safety measures in place.
- Have effective procedures for tackling safety risks at level crossings.
- Look for more effective and efficient ways of managing safety at level crossings, including using new technologies, drawing on good practice from other countries and, where appropriate, carrying out or contributing to relevant research.



- Take all reasonable opportunities to remove or replace existing level crossings or make them safer.
- Take account of the effect safety measures have on those who use level crossings, and those who live or work in properties alongside them, when considering new safety measures or changes to existing arrangements.
- Consult those affected by proposals for improvements (for example, diverting rights of way or replacing paths with bridges).
- Develop effective links with all agencies, organisations and other bodies who affect or are affected by the use of level crossings, and explore with them a wide range of strategies for managing safety.

## **What we will do**

### **Produce a strategy**

- We will use current laws on creating and using level crossings to support good practice.
- We will work closely with rail companies to help improve safety at level crossings, and be directly involved in working groups and committees where appropriate.
- We will encourage rail companies to lead research into safety at level crossings and, where appropriate, arrange our own research. If we arrange our own research, we will make the results of it available to the public.
- We will try to make sure that financial incentives we create do not put rail companies off taking action to improve safety at level crossings.
- Where appropriate, we will use our powers to make sure rail companies and other relevant organisations keep to their legal obligations concerning level crossings.

### **Develop ways of applying the strategy**

- We will try to make sure any guidance on managing safety at level crossings is appropriate and reflects current good practice.
- We will work with other government departments to simplify the law on level crossings and make it more accessible.
- We will target our inspections at those level crossings with the highest safety risk and the greatest opportunity for improvement.
- We will work with other government departments to try to make sure that those who increase risk at level crossings contribute to the costs of improving safety.
- We will try to influence and support the agencies, authorities and other bodies whose actions and decisions affect the use of level crossings to make sure they work effectively with rail companies in maintaining or improving safety at level crossings.
- We will work with other agencies to identify how they can best use their powers to encourage people to use level crossings safely.

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## Policy on level crossings

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Great Britain's level crossing safety record is among the best in the world, but every incident has the potential for significant human and economic loss. Level crossings are the single biggest source of railway catastrophic risk, but overall the risks are well managed.

We seek to influence dutyholders and others to reduce risk at Britain's level crossings. We do this through a variety of means ranging from advice to formal enforcement action. We check that preventive and protective measures are implemented in accordance with the principles of prevention set out in the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Risk control should, where practicable, be achieved through the elimination of level crossings in favour of bridges, underpasses or diversions. Where elimination is not possible, we aim to ensure that duty holders reduce risk so far as is reasonably practicable and in accordance with the principles of protection.

As the safety regulator for Britain's railways, our role is to provide clear advice and enforce relevant legislation – including that which relates to level crossings. We also exercise delegated powers of the Secretary of State in making level crossing orders under the Level Crossings Act 1983.

We believe that it is neither effective nor efficient for only rail companies to be responsible for managing safety at level crossings. Decisions about level crossings should involve rail companies, traffic authorities and other relevant organisations as early on as possible.

Relevant authorities should recognise the wider benefits that safety improvements at level crossings (for example, replacing them with bridges) can bring about, particularly for road users. If wider benefits can be achieved, the appropriate funding bodies should agree on how the costs of making safety improvements will be met.

We are also committed to helping people understand the importance of the safe use of level crossings ([PDF 354 Kb](#)).

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### Our aims

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- other than 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.

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### What we will do

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- 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.

*Last updated: June 2012*

### **Related documents**

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Automatic Open Level Crossings Locally Monitored (AOCLs) - ORR statement [\(PDF 26 Kb\)](#).

Policy on level crossings [\(PDF 47 Kb\)](#).

Using level crossings safely [\(PDF 354 Kb\)](#).

Level crossings: A guide for managers, designers and operators - December 2011 [\(PDF 3479 Kb\)](#).