

## **European Road Safety Action Programme (ERSAP) 2011-2020**

### **A view from the Rail Safety and Standards Board in Great Britain - Road Safety at the railway interface**

The Rail Safety and Standard Board (RSSB) facilitates the National Road-Rail Interface Safety Group, which monitors safety at level crossings, bridge strikes (where motor vehicles, usually buses or tall lorries, strike the pillars or deck of a rail-over-road bridge) and other vehicle incursions onto the railways.

RSSB is a not-for-profit company owned by major railway industry stakeholders in Great Britain. The company is governed by its members, a board and an advisory committee.

The primary objective of RSSB is to facilitate the railway industry's work to achieve continuous improvement in the health and safety performance of the railways in Great Britain, and thus to facilitate the reduction of risk to passengers, employees and the affected public, including, where necessary, road vehicle occupants and pedestrians.

RSSB would like to ensure that the European Road Safety Action Programme includes consideration of safety at the interface between roads and the railway, and level crossings in particular.

There were 2,538 people killed on the roads of Great Britain in 2008. This is 30% lower than the average for 1994-8, which is the baseline for Government reduction targets. However the number of fatalities at level crossings has not reduced in the same way. There was an average of 9.25 fatalities at crossings for the years 1994-8, compared to 12 in 2007 and 15 in 2008.

13 pedestrians died at level crossings in Britain during 2008. This is the highest number of pedestrian fatalities since 1997.

There were two accidental fatalities involving road vehicle occupants at level crossings, during 2008, in separate incidents. This is comparable with levels seen in recent years.

There have been 12 fatalities up to the end of October during 2009. These were seven pedestrians and five road vehicle occupants (in three separate accidents). Six of these deaths have occurred at public road crossings, with the others on footpaths or private land.

Most level crossing fatalities occur on passive crossings, where the user is responsible for ensuring it is safe to cross. This risk is largely to the public users of the crossings, both pedestrians and road vehicle occupants. This is a consequence of their own behaviour, with most accidents happening because of crossing user error. The risk is dominated by collisions between trains and road vehicles at level crossings in Britain. There were 19 such collisions in 2008 and there have been 12 collisions in the first ten months of 2009.

All the figures in this note exclude suicides, but there have been an additional 25 fatalities as a result of suicide or suspected suicide at level crossings in Britain in the first ten months of this year, compared to an average of 18 per year over the last ten years.

There are almost 7,000 level crossings on the mainline railway of Britain, comprising many different types. They are owned and managed by Network Rail, the rail infrastructure manager. Network Rail's 'Don't Run the Risk' awareness campaign has addressed this by promoting level crossing safety in 2008 and 2009. The campaign has used television, radio and other media to raise awareness of the risks to pedestrians and motor vehicle occupants at level crossings. But the truth is that road-user behaviour is the main cause of such accidents, and is an area where the railway has limited control.

As well as the 'Don't Run the Risk' campaign, Network Rail has regular meetings with local highway authorities, conducts enforcement campaigns at specific level crossings, accompanied by the British Transport Police, and writes annually to people who are authorised to use private level crossings, reminding them of their safety responsibilities.

RSSB conducts research into safety at the road-rail interface. This covers the causes of misuse, the effectiveness of existing and new technologies in reducing risk, and ways of improving the management of level crossings, including improved risk profiling. The scope of this research covers footpath crossings, station crossings and road vehicle crossings. It includes technical, human factors and economic issues that affect the railway and roads at level crossings. The research topic is also being extended to cover the causes and incidence of bridge strikes, where motor vehicles (usually buses or tall lorries) strike the pillars or deck of a rail-over-road bridge, and other vehicle incursions onto the railways.

RSSB has recently signed the European Road Safety Charter with a strong commitment to contribute to the reduction of accidents and fatalities occurring at level crossings.

Despite all these actions, the number of fatalities at level crossings remains stubbornly flat and therefore becomes a greater percentage of the total road fatalities as those totals fall, year by year.

When these figures are extrapolated across all EU states, it is seen that several hundred people die each year in Europe in accidents involving road vehicles and pedestrians being hit by trains at level crossings. This is equal to around 2% of road deaths in Europe with big differences between countries. 95% of these fatalities are caused by misuse of crossings by the victims who access the crossings from roads. Furthermore there is the potential for a catastrophic accident resulting in many fatalities and serious injuries, some on-board the train, if a car or bus is involved. This happened at Ufton (UK) in 2004, when six people onboard a train were killed (including the train driver) and a motorist, who committed suicide at the crossing.

It is for all these reasons that RSSB feels it is important that the European Road Safety Action Programme should ensure that those who manage and control the road infrastructure should work with the railway infrastructure manager, to improve safety at the road-rail interface and drive down fatalities and injuries. The programme should include targets, initiatives and campaigns aimed at those who access level crossings by public roads and rights of way.

Preventing level crossing accidents should be considered a shared responsibility between several players such as road authorities, railways, and land use planning departments, under the road safety action programme. Improvement of safety at level crossings requires a community approach involving all these players to achieve a common objective.

I would be happy to discuss this in more detail with the Road Safety Action Programme team if you wish.

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