

Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

Transport Select Committee inquiry into safety at level crossings

Living Streets' response, September 2013

We are the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk. We work with professionals and politicians to make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces.

We started life in 1929 as the Pedestrians Association and have been the national voice for pedestrians throughout our history. In the early years, our campaigning led to the introduction of the driving test, pedestrian crossings and 30 mph speed limits. Since then our ambition has grown. Today we influence decision makers nationally and locally, run successful projects to encourage people to walk and provide specialist consultancy services to help reduce congestion and carbon emissions, improve public health, and make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces.

Living Streets believes that pedestrians should be able to get around on foot in a safe, direct way, without conflict with cars and bicycles.

Level crossings represent a growing proportion of all railway deaths. According to a review of fatal accidents at level crossings in Great Britain between 1946 and 2009, by 2009 fatalities at levels crossings represented 46% of all railway fatalities. Therefore, improving safety at level crossings should be one of the top safety priorities for the rail budget.

We are concerned that the number of near misses with non-vehicle users has increased since 2007/8 and would urge National Rail to create a vision zero approach to take effective steps to ensure that the safety at level crossings improves.¹

We think that the design of level crossings needs to be consistent to ensure that members of the public understand how to use them safely. This could help reduce the risk of them misusing them and the potential occurrence of a collision.

We urge National Rail to continue to educate the public about how to use level crossings safely to reduce the risk of collisions between trains and all road users. We are aware that 10% of level crossings risk is due to equipment failure, reduced visibility or railway operator error.² It's important to address each of these factors with effective measures to adequately reduce the level of risk.

Living Streets recommends that level crossings provide enough space for a pedestrian only footway to ensure their safety once they and other road users are allowed to pass through. We recommend a minimum of 1.5m width to enable pedestrians to use the footway comfortably but the provision should take into account pedestrian flow.

¹ Level crossing mis-use: <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/aspx/4817.aspx>

² Our Approach to Managing Level Crossing Safety, Network Rail

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Living Streets maintains that railways, highways authorities, and the police need to work closely together to ensure a consistent and integrated approach to level crossing safety, both in terms of national policy and local policy and implementation at level crossing sites.

Now that some responsibility for public health has been transferred to local authorities, in England, there should also be opportunities for closer working with public health services. In fact, good level crossings can help ensure that people on foot can access direct routes to where they want to go encouraging them to walk. Keeping level crossings open can help reduce the chance of community severance and therefore we think Network Rail should keep level crossings open where there is clear demand for them.

Ensuring that good walking routes exist can help alleviate the significant economic and societal costs related to poor health such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, obesity and mental health. The costs of which to the UK economy were: £29 billion from Cardiovascular disease in care costs and lost productivity³; £5 billion from obesity⁴ and £106 billion in 2009/2010 in care costs, lost productivity and reductions in quality of life resulting from mental health problems⁵.

For more details please contact:

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³ Luengo-Fernández, R., Leal, J., Gray, A., Petersen, S., Rayner, M. 2006. Cost of cardiovascular diseases in the United Kingdom. *Heart* 2006;92:1384–1389.

⁴ NHS website accessed 11 October 2012 <http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/04/obesityfacts/>

⁵ Centre for Mental Health. 2010. The economic and social cost of mental health problems in 2009/10. The Centre for Mental Health, available at http://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/pdfs/Economic_and_social_costs_2010.pdf.