

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday, 26th January, 2017.

Present: Cllr David Wilburn(Chair), Cllr Paul Rowling(Vice-Chair), Cllr Gillian Corr (Sub Cllr Ken Dixon), Cllr Allan Mitchell, Cllr Stephen Parry, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Julia Whitehill, Cllr Barry Woodhouse

Officers: Steven Hume (Community Safety), Joanne Roberts (EGDS), Judith Trainer, Jenna McDonald (DCE)

Also in attendance: Sgt Tim Woolven, Insp Richard Price (British Transport Police), David Guy, James Perkins (Network Rail),

Apologies: Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley,

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Monitoring Update

Members gave consideration to the Action Plan for the River Tees Crossing Infrastructure.

AGREED that the Action Plan be noted.

3 Scrutiny Review of Safety at Railway Crossing Points

Members received a report on the Scrutiny Review of Safety at Railway Crossing Points.

Representatives from Network Rail (NR) and British Transport Police (BTP) attended the meeting to provide answers to the Committees questions as follows:

- Members asked whether the current safety measures at level crossings were adequate? and how should they be improved.

Network Rail responded as follows:

In response to the issues raised by stakeholders about needing a focal point as a contact and in order to drive up improvements, safety managers were introduced 3 ½ years ago

Network Rail's strapline was "the safest crossing is a closed crossing". Although it was not always possible to achieve this, crossings were upgraded where possible

In Stockton, all 16 level crossings were at a satisfactory standard and comprised:

11 Public Rights of Way (10 footpaths and 1 bridleway)
5 Highway crossings

Management of level crossings was based on risk and inspection frequency ranged from 1 ¼ to 3 ¼ years

Level crossings were given a score for collective and individual risk. Collective risk was on a scale of 1 – 13 and individual risk was on a scale of A – M making A1 the highest risk score. No level crossings in Stockton had this risk score

Asset inspections were carried out in partnership with highway officers as some parts of the level crossing were maintained by the highway authority

The Committee were keen to understand what cost-effective measures could be introduced to replace level crossings and improve their safety?

Network Rail responded as follows:

Level crossings were an expensive asset; to close a highway level crossing would cost in the region of £3 – 4 million

Risk was assessed based on census data, road speeds and the number and frequency of trains

All highway crossings were controlled by a signaller although a number were controlled by CCTV and a remote signaller

Network Rail planned to close all signal boxes and move to central operating centre

All but one of the highway level crossings were scheduled to be upgraded to a manually controlled barrier crossing. This type of crossing would provide the highest protection being a full barrier operated crossing, protected by signals. No one could be trapped in this type of crossing and therefore it had the lowest risk.

Automatic half barriers presented a higher risk and red light enforcement cameras had been installed in other parts of the country. The cameras could trigger automatic penalty notices with offenders having to attend a level crossing improvement course or pay a fine. The upgrade planned to the Stockton highway level crossings would mean that no one could commit this type of offence.

Members commented that there had been incidents of motorists driving through half barriers. Representatives attending the meeting reported that there had been no recorded reports of misuse of this type and that reports would usually come from train drivers as the barriers at this type of crossing would only come down just before the train crossed the road

Transport Police representatives commented that they were not aware of any reports of pedestrians being run down on the line. There had been one fatality in the last 4 years which was a suicide and reports of trespass were minimal

With regard to suicide, Network Rail worked closely with the Samaritans but the figures from suicide were disregarded for reporting purposes

Members commented that they were aware of youths being pulled away from railway lines by residents and a case of a pedestrian being “clipped” by a train. Transport Police confirmed that they had received no reports and stressed the need for the public to report such incidents and the importance of getting this message out to the general public. They stressed that if children were sighted on a railway line, a 999 call should be made. The more intelligence received on misuse would strengthen the case for an upgrade. The Transport Police also carried out school liaison in areas where there was known to be problem

Network Rail also ran education programmes in high risk areas

Better intelligence and reporting of issues and incidents would enable Network Rail to build a better risk profile and better inform the need to upgrade any crossings. The Chair commented that Members could be encouraged to put contact numbers in ward newsletters and the Council could play a role in raising awareness

- Members asked what factors affected the risk at level crossings?

Network Rail responded that there were a range of environmental factors including usage, type of user (i.e. children and vulnerable people) train numbers, line speed and type of crossing. All of the information was fed into an algorithm which generated a risk score and informed judgements on the need to make improvements

The Committee asked what actions by level crossing users endangered them and what could be done to mitigate this?

In response, Network Rail advised that problems tended to occur when users were distracted, for example, headphones were a modern risk.

- It was asked how Network Rail and British Transport Police worked in partnership to reduce rail crossing risk?

Both Network Rail and Transport Police representatives agreed that they were working together effectively. For example, they had a shared resource in a red light enforcement vehicle which issued auto prosecutions; they had worked on joint awareness campaigns such as Operation Look; attended schools together and shared data each month

- Members asked whether there were any improvements that could be achieved when working in partnership with local Highway Authorities.

Network Rail felt that the Highway Authority should classify roads for maintenance purposes giving a higher priority to those roads with a level crossing. For example, vegetation by the level crossing at Cowpen Lane caused obstruction; a higher priority would mean more regular maintenance and reduce risk

- Representatives were asked whether there were any examples of best practice they had with other local authorities that would benefit the way Network Rail and Stockton Borough Council worked together?

Network Rail commented that in other parts of the country a Road Rail Partnership had proven to be an effective way to share intelligence with membership drawn from Network Rail, Highway officers, Planning officers and Public Rights of Way Officers to discuss general concerns and provide an interface between Network Rail and Highways. Given the low number of railway crossings in Stockton, a partnership of this type could be in conjunction with other local authorities

The Traffic and Network Safety Manager commented that the Council would welcome an enhanced relationship and in respect of schools liaison, the Council's road safety officer could have a role attending schools where the lower risk meant that police engagement would not take place. She also commented that the Council's Communications Department could help to get messages out through social media

The Community Safety Manager also welcomed the opportunity to share more information and advised on the work of the community safety team in schools with initiatives such as Crucial Crew.

In response to further questions. The following points were noted;

The Transport Police advised that their staffing had not been reduced locally and that there were 10 PCs working from 7am to midnight each day. Out of hours cover was provided from Newcastle

Network Rail advised that although national awareness campaigns were run, TV ads were very expensive and it was hard to judge the impact of these. As a result awareness campaigns tended to have a local focus. In addition, as Network Rail were now part of the Government and there were more constraints on funding for campaigns

Members requested a contact number for the British Transport Police to include in Ward Newsletters and aid in the reporting of issues and concerns

Members also requested local data on level crossings and any incidents

AGREED that:

1. The information be noted.
2. Members be provided with a contact number for the British Transport Police to include in Ward Newsletters and aid in the reporting of issues and concerns.
3. Members be provided with local data on level crossings and any incidents at a future meeting.

4 Work Programme

Consideration was given to the work programme 2016/17.

AGREED that the work programme be noted.

5 Chair's Update

The Committee expressed its unanimous thanks to the current Scrutiny Officer of the Crime Disorder Select Committee - Graham Birtle who was due to leave SBC. Members passed on best wishes to Graham for the future.