Reducing risk at level crossings

How our level crossing risk reduction programme is improving safety on the network

In 2010 we embarked on a landmark level crossing risk reduction programme. The objective of the programme is to close and upgrade crossings across the network, which will improve safety for everyone and reduce the risk that level crossings present to the national rail network.

Since the start of the programme we have closed more than 1,100 crossings and dozens more have been improved or are being upgraded. This programme will continue until 31 March 2019.

Why do we close level crossings?

Level crossings were part of a network built around 180 years ago, when there were fewer and slower trains, no cars and the pace of life was much slower. If you were to build a railway today it would not have any level crossings. For example, HS1 does not have any level crossings.

We believe the most effective way of reducing level crossing risk is to eliminate the crossing completely by closing it. Where we cannot do this we will look at options to make the crossing safer.

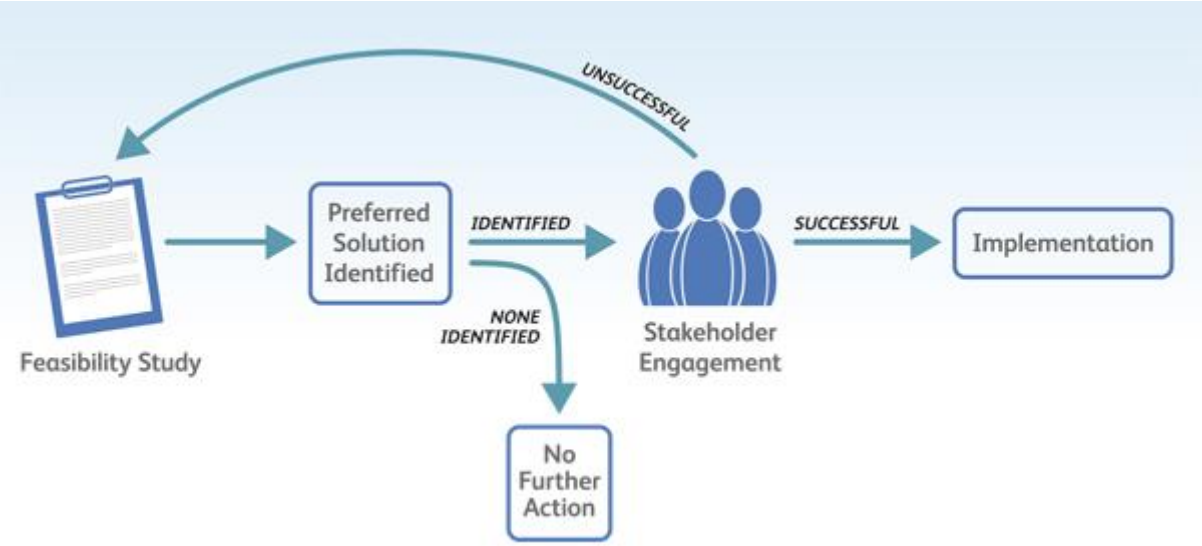
How do we decide which crossings to close?

We complete risk assessments of our level crossings at regular intervals. The assessments consider a number of important factors, such as the crossing's location, how much traffic (rail, road and pedestrian) it receives, and the crossing's history of near misses and accidents. The assessments' findings are used to inform our level crossing management strategy.

We aim to achieve the maximum possible reduction in risk of accidents at level crossings. The Level Crossing Risk Reduction Fund is an enabler for the work associated with meeting this objective, prioritising the permanent closure of level crossings but also deploying innovative technology to achieve risk reduction where closure is not possible.

Our route teams may also identify level crossings suitable for closure as part of bigger investment and upgrade schemes, or based on their knowledge of the local area, and working with local communities.

The flow chart outlines how we work with local stakeholders to decide which crossings can be closed:



Stage 1: feasibility

We assess the feasibility of closing the crossing. We consider a number of factors, including:

- crossing usage and the crossing users' needs
- Diversity Impact Assessments
- the risk to users at the crossing (this includes looking at frequency of trains, and sighting distances)
- the requirements of the operational railway
- the crossing's legal status – whether it is a private or public right of way
- land ownership and availability
- the crossing's history of number of near misses and incidents
- the cost of closure.

If closure is found to be a viable option, these factors are used to inform the development of a preferred closure methodology. This could include a diversion, stepped footbridge, ramped footbridge, bridge and lifts or an underpass.

At this point we may also decide that closure of the crossing is not a viable option.

Stage 2: engagement

We present the crossing closure proposal to stakeholders for feedback and comment.

If the crossing is a private right of way, we engage directly with the private user(s).

If the crossing is a public right of way, we consult through the local authority, as well as directly with any private land owners and identified crossing user groups.

The local authority will display a sign at the level crossing giving notice of a change to the right of way, and an advert highlighting the change will be placed in a local newspaper that covers the crossing's area. After four weeks the change to the right of way is applied. This is communicated

through a further advert in the local newspaper and an updated sign at the level crossing. Any objections that are received during the period of notice will be referred to the planning inspectorate for determination.

Stage 3: implementation

Following engagement, we progress the endorsed option for crossing closure and, where appropriate, create an alternative route for users to cross the railway.

Example: Hunwicks level crossing, Colchester

July 2014

We sent an email outlining the proposed extinguishment of rights at Hunwicks public footpath level crossing to a list of stakeholder groups, as identified by Essex County Council. This included:

- Local Access Forum
- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Sustrans
- Essex Bridleways Association
- Ramblers Association
- Auto-Cycle Union

No objections were received in response to our email.

We also sent letters to neighbouring landowners, one of whom responded in support.

August 2014

Formal application for extinguishment of rights was submitted to Essex County Council.

October 2014

Essex County Council consulted the same stakeholder groups, plus local councillors and the district council.

Sustrans lodged an objection on this occasion.

A meeting was arranged to discuss Sustrans' views and to explain our proposal in greater detail.

Following discussion, Sustrans agreed to withdraw their objection. Their views were noted and will be incorporated into future level crossing closure proposals.

19 December 2014

Essex County Council made the extinguishment order. This was advertised in the local paper and signs were displayed on site on 15 January 2015. A Public Notice explained that any objections should be submitted before 12 February 2015.

No objections were received.

16 February 2015

The order was confirmed, establishing the definitive date on which legal closure would occur.

Planned level crossing closures

View a list of level crossing closures (November 2017) at completion, implementation or engagement stage. To get in touch please visit our contact us page.

More information

- Level crossings

- Level crossing safety and user guides
- Our safety campaigns
- Safety performance