19 December 2006

Rail Industry Group Recommends Changes affecting Train Horns

In response to continued public concern at the levels of train horn noise, the rail industry Train Horns Steering Group has reviewed the arrangements for the use and type of train horns and has today published its recommendations for the rail industry to consider.

The main recommendations are:

- Introduce a night time quiet period from 2300hrs to 0700hrs, except for when drivers see people on the track or other emergencies
- Where possible, use only the ‘low tone’ at ‘whistle boards’
- For all new trains capable of speeds up to 160kph or when changing their horns, establish a lower minimum sound pressure level of 101dB, and a maximum of 106dB
- Over time, and taking account of the changes listed above, further reduce the number of whistle boards through, crossing closures, local review, challenging some of the current criteria, and adopting a new level crossing risk model
- Review and eradicate all other routine requirements to sound train horns
- The industry will continue to develop a specification for possible alternative technologies

The first three recommendations have already entered the industry rule change process and subject to consultation (both industry and public) could be implemented as standards in April 2007. In order to introduce the night time quiet period the industry will mount a communication campaign and Network Rail will, in parallel, initiate a prioritised programme of risk
assessments to identify those crossings which may have a greater reliance on whistle boards at night and, if and where appropriate, put in place alternative risk controls.

Anson Jack of RSSB, Chairman of the Train Horns Steering Group said ‘For some years those people living near to railway whistle boards have had to put up with noise levels that affect their lives. This review acknowledged that the rail industry should take proper account of the impact of its activities on neighbours, and established a means to do so. I believe that the implementation of the review findings, which the steering group has recommended to the industry, will make a significant difference to the lives of those affected.

The review has been conducted in an objective way overseen by members of the industry and the Office of Rail Regulation, using site surveys and observations by experts in their respective fields. Cross-industry cooperation enabled sharing of data and the development of a consensus as to the way forward. The report and recommendations are intended to support the industry in using its judgement as to the most appropriate way forward.

The introduction of a night time quiet period and the use of the low tone should remove many of the concerns of the public and establish an appropriate balance between the safety of crossing users and the health of neighbours of the railway.’

John Armitt, Network Rail Chief Executive, said: “We are delighted to have been able to respond to the concerns of our lineside neighbours who were being affected by noise from train horns. The industry has carefully considered the issue, carried out detailed and thorough analysis and risk assessments, and has been able to find positive solutions.”
Steve Bence, Director Operations Support at the Association of Train Operating Companies commented "Train Operators welcome these recommendations and will consider them very carefully. Train operators recognise that the recommendations attempt to strike a new balance between the essential requirements of safety on the railway and the needs of local residents and neighbours".

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For further information please contact

Rail Safety and Standards Board press office, on 020 7904 7524/5 or visit the website on www.rssb.co.uk
Network Rail press office on 020 7557 8292/3
Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) press office on 020 7841 8020

Notes to editors:

Train horns have been used for almost the life of the railway industry to give warning of the approach of a train. Following the introduction of new rolling stock in the early years of this decade, public complaints about the level of noise started on a large scale. A review in 2004/5 made some changes, which took away the need to sound horns at a number of locations (principally tunnels) but did not resolve the problem for those living near to whistle boards. Whistle Boards are placed near footpath crossings where the track is curved and there is potentially insufficient time for someone crossing on foot to see a train approaching. There are approximately 7000 crossings of all sorts over the national railway network and around 1200 of these currently have whistle boards on both sides.

A cross-industry Train Horn Steering Group, was established early in 2006 to undertake an extensive review, During the review the industry:

- Developed a better understanding of the risks to users of footpaths and user worked crossings.
- Developed a better understanding of the impact of noise to railway neighbours
• Found that the impact on neighbours health from exposure to train horn noise can significantly outweigh the safety benefit of sounding horns – thus justifying the recommendation of a night time quiet period
• Developed a specification to match the sound level of the horns on the older, withdrawn trains – which our neighbours have told us was acceptable
• Begun developing a new specification that would characterise a train horn using the latest technology

The detailed recommendations are available on the RSSB website at www.rssb.co.uk/comrelations.asp

In reaching its conclusions and recommendations, the steering group took account of reports into the impact on neighbours, by Faulkland Associates, to measure sound levels, by Spectrum, and into the risks at crossings, by AD Little. Copies of their reports can be accessed via the RSSB website on.

In addition, reports into the characteristics of train horns and the sound levels of older rolling stock (by Delta Rail) and a model to establish how to take appropriate account of the impact on neighbours, developed by RSSB, was also used. These reports are being finalised and summaries of the findings will be made available on the RSSB web site in due course.