

Communication from Train Horns Steering Group

Issue 5

October 4 2006

The cross industry Train Horns Steering Group met on 13 September 2006 to review progress and agree further action.

1. Progress since fourth steering group in July

- Met with an All party group of MPs on 12 July 2006
- All work streams involving external work are now underway with contracts let.
- A meeting of two representatives of the Steering Group (Anson Jack of RSSB and Derek Crook of Network Rail) with the Noise Abatement Society took place on 3 August under the Chairmanship of the Office of Rail Regulation. At the meeting progress was reviewed and issues relating to communication and the responsiveness of the industry to public complaints were raised. The Noise Abatement made several suggestions that were shared with the Steering Group.
- RSSB reported that although one contract was let 4 weeks late (relating to developing the technical specification for a Train Horn) the programme of work published in June is broadly on schedule – these workstreams are all in support of the evaluation of the following options
 - Broadband Horns
 - Reducing level of sound of train horns
 - Night time ‘ban’
 - Reducing the number of locations horns are sounded (Whistle Boards)
- Network Rail have continued with their programme to review particular problem areas and a table that summarises the progress will be published shortly

2 Commentary on progress with the consideration of potential national solutions

- Further to the meeting with the NAS, the Steering Group agreed to support the production of a document, from the industry, giving details of the industry’s respective responsibilities and how to contact the industry, depending on the nature of the issue. This document could be made available on the NAS Web Site – if that was agreeable to the NAS

- At the NAS meeting in August, the industry was asked if it had considered the use of temporary sound barriers for those locations where the local surveys did not lead to Whistle Boards being removed. Network Rail, having explored this before the steering meeting, advised that there is no readily available way of achieving this, and that the time it would take to explore (both technical and operational issues) would be longer than the current schedule of work. The steering group therefore concluded that it should press on, with all speed, with the evaluation of the current potential solutions. In the event that the implementation of the recommendations of the steering group does not lead to the resolution of all noise problems, it may become appropriate to revisit this proposal on a bespoke local basis.
- In reviewing the experience relating to the sounding of train horns, the steering group concluded that it should not issue guidance to train operators as to the use and application of horns – but that an RSSB suggestion to review all of the remaining circumstances (set out in the Rule Book) where horns have to be routinely used, should be adopted. The general thinking is that virtually all routine uses (apart from whistle boards) could potentially be removed, in favour of the existing drivers discretion to sound their horns when they see people on or near the track.
- During the course of the summer, the steering group and industry colleagues considered whether there is a case to immediately reduce the noise levels on train horns. There is broad agreement within the steering group that the case for allowing horns to be quieter has been made already. However, the group believes that there are two significant areas to resolve before any changes can be made:
 1. There is no historic record (standard) of what the old horns complied with – so we are undertaking work to measure horns on rolling stock that has been taken out of service.
 2. Given that changing horns on trains will involve considerable investment, and some downtime for passenger trains, the train operator community wishes to ensure that they would have to change their horns once – to fix the problem. It would not be justifiable either operationally or financially to introduce a short term relaxation of the standard and then for it to be amended a few months later when the results of the steering group's work is complete.

Work to complete the specification of what will constitute a quieter horn is on course for completion before the end of the year, although the demonstration of a useable Broadband horn is likely to extend into 2007.

3. What we are now going to do

- Meet with the Noise Abatement Society on 11 October
- Meet with All party group of MPs on 20 November
- Press on with the work identified and commissioned

Rail Safety and Standards Board

- During October and November RSSB will be reviewing the results and reports from the various consultancies working on this project and making reports with recommendations to the Steering Group
- Meetings of the Steering Group are arranged for October, November and December to enable the early review and assimilation of the work being undertaken, leading to a recommendation on at least the first three of the options being considered by the December meeting.
- Reports of all the work being undertaken will be published when they have been 'accepted' by the steering group

The cross industry Steering Group consists of representatives from: Rail Safety and Standards Board, Network Rail, Passenger Train Operators, ATOC, Freight Train operators, ORR, and is supported by RSSB's technical and risk expertise. If you want to communicate directly with the steering group you can do so through the Chairman, Anson Jack, who is director, standards at the Rail Safety and Standards Board at anson.jack@rssb.co.uk