



BRITAIN'S LEADING PRO-RAIL CAMPAIGNING GROUP FOR PASSENGERS AND FREIGHT

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PRESS RELEASE

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RAIL CROSSINGS SAFER DESPITE UFTON NERVET FATALITY

Despite a recent fatality at a level crossing in Berkshire, level crossings continue to become safer, says the Thames Valley Branch of *Railfuture*, the independent national campaign for better railways. The incident was between an express train and a motor scooter on 22nd May 2012 at Ufton Nervet, on the Reading–Newbury main line between Theale and Aldermaston.

Richard Stow, Chairman of *Railfuture* Thames Valley Branch, says "This is a tragedy for the scooterist's loved ones and a trauma for the train driver. We extend our sympathy to all who are affected by it. The investigation is just beginning and I will not prejudge its findings.

"Railways remain one of the UK's safest modes of travel. Deaths on UK railways are rare, are always thoroughly investigated and often lead to recommendations that continue to make our railways even safer."

In 2011 Ufton Nervet saw a near miss between a train and a car. The crossing is normally automatic, but the near miss occurred when it was being worked manually in connection with engineering work on the line. The Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) initial findings are that there was a communications failure, but its investigation is ongoing.

In 2004 an InterCity 125 train hit a car on the same level crossing, killing seven people including the train driver and the car driver. The inquest found that it was a suicide and neither First Great Western nor Network Rail was in any way to blame.

Richard Stow added "These three incidents seem to have no common cause. The first was a suicide, the next was probably a communications failure and the third is a tragic accident".

Britain has about 7,000 level crossings, of which about 1,500 are on public roads. The RAIB says that UK railways have "a good overall level crossing safety record" relative to other EU member states. Since 2004 Network Rail has greatly reduced collisions between trains and road vehicles.

UK railways have a risk assessment for level crossings that has reduced casualties dramatically. Since 2005 the five-year average for collisions between trains and road vehicles has reduced by more than 30%, and collisions at automatic half-barrier (AHB) type crossings have reduced by more than 40%. Deaths of vehicle occupants in such collisions have been reduced by nearly 50%: from an average of nearly four per year in 2004 to two in 2010.

Richard Stow commented “The risk assessment works relatively well, but there is scope to refine it and to implement its recommendations more fully and more quickly.”

Ufton Nervet is an “automatic half-barrier” (AHB) crossing. AHBs were introduced in the 1960s, because half-barriers give an escape route to any road user who becomes trapped on the crossing. However, in recent decades closed circuit television has been introduced at some crossings so that signalling staff can supervise them remotely. This enables crossings to be converted to full-barriers, because in the unlikely event of a road user becoming trapped, the signal operator can see them or their vehicle and will not let the train approach.

Richard Stow, concluded “The RAIB may ask questions about this latest crossing incident. Has the risk model been applied to Ufton Nervet? If so, did it produce the right recommendations and have they been fully implemented? If this level crossing has CCTV, could it be safer with full barriers?”

NOTE FOR EDITORS

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Railfuture is Britain’s only completely independent voice on railway development. We are not affiliated to or sponsored by any political party, trade union, or private industry. We are funded almost entirely by our members.

Railfuture’s President is Christian Wolmar, the well-known writer on rail issues. Its Vice Presidents include several retired train company chief executives, transport experts, MPs and MEPs from all main political parties and the former Secretary of State for Transport Lord Adonis. A full list of the *Railfuture* presidents can be found on our web-site at

<http://www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-index.php?page=vice%20presidents>.

Railfuture campaigns for Britain’s railways to play a larger role for passengers and freight, calling for an enhanced and expanded network, including high-speed rail, along with light rail.

Rail is a vital part of an integrated efficient transport system serving a modern, vibrant, environmentally sustainable economy. We are pro-rail but not anti-road. *Railfuture* maintains that investment in rail travel and rail freight is vital to the UK economy and environment.

Anyone supporting our aims can join online: www.railfuture.org.uk/join

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