



By email: [REDACTED]

Network Rail
Freedom of Information
The Quadrant
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Milton Keynes
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29th May 2018

Dear [REDACTED],

Information request

Reference number: FOI2018/00500

Thank you for your email of 29th April 2018. You requested the following information:

*'This email is to make a Freedom of Information Request regarding your programme of tree-felling and clearance of vegetation along the railways. I request the following information:
How many of the trees on land under your stewardship are marked for felling.
The number of miles of vegetation to be cleared.*

I request that this data extend to the furthest point in the future possible.'

I have processed your request under the terms of the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). Information is exempt under section 39 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 if it meets the definition of environmental information found in Regulation 2 of the EIR. In this case we think the information in question is covered by Regulation 2(a) of the EIR.

At Network Rail, we take very seriously our responsibility to keep the railway and the natural environment around it safe.

In recent media reports, there has been a lot of inaccurate coverage of how Network Rail manages trees and other vegetation that grows alongside the railway. To be clear, we do not have a national tree felling programme and we certainly do not have any plans to cut down all of the trees on our estate.

We believe we can enhance biodiversity whilst still running the railway safely. But it's much more complex than has recently been portrayed. By proactively managing vegetation we think we can find a win-win solution – protecting the environment and meeting our need, reinforced by the regulator, to remove trees and vegetation as necessary to maintain a safe and reliable railway. I have attached a copy of a briefing note which may be helpful.

Further information about our approach and policies is available on our website at these links, including copies of documents:

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/managing-railways-habitats/>

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/feeds/working-with-nature-by-the-railway/>

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/environment/sharing-railway-wildlife/trees-and-the-railway/>

The number of trees

I can inform you that we have searched our records and we do not hold the information you requested. In simple terms, we do not, as a rule, count trees, instead we measure land area¹.

That said, we have made some enquiries with our colleagues to see if it is possible to estimate the number of trees cut down on the basis of the information we do have available. We do count tree numbers on some individual projects that we work on and from this we can extrapolate out to calculate an approximate number of trees cut down across the country each year (taking into account the extent of our land that has trees on it as opposed to other types of vegetation). Although it must be stressed that this is only an approximation we think we cut down roughly 50,000 trees a year. Put into context this is around two trees per mile of track that we operate or 0.8% of the overall number of trees on our land.

The number of miles

We do not record the number of miles marked for vegetation clearance. Our policy is not aimed at clearing the lineside of all vegetation; rather we proactively assess the lineside vegetation to assess if it meets the required standards to safely operate the railway. Network Rail owns 20,000 miles of track and as outlined above we have

¹ Strictly speaking under the EIR we are refusing the request under Regulation 12(4)(a) and we are obliged to carry out a public interest, however, as the Information Commissioner recognises, it is not possible to do so in any meaningful way in circumstances such as these.

approximated we remove roughly 50,000 trees per year or around 2 trees per mile, we estimate the figures for 2018/2019 are likely to be similar.

If you have any enquiries about this response, please contact me in the first instance at FOI@networkrail.co.uk or on 01908 782405. Details of your appeal rights are below.

Please remember to quote the reference number at the top of this letter in all future communications.

Yours sincerely

Danielle Stratton
Information Officer

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Appeal Rights

If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, please write to the FOI Compliance and Appeals Manager at Network Rail, Freedom of Information, The Quadrant, Elder Gate, Milton Keynes, MK9 1EN, or by email at foi@networkrail.co.uk. Your request must be submitted within 40 working days of receipt of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF