

By email: [REDACTED]

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25th May 2018

Dear [REDACTED]

Information request

Reference number: FOI2018/00513

Thank you for your email of 30th April. You requested the following information:

'I recently read that Network Rail are undertaking a tree felling programme to ensure tracks are kept leaf free as well as to minimise the risk of fallen trees.

I'm sure this is preventative, prudent and necessary work however:

- 1. Can you provide any information about any replanting schemes that network rail will be supporting?*
- 2. Will Network Rail be replanting a tree for every tree felled?*

I understand this may not be the most complex FOI request however it is one that will resonate quite deeply with a large number of rail users.'

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.

I can confirm we hold the information you have requested. Please find attached a document explaining our approach to vegetation management. This document explains:

We are adopting the principle of biodiversity accounting, which incorporates metrics and calculations endorsed by DEFRA, so that we can measure the

impact that our infrastructure development and maintenance works have on biodiversity. However, we don't have a fixed target for compensating for tree loss, habitat loss, or changes in biodiversity valuation as a consequence of our maintenance or upgrade work.

In November 2017 we launched a new biodiversity accounting tool, the Network Rail Biodiversity Calculator. Projects may adopt local targets to achieve 'no net loss' or 'net gain' biodiversity outcomes, and can use the Biodiversity Calculator to measure any losses and biodiversity score reductions and invest in compensation measures and off-setting arrangements so that there is no loss, or an increase, in natural habitat as a result of that project. We are piloting targets of net positive biodiversity on specific infrastructure projects, including Gospel Oak to Barking and Thameslink. The Thameslink programme was also named by DEFRA as a demonstration project for its part in the national pilot test on biodiversity offsetting.

How we manage our land

We know that the public wants to know about how we manage our land and protect the environment. With this in mind I thought it would be useful to provide you with a few facts and figures in connection with the subject:

Why management is necessary

- Just last year, storms, rain and wind caused trees to disrupt the network over 1,200 times and caused over 400 instances (34%) of trains coming into contact with trees or large branches. Such incidents can be serious and have the potential to cause accidents. Blocked lines can also cause severe delays to trains and passengers using the railway.
- Incidents of vegetation disrupting the operation of the railway cost the taxpayer over £100m last year.

Where do we carry this out?

- Our network covers 50,000 hectares and routine maintenance is constantly carried out to prevent trees and vegetation encroaching on the track.
- Every three years we formally inspect lineside vegetation to check that it meets the standards required to safely operate the railway. This requires the assessment of over 6,000 miles of lineside on average each year.
- The areas we conduct vegetation maintenance are informed by aerial surveys which show us the location and condition our assets. This process improves safety and allows us to identify risk areas before incidents occur.

Environmental & Community Protection

- Where possible, we protect and maintain the local environment the railway runs through.
- Where there is enough room and it is safe to do so, after pruning or removing trees, we leave smaller branches as habitat for wildlife, such as hedgehogs and amphibians.
- Depending on species and availability of space we may allow tree stumps to regrow, or treat them with herbicide to stop unwanted regrowth, thereby enabling more diversity in ground flora to grow.
- We are mindful that clearing vegetation can have an impact on local communities. We always try to strike the right balance, but accept it's a challenge we may not always get right.

Further information can also be found on our transparency pages under vegetation management, please see link below:

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/whoweare/transparencyandethics/transparency/datasets/>

I hope you find this information useful. 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