



By Email : [REDACTED]

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12<sup>th</sup> June 2018

Dear [REDACTED]

**Information request**

**Reference number:** FOI2018/00587

Thank you for your email of 14th May 2018 in which you requested the following information:

*'Please accept this request under FOI.*

*Re the aerial survey mentioned here*

*<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/environment/vegetation-management/>*

- a) Please provide your best currently held estimate of the number of trees included in the "heat map" if this is different from the 10million suggested on your website.*
- b) Please provide your best currently held estimate of the number of trees so-far indicated on the heat map as "problem trees"*

*If the data is not presently held in that form -or easily derivable from data currently held - then I would accept the following:*

*- the proportion of the area currently included in the "heat map" which indicates the presence of "problematic" trees. i.e. If, on your heat map, orange, or red indicate the presence of problematic trees, the proportion of the surveyed area that is that colour.*

*A copy of the heatmap output (i.e. the map) indicating the hottest areas or regions at the smallest practicable but no smaller than 1:1,000,000 i.e. 1cm = 10km . Include on this the legend indicating what "hot" means and what "cold" means and how this is represented.*

*A copy of the most recent report produced in the last 3 years by the team overseeing the production of the heatmap and seen by the senior responsible manager setting out in broad terms the results of the heat-mapping exercise.*

*If you anticipate any part of this request taking too long to complete please email me advising how this request may be amended*

*I am happy to receive all data in an electronic format.'*

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 that we hold some of the information you requested.

### **Our approach to vegetation management**

Before addressing each of your individual questions, I thought it sensible to provide a little background information about how we take care of our land alongside the railway.

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/>

- a) Please provide your best currently held estimate of the number of trees included in the "heat map" if this is different from the 10million suggested on your website**

In 2014 we carried out an aerial survey of trees which identified approximately 13 million trees. It was this data that we used to create the heat map referred to in your request.

- b) Please provide your best currently held estimate of the number of trees so-far indicated on the heat map as "problem trees"**

"Problem trees" are identified using a combination of two very advanced risk models, intended to (1) reduce service disruption due to wind-thrown trees during severe weather events; and (2) to protect the network from derailment risk arising from train impacts with fallen trees.

We conducted an aerial survey which identified 13 million trees that are within 60 metres of the railway – it is, however, important to be clear that the majority of these trees are not on Network Rail property (only around 6 million of them are on our estate).

The trees are ranked using a multi-tiered intervention urgency ranking system developed by expert arboricultural consultancies. About 5% of all the 13 million trees surveyed have been identified as "problem trees" and about 8% of these "problem trees" belong to tier 1 (higher risk). Of course the majority of these trees are not on our land and so our ability manage this risk and take any action is severely limited.

- c) A copy of the heatmap output (i.e. the map) indicating the hottest areas or regions at the smallest practicable but no smaller than 1:1,000,000 i.e. 1cm = 10km . Include on this the legend indicating what "hot" means and what "cold" means and how this is represented.**

We do not hold the information you are looking for in this part of your request because the heat map does not work in quite the way your request is framed. To explain in a little more detail, the heat map is a dynamic geospatial representation of where the "problem trees" were in 2014 when the survey was conducted. It shows the areas with a higher spatial concentration of "problem trees". It is a dynamic system which means that it is redrawn

whenever you zoom in or out. There are no hardcopies or outputs in the way that your question supposes.

- d) A copy of the most recent report produced in the last 3 years by the team overseeing the production of the heatmap and seen by the senior responsible manager setting out in broad terms the results of the heat-mapping exercise.**

We do not hold any information in connection with this part of your request. By way of explanation, we have produced no new heat map report since 2014. However, this 2014 heat map information has been provided to each of our devolved routes to support their decision-making on vegetation management. There are plans to re-survey the rail network in the future when the heat map will be updated and access to the data offered to each route.

I hope the information and explanation provided are useful to you. If you have any enquiries about this response, please contact me in the first instance at [FOI@networkrail.co.uk](mailto: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

**Jonathan Mantle**  
**Freedom of Information Manager**

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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](mailto: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