

Adjustment of the Night Time Quiet Period (NTQP) - Dec 2016

Frequently Asked Questions

Background

Level crossings are the main interface between the rail network and road, footpath and bridleway networks. Due to the nature of the UK's roads and railways, both types of infrastructure are extremely heavily used in many parts of the country. This makes managing safety at level crossings both extremely important and complex.

The following questions and answers have been provided to help you with any concerns you may have following the recent adjustment to the Night Time Quiet Period.

Q. What is the Night Time Quiet Period?

At many level crossings, one of the traditional forms of safety protection is the sounding of train horns. Train Drivers sound their horns when they pass a "whistle board" sign on the approach to a level crossing and this provides users with an understanding of whether or not it is safe for them to cross the railway. There are approximately 1600 level crossings around the network that are fitted with whistle boards.

As modern trains have become faster and more frequent, train horns have necessarily become louder to ensure that crossing users continue to receive sufficient protection.

In response to this, and in recognition of the intrusive nature of modern train horns, the operational rules of the railway were changed in 2007 to incorporate a quiet period during which horns are only used in emergency circumstances. This period, originally running between the hours of 23:00 – 07:00 every day, is known as the Night Time Quiet Period (NTQP).

Q. Why is Network Rail adjusting the NTQP?

A. Network Rail's main priority at level crossings is to continually improve the way we assess risk and manage safety for users. Network Rail has a legal duty to manage level crossing safety. This requires cross-industry collaboration to deliver strong processes, robust decision-making and continuous technical improvement.

During 2015, a study was undertaken by the Railway Safety Standards Board [RSSB] in response to Recommendation 2 of the Railway Accident Investigation Board's Mexico Footpath Crossing Report. Amongst other considerations, it set out to determine the impact of the NTQP on near miss events. The study's findings were summarised in a paper to the cross-industry Level Crossing Strategy Group (LCSG) in December 2015.

The RSSB's paper concluded that 64% of near misses that have occurred during the NTQP have taken place during its shoulder hours, between 23:00-23:59 and 06:00-06:59. It highlighted that a sensible option would be to reduce the NTQP by two hours, from 23:00 – 07:00 hrs to 23:59 - 06:00 hrs, thereby helping to mitigate the risk of incidents at passive level crossings.

Network Rail has changed the times of the NTQP accordingly. No other arrangements have been adjusted. It does not represent a wholesale change of approach to level crossing safety – rather, it is a fine-tuning of one particular component.

Q. How do the changes affect my safety while using the crossing?

A. The changes promote improved crossing user safety between the hours of 23.00 – 23.59 & 06.00 – 07.00. In line with safety arrangements already in operation between the hours of 07:00 – 23:00, Train Drivers will now additionally sound their train horns between the hours of 23.00 – 23.59 & 06.00 – 07.00 to warn users of approaching trains.

Q. Do these changes affect the way that I should use the level crossing?

A. No. Continue to use the level crossing as before, taking care to observe the safety instructions displayed locally. Always stop, look and listen before crossing.

Q. How will these changes affect the environment?

A. The locations at which train horns sound has not been affected by this change. Therefore, if you have not heard the sound of train horns previously, you are unlikely to notice them now.

Lineside neighbours who live close to a level crossing with whistle boards may now notice train horns routinely sounding for an additional hour into the evening (23:00 – 23:59 hrs) and during the morning (06:00 – 07:00 hrs). Previously, Train Drivers only sounded their horns during these times in an emergency when people were seen on the level crossing at the last minute, or when their trains were approaching track workers. This will continue to be the arrangement during the adjusted NTQP (23:59 – 06:00 hrs).

There are no environmental protection requirements that govern noise originating specifically from the railway. However, noise created by train horns at any time of day must be proportionate to the railway's safety responsibilities.

Based on current understanding of level crossing use, Network Rail considers that the environmental impact of sounding train horns throughout the night would be disproportionate to the associated safety benefits. For this reason, we continue to operate a NTQP. Instead, the NTQP has been adjusted to operate between 23:59 – 06:00 hrs, thereby offering a balanced response to known patterns of level crossing use.

For further information, please see the link to our “Environmental Noise” web page and “Caring for Neighbours and Passengers” web page:

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/noise-and-vibration/>

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/quick-guide-to-contacting-us/>

Q. What alternative options have been considered?

A. Network Rail would like to eliminate whistle boards from the network. We are currently working to develop technical solutions that will make this possible, (striking an acceptable balance between safety integrity and affordability). However, such a solution doesn't exist today.

Currently, our options are limited to:

- Seeking closure of a level crossing, either by providing an alternative means of crossing the railway (bridge, underpass or diversion), or by agreeing with the rights holder that the legal right of way across the railway is no longer required. This is an option that we will always explore when assessing how to improve safety at a level crossing; a closed level crossing is obviously the safety form of level crossing. To this end, Network Rail has closed more than 1,000 crossings in the last six years. However, it is not always possible, or appropriate, to close every crossing and it can take many years to fully explore the opportunity.
- Reducing the train line speed over level crossings. Whilst individual changes to speed may add only a few seconds to train journey times, the effect quickly multiplies to network-crippling levels when applied to all 1600 level crossings with whistle boards.
- Installing existing technologies such as the Miniature Stop Light (MSL) protection system. MSLs do indeed offer a solution for some pedestrian and private road locations. Network Rail has a programme of work to install these systems at a number of our highest risk crossings. However, MSLs are expensive and unsuitable for every location.
- Adjusting the NTQP to align with current patterns of level crossing use. This remains the only option that Network Rail can implement with immediate effect to address the current risk at level crossings.

Q. How does Network Rail manage safety at level crossings?

A. The rail industry has made significant improvements to the way safety is managed at level crossings over recent years.

Dedicated Level Crossing Managers (LCMs) have been introduced to the network, bring together a number of level crossing related activities under a single role. LCM activities include inspection, risk assessment, and crossing user/stakeholder liaison. LCMs also act as a first responder to address minor defects.



To support the LCMs, improved training, guidance and safety assessment methodology has also been rolled out, together with the development of innovative new technologies for installation at many level crossings around the network.

Going forward, Network Rail will continue to invest in the development of new level crossing technologies and safety management systems. Site specific risk assessments at every level crossing will continue to identify and deliver appropriate risk controls and mitigations, thereby promoting a safer environment for users.

Q. Who has authorised the changes?

A. Following consultation conducted by Network Rail, this proposal has received strong support from the Office of Rail and Road and the Level Crossing Strategy Group (which includes representation from: the Department for Transport; the Rail Accident Investigation Board; the Rail Safety Standards Board; the Association of Train Operating Companies – now the Rail Delivery Group; the ASLEF Union). This change is supported by Network Rail's Route Managing Directors, and the Head of Corporate Passenger and Public Safety.

Q. How will Network Rail monitor the success, or otherwise, of this change to the NTQP?

A. Network Rail will monitor all feedback received in relation to the adjustment of the NTQP. The information gathered will be used to inform Network Rail of the success, or otherwise, of the changes to support the continual safety improvements for level crossing users.

Q. Where can I find out further information about Network Rail's management of level crossing safety?

A. There are various ways to find out more information:

- You can speak with your local Level Crossing Manager who will be able to help with any questions you may have.
- You can visit Network Rail's website and view the Level Crossings pages.

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/level-crossings/>

Q. How can I register my opinion about the change to the NTQP?

A. At Network Rail we care about those who live alongside our tracks and infrastructure. We know that our work sometimes causes disruption and noise and do our best to limit this. However, the nature and scale of our work means that disruption will occasionally be inevitable. You can contact us to discuss the NTQP (or other railway matters) as follows:



Phone

Our 24/7 National Helpline: 03457 11 41 41

Post

Contact and Communities
Network Rail
One Eversholt Street
London
NW1 2DN

Online

Please use the [online contact form](#)