

Valuing nature a railway for people and wildlife

Response to the review of our vegetation management



In November 2018, John Varley published a review of Network Rail's vegetation management. As part of this review, he set out six recommendations for how vegetation management on the railway could be improved.

The first of these recommendations advised the Department for Transport to outline a clear policy position for Network Rail in terms of delivering for the environment.

The five remaining recommendations were aimed at Network Rail. This document sets out how we propose to respond to each of these five recommendations, with an action plan setting out timescales on the final page.

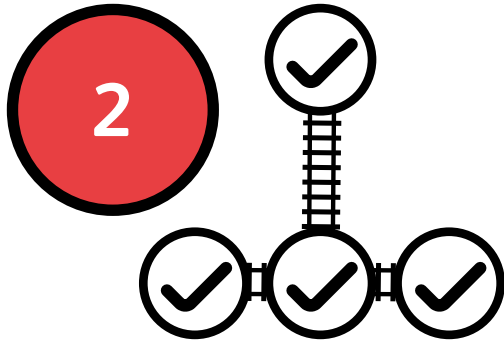


Recommendation for the Department for Transport

The Government must set out a clear policy position for Network Rail in terms of delivering for the environment

The Department for Transport (DfT) has accepted this recommendation and is working with other Government departments to set out a clear policy position.

5 recommendations for Network Rail



Appropriate governance must be put in place at organisation, route and project level

2.1 | A Board Champion

Appoint an existing or new Network Rail non-executive director with responsibility for natural capital.

All board members will attend a University of Cambridge course on sustainability leadership. This will provide training on a range of sustainability issues, including natural capital, enabling the senior leadership to better understand the importance of sustainability and lead culture change within the organisation.

2.2 | Route Level KPIs

Establish route level KPIs by the beginning of CP6 which are aligned to centrally set targets on habitat management plans and asset policy.

The vegetation management performance of all regions is now regularly assessed against KPIs at the end of each four week period.

We are working with Defra, DfT, Natural England and the Forestry Commission to put in place additional KPIs at a national and regional level by 2020.

2.3 | Review the standard

Review the vegetation management standard to identify any opportunities for changes that will deliver early wins for biodiversity.

We have carried out a review of our vegetation management standard and will be publishing an updated version in early 2020.

The updated standard will require our teams to properly categorise the habitats that exist on the railway and ensure that vegetation is treated as an asset, promoting biodiversity.

2.4 | Bird nesting season

All lineside vegetation management should be planned to minimise any negative impacts on biodiversity; this is particularly important during the bird nesting season.

Working with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the British Trust for Ornithology, we have reviewed and updated the way we check for breeding birds ahead of carrying out vegetation work on the lineside.

This improved process enables our teams to better record the presence of nesting birds before any work takes place.



Network Rail should publish an ambitious vision for the lineside estate

3.1 | Ambitious Vision

Set out an ambitious vision for the lineside estate within a year.

We are developing an ambitious vision for our lineside estate which will be published in 2020. The vision will set out our plan for a lineside managed sustainably and safely, delivering for the environment, railway users and our neighbours.

3.2 | Strategy and Plan

A strategy and plan should be created to deliver the vision. This should include targets for no net biodiversity loss by 2024 and net gain by 2040.

The strategy and plan for implementing the vision for our lineside estate will also be published in 2020. Elements of the work that will make up the strategy are already underway, including updating standards, and working with environmental stakeholders to define appropriate KPIs to measure biodiversity changes.

3.3 | A Partnership Approach

Work in partnership with neighbours, nature conservation groups, suppliers and landowners to deliver this vision and to contribute towards nature conservation targets in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

We are committed to working alongside neighbours, nature conservation groups, community groups, suppliers, contractors and landowners in delivering the vision for managing our lineside estate.

We have established close working relationships with organisations including The Tree Council, Natural England, RSPB, British Trust for Ornithology, the Bat Conservation Trust, the Woodland Trust, the Forestry Commission and British Transport Police. The knowledge and expertise of these organisations is informing our vision and strategy for natural capital on the railway.

3.4 | Route State of Nature Report

Each route to publish annual State of Nature Reports to report on performance across key indicators and projects.

We will report on performance against the KPIs agreed with Defra on an annual basis by region.



Network Rail must value and manage its lineside state as an asset

4.1 | Develop an asset database

Develop a baseline database of habitats and biodiversity across its estate, linked to new and existing related asset data such as on embankments and climate risks.

We are updating our databases to capture the new information being gathered by our teams on the various types of habitat that exist along the railway. By collecting this new data and treating vegetation as an asset we can establish a baseline from which we can track biodiversity performance on our estate.

4.2 | Route-specific Habitat Management Plans

Produce Route Habitat Management Plans by the end of CP6 year two.

Habitat management plans will be in place by 2021 and will set out how each region intends to manage habitats and encourage biodiversity at a local level. These will help us move towards a 'cut and maintain / replace' approach, as opposed to the 'cut and forget' approach that we've been accused of adopting in the past.

4.3 | Skills Programme

Over the next year undertake a review of skills needed and skills-gap analysis, develop appropriate elements to existing competency-based management system and undertake a comprehensive programme of recruitment and training, this will ensure that it has a robust and appropriate level of ecological and environmental expertise.

We are already recruiting and training ecologists and arboriculturalists, as well as offering further environmental training to our existing workforce.

4.4 | Demonstration Projects

Network Rail should establish a minimum of seven national demonstration projects, one per route in England and Wales. The projects should be co-ordinated to ensure that a range of important areas for investigation are considered.

Demonstration projects have been established in all of our English and Welsh regions, with a major trial location being set up in Kent. These projects will give our teams valuable insight into the most effective methods for promoting biodiversity on our estate, while running a safe and reliable railway for passengers.



Network Rail must improve its communication with communities and key stakeholders

5.1 | A New Approach to Communications

Review internal and external communication and engagement processes to ensure clear, transparent and consistent decision making in how local communities are engaged with across England and Wales.

Improved communication with our lineside neighbours and stakeholder groups is central to our new approach to vegetation management.

Working alongside The Tree Council, we have produced a new suite of template notification letters and leaflets to ensure that lineside neighbours and stakeholders are kept updated both before and after work takes place to manage vegetation on the railway. Examples of best practice communication as well as a vegetation management tone of voice guide have been produced, also with the input of The Tree Council. These are being shared with the route teams and will set a clear and consistent standard for vegetation management communications.

Our communications teams have provided updated guidance to on-site personnel when engaging with our neighbours during vegetation works. A new mapping system is also being set up to log and track areas that are receiving high volumes of complaints.

5.2 | Capture Corporate Memory

Adopt a more formal and consistent approach to ensure that information from engagement with communities is captured and retained as part of the corporate memory.

We are encouraging our teams to share examples of lineside communication, both instances where it has gone well or could be improved. Working groups have been established at route level encouraging vegetation management teams to work more closely with colleagues in communications. This will ensure appropriate and accurate information can be provided to lineside neighbours and stakeholder groups.



Culture change to value nature and the environment

Effective delivery of the recommendations will need a change of culture. This must embed the importance of Network Rail's natural assets and the need for responsible management of the public land under its stewardship.

The Varley review and its recommendations have made a vital contribution to our emerging approach to managing biodiversity and habitats. The strength of feeling on this issue from lineside neighbours, communities and expert groups has given us vital impetus and input into our work. As we put these recommendations into practice, both in establishing new processes across Network Rail, and in building a culture dedicated to enhancing natural habitats, we continue to look at where we can go further and demonstrate our leadership on this issue.

“Working with biodiversity and sustainability experts, we are developing an ambitious vision for managing our lineside habitats. Getting the right mix of habitat types alongside the tracks is crucial for safety but can be achieved in such a way that enables a thriving diversity of plants and wildlife, including many protected species.

I want to record my sincere thanks to John Varley and his team for the important work they have done, recognise the importance of this issue to many local groups and experts, and confirm our commitment to valuing and enhancing nature alongside Britain's railways.”

Andrew Haines

Chief executive, Network Rail

Appendix

Recommendation	Workstream	Control Period 6					Control Period 7				
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Appropriate governance	Board training	█					█				
	Development of route-level KPIs	█									
	Standards review and publication	█									
	Nesting bird assurance and briefings	█					█				
	ISO14001 upskilling and advice	█	█	█	█	█					
Ambitious vision	Vision development and publication	█									
	Strategy and biodiversity plan publication	█									
	Establish and manage partnerships	█	█	█	█	█					
	Route State of Nature Report		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
	GIS database development	█	█	█							
Managing lineside as an asset	Asset database development	█	█	█							
	Route habitat management plans		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
	Waste and pollution management		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
	Identify and install renewable energy solutions			█	█	█		█			
	Skills development	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
	Route pilot	█	█	█	█	█	█				
	Cut and replace	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Communications	A new approach to communications	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
	Capture corporate memory	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Culture change	Identify and implement community lineside projects				█	█	█				
	Communication of cultural change	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
	Sustainability training for Regions	█									
	Cultural change campaign and programme		█	█	█	█		█			
	Rail user surveys	█	█	█	█	█					

Network Rail Limited

1 Eversholt Street
London NW1 2DN

Tel **020 7557 8000**

networkrail.co.uk

Company number: 4402220
Registered in England and Wales