



Department for Transport

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From the Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
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29 November 2018

Dear John,

I would like to offer you my utmost thanks for producing your report. After careful consideration, I have accepted the recommendation aimed at the Department and expect Network Rail to rise to the challenge of those within its own areas of responsibility. Working with Network Rail (NR) and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), we will look to develop actions that will deliver on your vision.

As a Government, we take our national biodiversity goals seriously. Network Rail, as one of largest landowners in the UK, is in a unique position to help improve the state of the environment on its land.

Effective lineside management is also vital for the performance and safety of our railway and as your report makes clear, this can be achieved in tandem with our biodiversity goals.

As your report notes, vegetation management is an established part of Network Rail's existing operations and is being done to a high standard in some areas. I want to see this good practice replicated across the entire network, ultimately making it one of the most environmentally responsible transport infrastructure managers. I was pleased that Network Rail have engaged positively with you and the review team.

The Control Period 6 (CP6) settlement already agreed between the Department and Network Rail for the period 2019-2024 includes a very substantial provision for operations and maintenance, which includes vegetation management. This will see a shift in focus to the vital work, including vegetation management, that will help deliver improved reliability and performance across the network for passengers. As your report makes clear, what is now required is a change in governance,

organisation and culture within Network Rail, to ensure that these activities are better aligned towards achieving national biodiversity goals. Your report also makes clear that safety and performance can be improved, and whole-life costs reduced, through a more effective approach to vegetation management.

The Department will work closely with Network Rail, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to develop a policy that will support delivery of the 25 Year Environmental Plan.

I will be asking Network Rail to set out a plan on how it will address the recommendations of your report aimed at them and to return to me with this plan within 6 months. This plan will need to include the specific actions needed to deliver the changes in governance, vision, processes and culture required to deliver the transformational change outlined in the report, using the settlement already agreed for CP6.

I accept your conclusion that Network Rail's vegetation management needs to continue throughout the year. This includes felling during the nesting season, though this must be undertaken in line with all legal and statutory duties. However, as you say, Network Rail must ensure that it is ready to adopt an improved operating model. I am pleased to advise you that Network Rail has provided an assurance that they will improve the way they operate to better protect nesting birds, ready for next year's breeding season.

I would like to thank you again for the time you invested in to this review. I am determined that its recommendations will form the basis of a fundamental change in how the railway helps look after our environment for future generations. We all benefit from better environmental performance by a major landowner and passengers benefit from fewer potential delays.

I will be placing a copy of the review on the GOV.UK website and in the Libraries of both Houses along with a copy of this response.

*Yours sincerely,
Andrew*

ANDREW JONES