



## Department for Transport

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From the Parliamentary  
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*Dear Lilian,*

In November of last year, my Department published the findings of an independent review into Network Rail's approach to managing vegetation at the lineside of the railways, which was led by the experienced land manager John Varley OBE TD. This followed growing public concern about the environmental impact of cutting down lineside trees on our rail network, which Network Rail carry out as part of their statutory duty to ensure the safe operation and reliability of the railway.

The report contained six key recommendations, five of which were directed to Network Rail, and one for my Department, recommending that we set out a clear policy position for Network Rail in terms of our expectation for delivering for the environment.

At the time of publication, John Varley explained that he intended to review progress on the outcomes of the recommendations within 6 months. He has now written to me with his 6-month review, in which he states his view that the policy developed by the Department meets his recommendation. His letter also notes that he is pleased with the progress made by Network Rail since the report was published, commending them for their enthusiasm to implement changes in their approach.

We have worked closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Natural England, Highways England, the Forestry Commission, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and Network Rail, to develop this policy and ensure a balance between protection of lineside

vegetation and wildlife, and passenger safety. I have attached the full policy with this letter, however the main aspects are as follows:

- The Department for Transport expects Network Rail to achieve no net loss in biodiversity on its existing lineside estate by 2024 and to achieve biodiversity net gain on each route by 2040.
- The Department expects Network Rail to produce a vision statement and a *Biodiversity Action Plan* by December 2019 outlining how they will meet these goals for biodiversity. This should be in alignment with the goals set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan, published in January 2018.
- The Government expects Network Rail to use the funding envelope provided for in Control Period 6 (2019-2024) to meet the policy goals set out above, and will be expected to bid for appropriate funding to enable it to achieve its long-term goals through future periodic reviews.

I believe this policy sets and ambitious and challenging task for Network Rail, harnessing their unique position and responsibilities as one of Britain's landowners. It also provides an excellent opportunity to deliver positive environmental outcomes on our network for the benefit of society and wildlife, and is consistent with the targets set of other public-sector bodies, including Highways England.

I am confident that Network Rail are well-placed to deliver this, and that they can build on their existing examples of best practice, and use the expertise they have developed, and the strong relationships established with environmental groups and organizations, to achieve this.

I am placing a copy of the policy developed by the Department for Transport on the GOV.UK website and in the libraries of both Houses.

Yours,

Andrew

**ANDREW JONES**