SUMMARY

DERAILMENT OF A COMMUTER TRAIN AT HELSINKI STATION, FINLAND, ON 26 APRIL 2010

On Monday 26 April 2010 at 5:10 pm, a commuter train was derailed in Helsinki at a turnout. The train was approaching track 6 at Helsinki station when a turnout along the route turned underneath the train causing the train to be derailed. The rearmost unit of the three-unit train derailed and collided with a catenary support, with the result that the portal fell on the train's roof causing extensive power outage at Helsinki railway yard. The derailed unit was damaged and there was also damage to track equipment. There were no personal injuries.

The cause of the derailment was that the turnout turned underneath the train. This was due to emergency commands issued from the signal box control. The traffic controller issued the commands to a turnout other than the one intended. Contributing to this was the fact that insulated track section faults had been common at Helsinki railway yard. Due to these faults, traffic control was using shunting routes for which emergency commands could be issued. This had become almost daily practice. Methods with stripped security were being used so as not to disturb the flow of traffic. Partly contributing to the accident was the fact that the traffic controller had very little experience with the task.

In order to prevent the occurrence of similar accidents, the investigation commission recommends that the party responsible for the upkeep of the track should systematically monitor and, when required, improve track maintenance and techniques for determining track availability so that security is not unnecessarily compromised. In addition, the commission recommends that traffic control job rotation should ensure that demanding posts are familiar to traffic controllers by means of training and sufficient task rotation. With regard to training in the identification and handling of disturbances, and response procedures relating to them, special attention should be given to practices that do not compromise safety.

It became apparent during the investigation that information about disturbances experienced by traffic control is forwarded to maintenance, but not to parties responsible for safety. The keeper of the track and the contractor responsible for track maintenance did not fully recognise the significance of the insulation faults for traffic control, and the controllers had become used to them. For this reason, the commission proposes that, in order to prevent similar situations, the parties responsible for rail traffic should improve their information exchange. It should be better monitored that exceptional procedures do not become established practice.