

SUMMARY

FATAL LEVEL-CROSSING ACCIDENT IN SUONENJOKI, FINLAND, ON 26 AUGUST 2008

At 10.43 a.m. on Tuesday 26 August 2008, a railway work unit en route from Pieksämäki to Suonenjoki collided with a car at an unprotected level crossing in Suonenjoki.

The accident was fatal to the driver of the car. The car was damaged beyond repair and the railway work unit, which was a service railcar, incurred minor damage.

The direct cause of the accident was that the car driver drove onto the level crossing without stopping. In all probability, the driver completely failed to observe the railway work unit approaching from the left. The lack of a proper wait platform, a sharply rising road and limited visibility made it difficult to observe the surroundings and drive the car at the same time.

To prevent the occurrence of similar accidents, the investigation commission recommends that the sightlines of the level crossing be improved and the wait platforms reconditioned to meet regulations, and that the level crossing be equipped with a warning sign. If it becomes apparent that sightlines cannot be improved and that the wait platforms cannot be reconditioned, then the level crossing should be removed or equipped with a half-barrier.

In addition, the investigation commission recommends that the Finnish Rail Administration inform the parties in charge of road maintenance of their obligation to build and maintain road segments leading to level crossings as set out in the relevant regulations. The Finnish Rail Administration should also provide appropriate information on any track changes made and shortcomings discovered during inspection rounds. It is also suggested that the Finnish Rail Administration and the Ministry of Transport and Communications initiate a nationwide campaign about the obligations of road maintainers with regard to level crossings.

Furthermore, the investigation commission reiterates recommendation S211 of investigation report B1/2005R: *The instructions for the drawing up of an emergency notice should be developed to ensure that whenever urgent aid is needed from the rescue service, also the general emergency number is called from the incident scene, in addition to the notifying of the traffic control unit.*

The investigation commission also wishes to note that the level crossing safety study of 2007 and the related DVD on level crossing safety should still be actively used by driving schools and the other relevant parties. Drivers should also be provided with other forms of Information and education on level crossing safety, especially drivers who regularly cross level crossings. For example, the campaign “Be on guard at level crossings – especially the ones you know well” should be continued. Basic and advanced driving school instruction should pay greater attention to appropriate behaviour at level crossings.