

SUMMARY

FATAL LEVEL CROSSING ACCIDENT IN KOKEMÄKI, FINLAND, ON 16 MAY 2010

On Sunday 16 May 2010 at 7.57 pm, an Sr2 electric locomotive en route from Rauma to Tampere collided with a car at the Koskinen unprotected level crossing in Kokemäki. The accident was fatal to the car driver and a passenger. A second passenger was slightly injured. The car was wrecked beyond repair and the front of the locomotive suffered minor damage.

The accident occurred because the car driver noticed the approaching train too late and despite braking was not able to stop the car before the level crossing. As the car approached the track the driver was driving too fast in relation to how visible the track was from the road. Contributing to this were the inexperience of the driver and the fact that there was little indication that a level crossing was approaching: there were no warning installations, and there was a curving road before the crossing and a level crossing sign pointing in the wrong direction. Underlying factor to the accident was also that visibility to the track was poor when approaching and insufficient sightline towards the approaching train made the observation more difficult. The evening sun was shining low on the horizon from the direction of the approaching train.

The investigation commission is not issuing any safety recommendations as a result of the accident, but states that sightlines at the crossing should immediately be cleared in such a way that they meet regulations. In addition, the party responsible for road maintenance should reduce the speed limit to 20 km/h in the vicinity of the crossing, place warning signs on the road before the crossing and also place relevant STOP signs at the crossing. The Finnish Transport Agency should take effective action to ensure that road maintenance staff are sufficiently aware of proper level crossing maintenance as well as the installation of the relevant warning signs.

Actions leading to safety improvement were completed in the surrounding area following another accident in 2004, namely the number of level crossings in the area was reduced and traffic was redirected to the Koskinen level crossing. Redirecting traffic is generally a good solution but it also necessarily increases traffic at other level crossings, and therefore such actions should also include the equipment of remaining level crossings with appropriate half-barrier installations.

The investigation commission also notes that there was uncertainty as to which party was responsible for level crossing maintenance and the clearing of sightlines.