

SUMMARY

FATAL LEVEL CROSSING ACCIDENT IN LAUKAA, FINLAND, ON 25 FEBRUARY 2008

On 25 February 2008 at 9.53 a.m., a fatal level crossing accident occurred on Laukaa's Kauramaa unprotected level crossing. A tractor returning along an agricultural road from ploughing work drove without stopping in front of a freight train en route from Jyväskylä to Suolahti. The only person in the tractor was the driver, who died from his injuries in hospital later that day. The damage to the tractor and rolling stock totalled around € 30,000.

The accident occurred because the driver of the tractor did not observe the approaching train and drove onto the level crossing without stopping. Furthermore, the crossing did not meet level crossing safety requirements on the part of the wait platform and with respect to sightline. Too short a wait platform, in particular, may have caused the driver to focus more than usual on controlling the tractor, to which extra equipment was hitched, as it approached and arrived at the crossing. The driver's visibility may also have been impaired due to the sun shining against him. The agricultural road was intended only for agricultural use and not for through-traffic.

In order to prevent similar accidents, the accident investigation commission recommends the removal of the Kauramaa level crossing. Two safer routes in the vicinity of the track offer access to the agricultural fields. In addition, the accident investigation commission pays attention to the notion of the Ministry of the Interior Rescue Department that mobile phones should be used in the localisation of accidents, or, alternatively, that the feasibility of supplying all trains with GPS positioning equipment should be reviewed, which would ensure fast and accurate relay of location information to the emergency response centre. As other observations, the investigation commission suggests that tractors used in road traffic should be equipped not only with safety cabins but also seat belts.