

News story: Balance between safety and conservation at heart of tree review, says Rail Minister

- report led by John Varley delivers recommendations for lineside vegetation management by Network Rail
- publication shows need to roll out good practice across the network, and that safety of passengers is as vital as wildlife and vegetation preservation
- minister calls on Network Rail to set out action plan for protecting biodiversity and improving lineside management in six months

A careful balance between ensuring passenger safety, reliability and protecting lineside wildlife and trees is at the core of the independent Vegetation Management Review undertaken for the government, Rail Minister Andrew Jones revealed today (28 November 2018).

His comments came on a visit with review author John Varley to the launch of the first British railway hedge planting trial at Hadley Wood, by Network Rail, the Tree Council, and Hadley Wood Association and Rail User Group in Hertfordshire.

Mr Varley, an experienced land manager, [sets out a number of recommendations for Network Rail to revamp its lineside operations across the network](#). They include calling on the Department for Transport to set out clear expectations for Network Rail, and for the organisation to implement a cultural change focused on valuing nature and the environment as well as improving communication with affected communities.

Network Rail is the one of the largest landowners in the UK. Last year there were an estimated 1,500 incidents of rail disruption due to trees and bad weather.

Over the next 6 months Network Rail will develop a plan to address the recommendations. This includes a commitment to improving the way it operates to better protect nesting birds, before next year's nesting season.

Rail Minister Andrew Jones said:

This is a positive report and I welcome it. The thousands of miles of lineside vegetation and wildlife on our rail network are valuable assets which need protection because of the environmental benefits they bring.

So I completely understand people's concerns when they see trees being cut down, but it's also important to recognise that without effective lineside vegetation management we risk delays and

compromise safety for passengers.

Network Rail already demonstrates good practice in many locations but it is vital this is mirrored across the network, which is why I have asked the organisation to put together a plan which addresses these issues in the next 6 months. This is about culture change across the organisation as a whole.

Review chair John Varley said:

The profile of today's line-side vegetation is a product of the evolution of the railway over decades. If laid out end to end it would stretch over halfway around the circumference of the earth.

This is a valuable and nationally important natural asset. Taken together, my review's recommendations should lead to a significant improvement in the environmental impact of the railway, while reducing cost, and safety and performance risks.

The time is right for Network Rail to not only be one of the safest railways in Europe, but the greenest too, by valuing nature and providing a railway for people and wildlife.

Andrew Haines, Network Rail chief executive, said:

I welcome the Varley Review, in particular the opportunity it gives Network Rail to develop an ambitious vision for increasing biodiversity on the railway. Over the next 6 months we will develop a costed plan to deliver the aims and recommendations of this report. We will also improve the way we operate to better protect nesting birds, ready for next year's breeding season.

We are grateful to John and the team for their vision, insight and guidance.

Mike Clarke, Chief Executive, Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB):

The Network Rail estate is an important national asset for biodiversity, providing vital connections for wildlife throughout the landscape. The RSPB commends the recommendations in this review as the right ones to resolve the issue of vegetation management in the bird nesting season, and, enable Network Rail to deliver a positive approach to environmental management that enhances the estate's biodiversity, natural capital and provides a safe railway.

The Department for Transport accepts the recommendation for government.

[News story: London seminar: Commissioning to eradicate County Lines](#)



Seminar audience

Tuesday, 15 January, 2019

featuring

Evan Jones

Head of Community Services | St Giles Trust

Abi Billinghamurst

Founder and CEO | Abianda

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Press release: Pair caught fishing illegally land over £1200 in fines and costs

A fishing trip cost two Wolverhampton men more than £600 each, after they were caught without a licence and illegally removing fish.

Press release: Merger of credit score firms could reduce competition in sector

The CMA is concerned that Experian's takeover of start-up rival ClearScore could stifle product development and impact customers.

Press release: Merger of credit score firms could reduce competition in sector

The Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) Phase 2 investigation has provisionally found that Experian's takeover of ClearScore is likely to result in less intense competition, potentially harming the continued development of digital products which help people understand their personal finances.

The CMA referred the proposed merger between credit score checking firms Experian and ClearScore for an in-depth Phase 2 investigation in July 2018, following initial concerns that the deal could have a negative impact on the services provided to customers.

Experian and ClearScore are the 2 largest credit checking firms in the UK. Experian offers both free and paid-for credit checking services, while ClearScore, which entered the market in 2015, quickly became market leader in free credit checking tools for customers. Both companies also provide people

using these services with comparisons of third party lenders such as credit card providers and banks.

Currently, competition between the 2 firms is helping to drive quality and innovation in both free and paid-for credit checking services as they develop their products to vie for customers. By taking one of the firms out of the market, the CMA's provisional finding is that the merger would substantially reduce the pressure to continue to develop innovative offers and to make other improvements in services.

Roland Green, the Inquiry Chair, said:

Our investigation has shown that this is a fast-paced and evolving market, and that both Experian and ClearScore are an important part of that.

The provisional findings in our investigation show that Experian's proposed takeover of ClearScore is likely to weaken competition in the sector and have a negative effect on the services offered to customers.

The CMA is now asking for views on these provisional findings by 19 December 2018 and will assess all the evidence before making a final decision. The statutory deadline for the CMA's final report is 11 March 2019.

Further details are available on the [Experian / ClearScore case page](#).

Notes to editors

1. Experian provides a variety of services to businesses and individuals. It is a credit reference bureau, supplying credit providers (e.g. banks) with information which helps them to assess the risk of lending. It also provides a free credit scores that generate leads for financial products (e.g. credit cards and personal loans) from which it receives commission from financial product providers. It also provides provides a detailed credit report and features such as a dedicated call centre, fraud alerts, support for victims of identity fraud and dark web monitoring via its 'CreditExpert' service. Finally, Experian provides 'pre-qualification services' to comparison websites which allows users of those sites to see whether they are eligible for a particular credit product in real time.
2. ClearScore offers people free credit scores and reports and matches them with personal financial products (e.g. credit cards and personal loans) via its website and mobile app. ClearScore earns commission from the providers of the financial products.
3. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an

independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law.

4. The CMA's functions in phase 2 merger investigations are performed by inquiry groups chosen from the CMA's panel members. The appointed inquiry group are the decision-makers on phase 2 investigations.
5. The CMA's panel members come from a variety of backgrounds, including economics, law, accountancy and/or business; the membership of an inquiry group usually reflects a mix of expertise and experience.
6. Media enquiries to the CMA should be directed to press@cma.gov.uk or 020 3738 6460.