

News story: Near miss with track workers at Browney Curve

At approximately 23:45 hrs on Sunday 20 January 2019, a train operated by Northern encountered two track workers who were walking along the Browney Curve on the East Coast main line, South of Durham. The track workers had just set up a work site and were walking with their equipment to get to their place of work. However, because of an earlier planning mistake which went undetected, trains had not been stopped on the line on which the work site had been established. This occurred because the possession (a part of the railway which is closed to traffic to enable engineering works) did not encompass the location of the work.

RAIB was notified of the incident by Network Rail and has carried out a preliminary examination to understand the circumstances and identify whether it provides the potential for significant new safety learning. On the basis of the evidence that was available at the time, the RAIB has decided not to undertake an investigation into this incident.

The RAIB has previously carried out many investigations into accidents and incidents involving track workers, including a class investigation published in 2017.

Following this latest incident, the RAIB has written to Network Rail to remind it of the importance of addressing RAIB's findings following an investigation into a near miss at Camden Junction South on 28 February 2017. This recommended that Network Rail investigates ways to improve the layout and format of notices publishing the safety arrangements for track workers, with a specific focus on the greater use of diagrams to represent information.

In July 2018 the RAIB published a safety digest into a near miss west of Dundee. This again arose as a result of people not realising that the location of the work, and the location where protection had been planned, were different. In that safety digest, the RAIB re-iterated the learning from the near miss at Camden Junction South.

The implementation of the Camden South Junction recommendation is still in progress. The incident on the Browney Curve serves as a timely reminder of the importance of addressing this recommendation.

In its letter, the RAIB also observed that it would be helpful if new planning tools currently being developed by Network Rail could undertake automatic checks on whether work sites are actually located within the possession to which they are linked. The letter has been copied to the Office of Rail and Road as the safety regulator for the UK railways.