

[Press release: Report 09/2017: Fatal accident involving a passenger near Balham](#)

Summary

At about 17:24 hrs on Sunday 7 August 2016 a passenger, travelling on a Gatwick Express service from Gatwick Airport to London Victoria, suffered fatal injuries as a result of having his head out of a window and striking it on a signal gantry near Balham in south London. The train was travelling at about 61 mph (98 km/h) at the time of the accident.

The window concerned was on a door opposite a guard's compartment in the train; this door was accessible to passengers but it was not intended for passenger use. The RAIB has found no evidence to explain why the passenger put his head out of the window at that time.

The accident occurred because the passenger's head was out of the window, there was nothing to prevent passengers from opening the window or putting their head out of the opened window, and because there was less than the normal standard clearance between the train and the signal gantry. Although the clearance was compliant with standards for existing structures, it was less than an industry recommended minimum for new structures where there are trains with opening passenger windows.

An underlying cause was that the process for assessing the compatibility of this train on this route did not identify the risk of the combination of reduced structure clearances and opening windows.

Recommendations

The RAIB has made two recommendations and identified one learning point. One recommendation is addressed to Network Rail, and seeks to improve the industry's management of the interacting risks between infrastructure and rolling stock. The second recommendation is addressed to relevant train operators with the intention of reducing the risk from people leaning out of opening train windows.

The learning point reinforces the need for regular monitoring and management of structure clearances when those clearances are reduced from normal.

Notes to editors

1. The sole purpose of RAIB investigations is to prevent future accidents and incidents and improve railway safety. RAIB does not establish blame, liability or carry out prosecutions.
2. RAIB operates, as far as possible, in an open and transparent manner. While our investigations are completely independent of the railway industry, we do maintain close liaison with railway companies and if we

discover matters that may affect the safety of the railway, we make sure that information about them is circulated to the right people as soon as possible, and certainly long before publication of our final report.

3. For media enquiries, please call 01932 440015.

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