

# **London Assembly Environment Committee**

## **Railway Embankments**

### **Responses Received**

#### **Investigation: Railway Embankments/Lineside Vegetation**

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**LVR001      GLA Urban Greening Team**

From: Peter Massini  
Sent: 23 January 2012 16:28  
To: Richard Derecki; Michael Walker  
Subject: FW: EMBARGO: Environment Committee report on trackside vegetation

Follow Up Flag: LVR001 GLA Urban Greening Team

Richard/Michael

The Urban Greening unit in the Environment Team commented on this report. The report seems to correspond with our views on this issue. We have provided response to previous Assembly reports where there are recommendations that relate to the mayor or the GLA. There are no such recommendations in this report. Nevertheless do you think the Assembly is expect a response from the Mayor or GLA?

Regards

Peter Massini  
Urban Greening Team Leader  
Development & Environment  
Greater London Authority

**LVR002        (Member of the Public)**

**From:** Susan Lees []

**Sent:** 25 January 2012 12:07

**To:** Michael Walker; Richard Derecki

**Subject:** GLA Environment Committee Report on the Management of Railside Lands

**Follow Up Flag:** LVR002\_Public-Islington

**Flag Status:** Green

Dear Mr Derecki,

I have been passed a copy of the new Report on the Management of Railside Lands which sheds much needed light on the management (and mismanagement) of London's railside lands, which are so important for biodiversity and residents' amenity.

I am about to pass a copy round the Islington Wildlife Gardeners' Group (members of whom were involved with the Drayton Park SINC razoring outcry), and I think that we would all be interested to learn what is going to happen next, and in particular when do you expect to get a response from Network Rail and Transport for London, and when (and whether) they will adopt (effectively) the Report's recommendations.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Regards,

Sue Lees

From the Minister of State  
The Rt. Hon. Theresa Villiers MP

Department for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London SW1P 4DR

Daren Johnson AM  
London Assembly  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
LONDON  
SE1 2AA

Dear Darren,  
Thank you for your letters of 14 February, seeking the views of Caroline Spelman of the London Assembly Environment Committee's final report of its review of vegetation management on London's railway embankments. I am replying as the Minister responsible for Rail.

I note that the implementation of the Report's three recommendations falls to Network Rail. As your report acknowledges, Network Rail is a private sector company and its tree and vegetation management programme is an operational matter in which Ministers have no power to intervene.

However, I am happy to provide some general comments by way of background. I am well aware that the approach taken on our railways to trees can often provoke controversy, and this is a matter that I have raised directly with Network Rail.

Network Rail's first priority is to operate a safe and reliable railway and tree clearance plays a part in achieving this. Leaf fall, particularly from broadleaved trees, can result in adhesion problems for trains and cause the signalling system to malfunction. Train accidents due to falling trees are a significant risk in certain areas, due to factors such as the steepness of cutting slopes, soil conditions and the nature of the vegetation.

That said, and as your report also highlights, there are important ecological issues to be considered and care needs to be taken to avoid unnecessary tree-felling. I fully recognise the concern that local people often feel when they see trees being felled next to railway tracks; and agree that railway embankments need to be carefully managed.

Department officials have sought Network Rail's comments on the three recommendations in your report. These are set out below.

#### Recommendation 1

*As part of its current review of strategic vegetation management, Network Rail should follow Transport for London's lead and make use of Greenspace*

*Information for Greater London to plan maintenance works line-side ahead of any on-site surveys.*

Network Rail (and its contractors) carry out expensive surveys of sites on the day that works are due to commence to identify the presence of species and activity of interest. Steps are in place if either is found to be present, and Network Rail feels that these are adequate to ensure that biodiversity is respected.

Recommendation 2

*Network Rail and Transport for London should immediately use more specific and informative language when notifying stakeholders about vegetation management. They should move away from standardised template letters and use a wider range of templates to be more explicit about the type of management works announced. Letters should also provide weblinks where people can find more detailed information about line-side works.*

Network Rail accepts that on occasions the language used in communications to line-side neighbours does not adequately prepare for the extent of works; and that this can cause upset. It is currently reviewing aspects of communications with its neighbours.

Recommendation 3

*Network Rail should join the London Biodiversity Partnership (LBP), attend meetings or provide written input where necessary. A greater exchange with LBP members, particularly boroughs, would help achieve common biodiversity objectives and inform vegetation management strategies.*

Network Rail welcomes accurate additional information on any site or project and this will be considered. However, the principle objective of Network Rail is to deliver and maintain a safe national rail network.

Thank you for taking the time to draw to my attention the recommendations of the Environment Committee's final report.

Regards

THE RT. HON. THERESA VILLIERS

GREATERLONDONAUTHORITY  
Mayor's Office

**Alexandra Beer**  
Assistant Scrutiny Manager  
London Assembly  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
London SE1 2AA

Dear Ms Beer,

**On the right lines - management of vegetation on London's railway embankments**

Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to Darren Johnson's letter of 14 February about the above, which has only just been passed to me following an internal administration problem.

I am grateful for the Environment Committee's work on this subject. The loss of vegetation, especially mature trees, on railway embankments is an issue that is often raised by Londoners. This is not only because of its value as wildlife habitat, but because it provides an important landscape feature, especially in the more densely developed parts of the city - the most verdant railway corridors being green corridors in every sense.

I am pleased that your report notes that Transport for London (TfL) and Network Rail have good policies in place in relation to vegetation management and acknowledges that regular management of line side vegetation, including the felling or removal of trees on occasion, is necessary to ensure the safe and efficient operation of the railway and to maintain the structural integrity of embankment and cuttings.

Officers from the Greater London Authority and TfL have developed the strategies and plans (such as London Underground's Biodiversity Action Plan) that supports the informed decision-making that ensures we meet our obligations on safety and good environmental management.

However, I agree with the report's recommendations that TfL should provide good quality information to interested parties about the works they undertake. Consequently, I will ask TfL to consider how they might better inform stakeholders about line side works at the most sensitive sites (i.e. where there is likely to be significant removal of vegetation) and how the communications about such works could be improved.

I also support the recommendation relating to Network Rail's communications and utilisation of relevant data available from Greenspace Information for Greater London. I suggest that the Chair of the Environment Committee writes to Network Rail enclosing a copy of this letter.

Regarding your recommendation that Network Rail should join the London Biodiversity Partnership (LBP), I am informed by my officers that there have been discussions between the LBP and Network Rail in the past. However, because Network Rail's line side management regime is based on routes (e.g. East Coast Mainline) they are unable to make a significant commitment to the LBP as only a relatively minor part of their rail side estate falls within the Greater London boundary.

The Chair of the Environment Committee might wish to raise this directly again with Network Rail at

a senior level if you feel this would be appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

**Boris Johnson**  
Mayor of London  
Cc: Darren Johnson AM

Mr Darren Johnson  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
London  
SE12AA

26 March 2012

Dear Darren,

Thank you for your letter of 14 February in which you enclosed the final version of the London Assembly Environment Committee's Report 'On the Right Lines - management of vegetation on London's Railway Embankments'.

I welcome the balanced comments of the Committee in the report and its positive comments on Transport for London's (TfL) approach to trackside vegetation management across the Tube, DLR, Tram and London Overground networks. In particular, I welcome recommendation one and the acknowledgement of TfL's use of Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL) in planning this work.

Improving the management of trackside vegetation is an area that we have had a significant focus on in recent years. London Underground's Biodiversity Action Plan, developed in conjunction with a variety of wildlife organisations, including GiGL, sets the framework for improving the connectivity of rare habitats across London as well as conserving protected species. This Plan informs all our work in this area and has helped shape and drive, for example, the nature area at Kingsbury, work to protect bats at disused tunnels in Highbury and, more recently, work with the RSPB and Froglife on an embankment at Barkingside to provide a habitat for reptiles.

More broadly, TfL's vegetation management approach has been put in place on our other networks such as the work done by Tramlink in Croydon's Lloyd Park.

With regard to your comments in recommendation two; since the publication of your report we have reviewed ways to make our letters more accessible. We have already begun to make language more specific and informative where possible - particularly when communicating the likely impact of potentially intrusive work. Although it is not always possible to say at the outset the exact scope of vegetation management needed - we are making changes to make this as clear as we can. We are currently looking at how we can improve the information on our website, in order to provide residents with further information about how different types of work might affect their area.

We continue to work with wildlife organisations on targeted awareness- raising initiatives and will of course remain active members of the London Biodiversity Partnership (LBP), working with LBP members to help achieve common biodiversity objectives.

Yours sincerely

Peter Hendy



5th April 2012

Alexandra Beer  
Assistant Scrutiny Manager  
London Assembly

Dear Alex,

## **ON THE RIGHT LINES? Vegetation Management on London's Railway Embankments**

Thank you for the copy of the above report; London Wildlife Trust is pleased that our interest in this area, and our response to the Environment Committee's investigation helped to provide some context. We have a few comments, mainly in respect of clarification, set out below.

### **1. Introduction**

#### **Para 1.3**

The protection alluded to relates to planning protection. Whilst no railway land in London is covered by statutory designations (e.g. SSSI), the SINC's are identified in local (or unitary development) plans, and will be afforded various levels of protection in respect of planning proposals – for example, housing. This does not protect such sites from management activities by the railway companies, nor gives them much protection if they wish to remove habitat to meet operational needs.

### **2. Why management works need to be carried out**

#### **Para 2.5**

The term now used for such species is 'non-native invasive', and the national framework for this is overseen by the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat<sup>1</sup>. The London Invasive Species Initiative (LISI) is the regional articulation of this work, overseen by the Environment Agency, and a new LISI Manager has recently started, hosted by GiGL at London Wildlife Trust's offices. The LISI work has already identified a list of potential problem species, some of which will be relevant to lineside management:

<http://www.lbp.org.uk/LISI.html> and an action plan is to follow, which will benefit from Network Rail's and Transport for London's input.

### **3. Scale and impact of line-side management**

#### **Para 3.4 (and Box 3)**

See above. The scale of Japanese knotweed across the network is probably not known, but mapping it (and other priority Schedule 9 species) would be the necessary first step to develop a management plan. It is unlikely that the species can be eradicated from London's railways – but it will need to be controlled where it is likely to cause damage. Virginia-creeper, false acacia, and rhododendron, also listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, are also problematic in some areas of the railway network.

Other species which are problematical but not listed under Schedule 9, include buddleja and tree-of-heaven. Arguably, these should be included within a network management plan.

#### **Para 3.6 and 3.7**

Only one comment (under para 2.4) makes reference to the benefits from some clearance of vegetation. The Trust's position statement makes clear that part of the biodiversity interests of railway linesides are those which are still grasslands – grasslands that by and large are free-draining, relatively species-diverse, and not heavily 'improved' by fertilisers and herbicides, a relatively uncommon habitat. Grasslands can be lost through the colonisation by trees and shrubs, and in time their value for wildlife

changes. Replanting of cleared areas may not always be appropriate, especially if grassland habitat can be effectively restored and maintained within ordinary operational regimes.

Therefore management which helps to retain tracts of grassland and good quality areas of scrub and woodland would be our preferred outcome for biodiversity. This could help provide foraging habitat for bees (and other pollinators) referred to in para 3.13.

#### **Para 3.11**

This doesn't surprise us; most audits of railway linesides (that helped identify the SINCs) have been of vegetation; access has prevented more detailed assessments of fauna.

#### **Para 3.12**

We would concur at the points made on the role of railway linesides habitat and how these can act as important corridors. The role of 'green corridors' as biodiversity conduits is often over-stressed, although there is evidence that railway linesides have provided the means for a range of species to move along them (for example, badger, muntjac, roe deer, kestrel have been recorded using them in London); the key is to provide ample habitat within them, and adjacent to the green spaces they run by.

### **4. Standards and good practice**

#### **Para 4.15**

We recognise the operational requirements of Network Rail, but the quote provokes more questions rather than satisfies that the concerns over wildlife harm are being addressed. What steps are in place, and how can they demonstrate they have met legislative requirements? Surely the availability of good data should aid appropriate management decisions? There's clearly a lack of recognition of the SINC designations. In this respect we support **Recommendation 1**.

### **5. Communication and consultation**

We support **Recommendation 2**. The issues set out here concur with our experiences over many years. Whilst communication has improved since the 1990s, it is not only the information that is stripped to the minimum, but also the timing. As stated in para 5.8 we only get to hear about events once works have started on site which is far too late; what would be more beneficial is not only more advanced information locally, but also an outline plan for the London network as a whole, as we suggested in our submission:

*A compact of operational best practice between key stakeholders (e.g. London Tree Officers Association, London Forum (of civic amenity societies)) that sets out what should be undertaken, and how this can have biodiversity benefits as well as meeting operational requirements, could serve to develop a stronger relationship between organisations that are affected by the impacts of such management.*

#### **Para 5.14**

It would help for local Biodiversity Action Plan partnerships and other frameworks, to have a sense of the structures in place within Network Rail – part of the problem has been trying to find a consistent contact with whom to develop a positive relationship. Whom within the company is best placed to address the issues of biodiversity conservation in London?

#### **Para 5.15**

We support **Recommendation 3**. Network Rail and Transport for London should also consider becoming a partner of the forthcoming London Local Nature Partnership, and also the All London Green Grid, the emerging green infrastructure strategy for London.

The Trust will continue, where we can, to encourage the beneficial management of London's railway linesides for biodiversity, and provide advice to others how best to achieve the potential for the capital's railway network in contributing to strategic conservation objectives.

I hope you find these points of use; please don't hesitate to contact me if you want any further details.

Regards,  
Matthew Frith  
Deputy CEO

Alexandra Beer  
Assistant Scrutiny Manager  
London Assembly  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
London SE1 2AA

18th April 2012

Dear Alex,

**On the right lines? Vegetation Management on London's Railway Embankments**

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the above report. Our comments are as follows:

**Recommendation 1:**

We strongly support the recommendation that one of London's major land managers engages with the GiGL partnership. Our partners benefit from access to key datasets and associated services that are used to inform management and maintenance of sites, and as importantly, are able to share their own information via GiGL too. This is particularly relevant in Network Rail's case as their data are of interest to many of our partners including the London boroughs, London Wildlife Trust and other organisations that manage land on or adjacent to the line-sides.

**Recommendation 3:**

We strongly support the recommendation that Network Rail should join the London Biodiversity Partnership. There are other initiatives that are emerging that may also be of use to Network Rail, including the new London Local Nature Partnership.

**Other specific points:**

GiGL now hosts the London Invasive Species Initiative Manager. LISI was set up to coordinate action in line with *The Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain* produced by DEFRA while also delivering benefits under the *Water Framework Directive* and national biodiversity objectives, including the *London Biodiversity Action Plan*. All major land managers would benefit from engaging with the LISI partnership to access information on current best practice and the opportunity to co-ordinate management efforts. The current term is 'invasive non-native species' (INNS) of which a London-specific list have been developed and maintained by LISI for peoples' attention. Data on the distribution and management of INNS are held by GiGL with the view of expanding the dataset over the coming year.

Through including LISI within this review the original management aims would be better met, in reference to points 2.5, 3.4, and 3.5 addressing INNS. Additionally both LISI and GiGL could also providing assistance in regards to addressing point 4.7, Monitoring and Implementation through collection and management of INNS datasets.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Mandy Rudd  
*GiGL Director*

[END]