

Lessons Learnt from a Formal Investigation



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Title: A close call involving a track patrolling team working Red Zone with a Lookout Operated Warning System (LOWS)



Example photo of the location of the Lookout.

Example photo of the type of train obscuring the Lookouts view

Overview of Event

- A supplementary basic visual inspection (track patrol) was being undertaken on the West Coast Main Line at Whitmore, near Stafford.
- A safe system of work was introduced which included a LOWS controller and two LOWS lookouts to give warning of trains approaching from the Up and Down direction.
- The pre-planned location for Lookout No.2 to observe and give warning of trains passing over the Down Slow and Down Fast line was obscured by vegetation and an alternative location was utilised.
- From his new position of safety, the Down Slow line was nearest to him with the Down Fast line was located beyond the Up Slow line.
- Therefore, trains on the Down Fast line could be obscured by trains passing on the Down Slow and Up Slow lines.
- The method of work continued for over 30 minutes without a problem until a long freight train, consisting of high sided vehicles, passed over the Down Slow line and obscured a passenger train on the Down Fast line.
- The Lookout did not activate the LOWS warning system for the passenger train travelling over the Down Fast line as he did not see it.

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Underlying Causes: Supervision & management

- The supplementary basic visual inspection was planned late to deal with a backlog of inspections and combined two inspections. As a result the safe system of work was produced and authorised only hours earlier.
- The revised safe system of work did not take into account the potential for long and or slow moving freight trains to obscure the Lookout's view of the Down Fast line.
- **Knowledge, skills & experience**
- The Lookout did not consider that the long, high sided freight train, could obscure his view of a train running over the Down Fast line.

Key Message:

Line Managers should thoroughly examine the effectiveness of any safe system of work that they approve which has been planned or amended at short notice