

Guide Dogs response to the consultation on the review of Guidance on Level Crossings.

Introduction

Guide Dogs is the UK's largest single provider of mobility and other rehabilitation training for blind and partially sighted people. Each year, we help thousands of visually impaired clients to live independent lives, either with a guide dog or long cane.

Our vision is for a world in which all people who are blind and partially sighted enjoy the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as everyone else. We help blind and partially sighted people to achieve independence and mobility through the provision of guide dogs and rehabilitation services – yet this independence is limited by the environment in which they must live. We therefore campaign for equal access to transport and the built environment, shops and services, health and social care for all blind and partially sighted people.

Guide Dogs represents the visual impairment sector on mobility issues. In addition to around 5,000 guide dog owners, we represent the interests of all blind and partially sighted people. We have a Consultative User Forum of approx 12 members based around the UK, and Guide Dogs provides the secretariat for the Joint Committee on Mobility for Blind and Partially Sighted People (JCMBPS), an umbrella body with representatives of the main national organisations representing blind and partially sighted people.

Our views are based on established policy positions and consultation with our Users Forum and JCMBPS members.

Response:

Generally Guide Dogs and JCMBPS would like to see the design of all level crossings provide physical and tactile cues to warn blind and partially sighted pedestrians that they are coming up to, going over and completed a level crossing to enable the blind or partially sighted pedestrian to do this safely and independently. This should be consistent in design regardless of the type of crossing. In addition, the audible signals to be clear and distinct

enough to be distinguished from other surrounding noise as some blind and partially sighted pedestrians may not be able to benefit from the added visual cues.

12 Provisions for pedestrians at public vehicular crossings:

Audible warnings

171. Audible signals to be clear and distinct enough to be distinguished from other surrounding noise. Also, that the audible warning gives sufficient notice prior to the barriers closing or descent.

177. Tactile

We would like the heading Tactile thresholds to be changed to **Tactile Paving Thresholds**. This is a better understood term and encompasses all the different types recommended in the DfT guidance 'Guidance on the use of tactile paving surfaces'. In addition, this term would give more clarity as to what is proposed which is not very clear at the moment.

We would strongly recommend tactile paving - **corduroy paving** to be provided to warn/inform blind and partially sighted pedestrians they are approaching a level crossing. In addition **guidance paving** to assist crossing over in a straight line or to the opposite side of the cross thereby preventing a blind or partially sighted pedestrian from veering off their route and onto either the railway line or centre of the carriageway. To further assist people with reduced vision the provision of a white line as is provided at railway crossings to give an additional cue.

16 Gates, wicket gates and barrier equipment

Gates

229. We would recommend a consistency in design of the gates.

Wicket gates

Most of these type of gates are quite narrow for people with Guide dogs. Guide dog owners find it difficult negotiating these gates with the dogs especially when they spring back catches the back of a pedestrian's leg.

Barriers

Half barriers

2.45 Half barriers can be a potential hazard for a blind or partially sighted person who may approach from the side where there is no barrier without knowing they are approaching it from the wrong side due to their reduced or no vision. We would recommend half barriers are replaced with full width barriers for the safety of more vulnerable users.

Common Terms

Tactile Thresholds to be changed to Tactile Paving Thresholds

End