

Urgent Safety Advice 02/2023: Overspeeding through Spital Junction

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1. Safety issue

Suitable arrangements may not be in place to mitigate the risk of trains travelling southbound through Spital Junction at excessive speeds when signalled from the Up Fast line onto the Up Slow lines at Peterborough station.

P468 signal, which controls this junction, is located 700 metres on the approach to the point of divergence. The signal is fitted with a position light junction indicator informing drivers of their signalled route. Under certain circumstances, the signal clears from red as a train approaches when a diverging route is set. The maximum permitted speed through the diverging junction is initially 30 mph (48 km/h), before reducing further to 25 mph (40 km/h).

Drivers who rarely experience being routed towards the slow lines when approaching Peterborough station from the north, and whose trains are not scheduled to stop at the station, may develop an expectation that their train will remain on the Up Fast line and miss some of the information provided at P468 signal when their train is being signalled onto the diverging route.

In these circumstances the distance from which a proceed aspect on P468 signal can be seen by approaching trains, and the distance from the signal to the junction, is sufficient to result in some trains being able to accelerate to speeds which could lead to derailment by overturning when passing through the junction.

2. Safety advice

Duty holders should take immediate steps, either operationally, or by technical means, to mitigate this risk.

3. Issued to:

Network Rail and transport undertakings who operate trains on the East Coast Main Line through Peterborough station.

4. Background

On 17 April 2022, the driver of a Lumo service from Newcastle to London King's Cross did not observe and react to the junction indicator on P468 signal which showed that the train was being signalled towards the slow lines at Spital Junction. Believing that his train was going to stay on the Up Fast line, he accelerated the train towards the junction and passed over it at 76 mph (122 km/h) instead of the 30 mph (48 km/h) maximum permitted speed.

On 4 May 2023, the driver of a Grand Central service from Sunderland to London King's Cross did not observe and react to the junction indicator on P468 signal which showed that the train was being signalled towards the slow lines at Spital Junction. Believing that his train was to stay on the Up Fast line, he accelerated his train towards the junction and passed over it at 65 mph (105 km/h).