



## News

# Surge in motorists risking their safety on level crossings

Friday, June 02, 2017

KiwiRail and Tracksafe NZ are warning Auckland motorists to take more care as the number of vehicles hitting protective barrier arms at level crossings surges.

The number of incidents where protective barriers are damaged has risen by almost 300 per cent since 2012.

“When a vehicle hits a barrier arm it means motorists have not made sure they had the space or the time to cross and fully exit the rail crossing, and that is dangerous,” says James Brailsford, KiwiRail’s Network Service Manager for the Auckland Metro rail network.

“These are critical safety devices. Every time a motorist hits a barrier the real worry is that there is unknown damage to the safety systems designed to keep crossing users, motorists and trains separated and safe.

“When the barrier arm is damaged, train speeds must reduce until a full safety inspection is carried out, and that means delays to commuter services.

“Since 2012, 331 level crossing barrier arms have been hit by cars, vans, trucks and motorbikes across the busy metro area. That’s 331 times where safety has been compromised.

“In 2016 alone there have been 114 incidents and the number and risk to the public is growing. Our concern is that more motorists think they can beat the warning signals and the train.”

KiwiRail ensures that it recovers costs whenever possible to deter those who put the public at risk. In the last year, more than \$250,000 has been sought from motorists involved in incidents with crossings.

Woodward Road crossing in Mt Albert is the worst location for incidents, with 40 barrier arm strikes since 2012. That is followed by Manuroa Road in Takanini with 39 strikes and Metcalfe Road in Ranui with 34 strikes.

Mr Brailsford says the increasing population in Auckland and better reporting of the incidents by both the public and train drivers have had some impact on the rise in numbers.

TrackSAFE Foundation Manager Megan Drayton says what the figures really show is that motorists are not getting the message. “We cannot stress enough the importance of motorists having patience at level crossings,” she says.

“Always obey the warning signs and look carefully in both directions for trains. Stay focused, keep the cross hatching clear and ensure there is space on the other side of the crossing for your vehicle before you cross,” she says.

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“Never overtake a vehicle that has stopped for a train or try to race a train over the crossing - trains are usually travelling faster than you think.”

The figures have been released on International Level Crossing Awareness Day (ILCAD), in which 40 countries raise awareness of the dangers of railway crossings.

In addition to the barrier arm damage there have been 92 recorded near misses between vehicles and trains and 77 near misses with pedestrians

“Every year there are hundreds of near collisions reported by train drivers. Research in New Zealand has shown that distraction, complacency and impatience are the key causes of level crossing collisions in our country,” says Ms Drayton.

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