



ARE TETRA WAVES DANGEROUS?

Its official, no one seems to know!

After numerous meetings with management, Connect experts and a series of TETRA wave boffins, the Train's Health and Safety Council are none the wiser about the effects of TETRA waves on the health of our members.

Given that we are mere drivers this is hardly surprising. More worryingly, at a recent TETRA conference organised by LU, the head of LU's Occupational Health and an eminent expert in the field, brought in for a questions and answers stint, could not give guarantees about the safety of this new technology.

Here's the science part from a train drivers point of view:

For those who have missed all previous communiqués on this topic, TETRA stands for *terrestrial trunked radio*. The concerns of our safety reps, and other scientists in the field, centre around what damage may be caused by electromagnetic waves emitted by the Connect radio system.

At one end of the electromagnetic spectrum you have the very short waves, namely gamma rays and x-rays and at the other end of the spectrum you have the very long waves, namely radio, TV and waves from overhead power cables.

The electromagnetic spectrum is ordered so that at the short wave end you have the gamma rays, x-rays, ultra-violet, visible light, infra red, microwaves, radar, TV and radio in that order. The ultra-violet and above are known as ionising waves and there is no argument as to the damage they can cause when entering the body. Below ultraviolet is said to be non-ionising and this is where arguments occur between scientists as to whether damage can occur inside the human body through exposure to these waves. The microwaves used in the TETRA system are in the non-ionising section of the electromagnetic spectrum.

At RMT Head Office last week, a presentation was given for our members that raised safety concerns

about the TETRA system and effects on the body: the concerns included, degenerative eye problems, fertility problems, carcinogenic effects and fatigue, among others.

At the LU TETRA Conference, the language used by their Occupation Health representative was ambiguous to say the least: words such as 'unlikely' and 'uncertainty' seemed to crop up far too often.

The view expressed by the expert at the LU Conference, David Coggan, was that he was confident that there was nothing to worry about. It has to be said though that even he could not give a 100% guarantee about safety.

A word of caution has to be added here: the experts in the field cannot always be trusted: it wasn't that long ago that scientists were claiming there were no long term health effects from asbestos, and even smoking was good for you, and look what happened to the Marlboro Man!

Others trying to play down the effects of TETRA waves have argued that they are no more harmful than mobile phones. Well use of your mobile phone is an optional choice; use of your train radio isn't!

The only constant theme is that everyone seems agreed that any harmful effects would take years to manifest themselves. It would therefore take longitudinal studies over periods of time to establish the truth. In the meantime, it would appear that we have become the TETRA 'lab-rats!' One thing is sure, monitoring has to start now to examine the effects of the system, if any, on our members.

Obviously, we are just train drivers and not experts. For this reason we will be asking RMT Head Office to pick up the ball from this point on and to get experts in the field to take up our concerns with LU. We will add some links for further reading and keep you posted of any developments.

www.tetrawatch.net

Report from the Tier 2 Train's Council meeting.....

If you are not already aware, this is how the LU Health and Safety Machinery works: if Health and Safety problems or concerns arise locally, the first port of call is your local RMT health and Safety Representative at the Depot. They will raise these concerns with the local manager. If no resolution to the problem can be found, the matter will be referred to us at the Tier 2 Train's Safety Council. If we are unable to resolve the matter it then gets referred to LU Directors / RMT Head office level for them to resolve. Below is a snapshot of items currently being discussed at Tier 2.

Unstaffed Stations

Your RMT Rep's have made management aware that Train Operator's are far from happy running through stations that are not adequately staffed. Management assure us that no stations are intentionally left de staffed, *however*, there are times when Station Staff may be on meal relief, dealing with incidents, travelling to or from stations and assistance, if required, is not readily available.

Met Line Reps have asked that their drivers are notified by the LC when a station is unmanned. This would forewarn us and enable us to deal with problems that may arise more effectively. This request was refused at Tier 2 and has been referred to the Director's/ Head Office level of the H & S machinery for resolution.

It is of great concern to us that stations are left unmanned at all. Bizarrely, there is no Rule Book ruling on how many stations in a row, in the open section, can be left unmanned. This has to be addressed.

Platform Train Interface equipment

As you will all be aware, the underground system is undergoing a huge amount of refurbishment work, and during engineering hours there is the potential for equipment to be put out of alignment prior to start of traffic the next day. We believe this may be the case with OPO equipment so we urge you to make sure that your view of the entire PTI is 100% prior to departing a platform and if you are in any doubt follow the applicable procedure for defective OPO equipment.

It could be that OPO/PTI Groups should be performing platform walks to check alignment of all mirrors and monitors in their area.

Tunnel Cleaning Train

Has anyone seen it? We've asked the question and we'll be chasing up whether or not the alternative method of cleaning the tunnels, especially during this period of refurbishment, is sufficient. If you feel your workplace has become dustier then let your local rep know and they in turn will inform us and we'll get something done about it.

Litter picking in sidings

An anomaly exists with our Cleaner members being asked to litter pick on trains that are entering/exiting reversing points. Despite LUL not being able to keep a lid on their own generic rules and procedures, one of the functions of your Tier 2 Rep's is to strive for a consistent approach across the combine, with safety at the forefront of our joint decision making.

When the issue of litter picking in sidings was discussed at a recent meeting it was decided by management that litter pickers can travel into the sidings to carry out their job *but* an individual Train Operator may refuse if they're unhappy about taking a Cleaner with them.

Cross tack projection (XTP)

In this ever increasing commercial world we live in companies are trying to identify every single advertising space on our system and are introducing new methods to display their goods. One such method is Cross Track Projection (XTP): this involves showing a film onto the platform wall when trains are not in the platform; well that's what we were told at first! This would not present a problem to Train Operators as long as the equipment switches off when a train is approaching the platform. Unfortunately, it would appear safety is taking a back seat to advertising and revenue and the XTP equipment at certain locations with equipment staying on permanently. This is causing a problem for Train Operators vision; many drivers have complained about the distraction from this equipment.

At Piccadilly for example, you come round the bend to enter the platform and you are greeted with a huge screen advertising all sorts. At a time when we should be concentrating on the PTI, we are being distracted.

This is unacceptable. No resolution could be reached at Tier even though the managers their agreed with us. It would appear an order has come from above to insist XPT remains on. We have referred the matter to Directors Level/ Head Office level for them to resolve.

New Years Eve Working & the Alcohol ban

This New Years Eve we'll enter into new territory thanks to Boris and his barmy army. There have been several incidents of Staff being presented with threatening behaviour since the alcohol ban was introduced. The ban may well lead to an increase in dangerous situations for our members throughout the Christmas festivities

and we have demanded that LUL reviews its work place risk assessments for New Years Eve working prior to expecting our members to be potentially confronted with an increase in workplace violence.

Five day block refresher training (CDP)

As you may be aware the traditional 5 day block of refresher training has been condensed into 4 days and the additional fifth day is utilised by individual lines for any training they believe is beneficial for their staff. There have been attempts to utilise the fifth day for more 'handle turning' time and we have made LUL aware that we will not stand for any watering down of our training, that after all can make the difference between us keeping our livelihoods or not.

Manual operation on Automatic Train Operation lines

Automatic trains are here already and, with the line upgrades that are occurring (report on next page), automatic trains will be phased in on all lines in the near future. However, when ATO becomes unavailable, for whatever reason, Train Operators are expected to drive their trains manually. If LUL expects its Train Operator's to remain competent when driving their trains manually then Train operators must have the opportunity to practice the activity and indeed be assessed on their competence. Simulators are no real substitute for actually driving a train on an operational railway and we have asked LUL how they are going to resolve this potential problem. Our position is that scope for manual operation is built into all timetables and duty rosters.

We are awaiting LUL's response and we will keep you updated.

Remember, if you have a safety concern, report it to your local Health and Safety Rep ASAP. Safety Reps should ensure that all matters that cant be resolved locally are referred to the Tier 2 ASAP.

Upgrades Report.....

Owing to the amount of upgrades with stock and signalling, LU last year allowed the RMT to appoint a dedicated Safety Rep solely to deal with new Upgrade issues. This Rep is Gwyn Pugh from Acton Town Depot.

He has supplied us an update of the burning issues that we will be facing soon.

Code Red: there are plans afoot for Controller to have the ability to stop trains immediately without having to call a 'code red'. The Controller will have a button on his desk that we only have to push for all trains to grind to a halt.

We obviously have problems with this as the fact trains are not fitted with air bags seems to have escaped them. Drivers will be crashing against the wind screen with no warning being given. This matter will be discussed at the next Tier 2 meeting.

Auto Door Opening: this is where trains will arrive in the platform and the doors will open automatically.

This is just one step away from automatic trains completely. We would be voting ourselves out of a job if we agreed to this. The driver should be in charge of train and that's the way we want it to stay. This matter will also be heading to Tier 2.

Blue lights for auto running under normally signalled areas: This would add a blue which meant no reduced speed when we would normally be shunting round depots. The arguments against are straight forward really, we do not need several differing signalling systems. The ATO system on all lines should be clever enough to work with existing signalling thereby preventing the need for another colour light. we cannot allow this dangerous manoeuvre to happen on our

watch, it will be the precursor to the next item.

Again, this item will be sent to Tier 2 for discussion.

NOPO: (No Person Operation) into sidings and depots. (If the above item is allowed to happen, this will be the next stage in the reduction of the train operators roles and responsibilities) This facility will allow trains to automatically, with no driver, to enter depots or sidings. We cannot allow this.

Platform Emergency Stop Plungers: (PESP coming to a place near you soon)

The Jubilee line want train ops to "reset" any activated PESP's where (and this is the crux of the matter) no station staff are available! We cannot agree to stations being unmanned even for S/S meal relief's and we cannot agree to train ops resetting PESP's on that basis.

Maintaining train op skills: (On its way shortly)

When ATO does eventually arrive, the basics of how to operate trains and the skills learnt over decades of intense training could be lost if we do not have at least 1 program per line defining and insisting on manual train operation during the course of the train ops working week. I have and will again be putting forward the line in the sand argument on this which will then work its way on to you.

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