

Frequent timetable corrections cause SPAD incidents

15.12.2021

The President of the Office of Rail Transport asked rail passenger carriers to introduce changes to train stops only in timetables once a year, i.e. with the entry into force of the annual timetables. This request is a result of an analyses conducted by the Office which shows that the incidents where a train passes a stop signal without authority to do so (a signal passed at danger, SPAD) are often caused by the lack of knowledge of a current timetable. Frequent changes of train stops in timetables also increase such risk.

In 2021 four out of ten SPAD incidents (which are basically passing semaphores indicating the 'stop' signal or failure to stop at a designated place) are cases where a train fails to stop at a platform or completely omits a stop sign at a given location. In half of the examined events, railway commissions found that the reason was insufficient knowledge of a timetable by a train driver.

In a letter to rail passenger carriers the President of the Office of Rail Transport pointed to another aspect of this situation. i.e. that the risk of a mistake by a train driver increases with too frequent changes of stopping places indicated in a timetable. In the opinion of the President of the Office of Rail Transport, it is necessary to limit such situations. The stops on routes for individual categories of trains should remain constant throughout the period of validity of an annual timetable. It will facilitate the work of train drivers who will be aware that any possible changes to stopping places will be only once a year. Railway undertakings should also take care of the legibility and repeatability of the stop system on routes for particular categories of trains.

Prevention of SPAD incidents should be a joint effort of the entire company. Decisions made in various divisions of a rail company may create circumstances conducive to the occurrence of rail incidents. These risks should be identified and taken into account when implementing changes to timetables.