

Network Rail chiefs share £630,000 bonus as company faces court for crossing deaths



Network Rail said the bonuses would have been higher had its punctuality and safety records been better Gareth Fuller/FA

Philip Pank Transport Correspondent
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Four Network Rail directors will receive taxpayer-funded bonuses totalling £633,000 on top of combined salaries worth £1.4 million.

The state-funded maintenance company said yesterday that it would pay the bonuses even though it is due to miss punctuality targets and has been found to be responsible for deaths at level crossings and for accidents involving trackside workers.

Network Rail is due to be sentenced today for health and safety breaches leading to the death of a woman at a level crossing in Herefordshire. The company will pay Patrick Butcher, its finance director, a long-term bonus of £168,000. Robin Gisby, network operations managing director, and Simon Kirby, infrastructure projects managing director, will receive bonuses of £158,400 each and Paul Plummer, group strategy director, £148,400.

The bonuses are on top of Mr Butcher's salary of £382,000 and annual pay to Mr Gisby and Mr Kirby of £360,000. Mr Plummer's salary is £330,000. Sir David Higgins, the chief executive, who receives an annual basic salary of £560,000, does not yet qualify for a long-term bonus.

Network Rail, a private company that has no shareholders and is free from direct ministerial interference, receives more than £3 billion of public money a year to maintain track, signals and stations.

It said that the bonuses would have been 20 per cent higher had its punctuality and safety records been better. David Sidebottom, the director of the passenger watchdog Passenger Focus, said: "It's up to Network Rail to justify performance-related bonuses by working with operators to deliver an on-time railway and to continue to drive down the costs of this."

Manuel Cortes, leader of the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association union, said: "As passengers faced a 4.2 per cent fare increase in January, they will be puzzled why the people who cannot make their trains run on time are rewarding themselves with taxpayers' money. This is yet another Great Train Robbery."

A survey of 43,000 executives in 180 organisations by the Chartered Institute of Management showed yesterday that chief executives enjoyed a 15.8 per cent increase in their salaries in the past year, largely made up of bonuses.

Average pay for a company chief executive stands at more than £215,000, compared with around £43,000 for a middle manager.

The research showed that chief executives' pay increased five times as much as that of the average executive in the past 12 months. The basic salary of chief executives rose by 1.8 per cent last year, but leapt to 15.8 per cent when bonuses were added.

Network Rail and the operator of a level crossing at Moreton-on-Lugg are due to be sentenced at Birmingham Crown Court today following the death of Jane Harding, 52. She was killed when her husband drove their car onto the tracks after the signalman opened the gates in error. The company decided against fitting a device that would have prevented the signalman from manually opening the gates as a train approached because it did not consider the cost to be worth the risk of an accident.

Two people were killed last night when their car was struck by a train at a level crossing in Lincolnshire. The 19.26 TransPennine Cleethorpes to Scunthorpe service hit the vehicle at the Great Coates crossing in Cocks Lane, Grimsby.

The crossing was fitted with an automatic barrier that was designed to block one side of the road.

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