

Crackdown announced after spate of metal cable thefts

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Network Rail and the British Transport Police have announced that they are cracking down on thieves stealing metal cables in South Yorkshire.

The action is being taken after a series of daily offences in April.

Since April 2021, the theft of signalling cables, electric wires and metal equipment from locations including Rotherham, Sheffield and Aldwarke has cost the infrastructure owner more than £280,000.

Network Rail has emphasised that as it is “arm’s length” government body, these costs are ultimately covered by taxpayer money.

But it is not just a matter of cost: journeys have been delayed by 89 hours in the past 12 months, as every theft causes widespread disruption. Cutting cables inevitably brings trains to a standstill, and these delays ripple throughout the network.

With the rising price of copper, the number of offences has gone up. The first week of April saw thefts

every day.

There are new ways to catch these thieves, however, and Network Rail and British Transport Police say they are now using them. Its teams are increasing their patrols and using real-time surveillance techniques to monitor hotspot areas.

Olga Barannikova, area customer services and performance manager for Network Rail, said: “The impact of railway cable theft mustn’t be underestimated. Not only does it waste taxpayers’ money and frustratingly make passengers late, but it also holds up the delivery of important freight supplies and takes key railway staff away from their work.

“We’re constantly finding new, clever ways to catch offenders, and I know that this new push with the BTP will help us to hammer home that criminal behaviour – trespass, vandalism and theft – will not be tolerated on Britain’s railway.”

PC Darren Martin from British Transport Police’s disruption team, said: “The theft of cable from the railway is far from a victimless crime.

“It costs the rail industry millions of pounds each year, causing delays and increases in costs to projects which have a knock-on effect on passengers.

“Every day rail users feel the impact on their journeys when thieves strike and ultimately it is the tax payer who forks out.

“Just like ourselves and Network Rail, the courts also take the theft of cable extremely seriously and we will do all we can to bring those responsible to justice.

“We continue to work with Network Rail to modernise and enhance our resources to catch cable thieves in the act – I would assure those responsible for the recent spate of cable thefts in South Yorkshire that it is only a matter of time before they are caught.”