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Sae Siew, James ; Mirza, Olivia ; Kaewunruen, Sakdirat

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9
10 **James Sae Siew**

11 School of Civil Engineering
12 University of Western Sydney, Penrith, NSW, Australia

13
14 **Olivia Mirza**

15 School of Civil Engineering
16 University of Western Sydney, Penrith, NSW, Australia

17
18 and

19
20 **Sakdirat Kaewunruen**

21 Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education,
22 University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

23
24
25
26
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29
30
31
32 Corresponding Author:

33
34 Sakdirat Kaewunruen

35 Senior Lecturer in Railway and Civil Engineering
36 School of Engineering, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK
37 e-mail: s.kaewunruen@bham.ac.uk

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Torsional effect on track support structures of railway turnouts crossing impact

James Sae Siew¹, Olivia Mirza², and Sakdirat Kaewunruen³

Abstract: The introduction of special crossings and rail turnouts provides flexibility in the rail network as it allows for vehicles to switch between various tracks, therefore maximizing the utilisation of current infrastructure. Turnouts are a costly and critical feature to a rail system as they suffer adverse operational loads, in comparison to a straight rail track, and thus require regular maintenance. This leads to the question of whether a turnout can be justified for flexibility in comparison to upkeep costs throughout the life of the turnout. Therefore, great consideration is given to the interaction between the turnout components, and reducing wear in service, as failed components may have adverse effects on the performance of neighbouring components. This paper herein presents a development of 3D finite element (FE) model, fostering nonlinearities in materials' behaviours, in order to analyse the forces and reactions within a railway turnout system. The analysis provide new findings of critical sections within the turnout and further enables alterations to be made to initial design of members in order to accommodate for the increased effects. The FE model comprises of standard concrete sleepers with 60 kg/m rail, and with a tangential turnout radius of 250 m. The turnout structure is supported by a ballast layer, which is represented by a deformable solid. The FE model is the world first to predict the torsional behaviour of the turnout and its fragile support by considering multi-wheel impacts which would simulate in-service and cyclic loading, and will be adapted as a set of concentrated loads to represent a coupled locomotive negotiating the turnout. The simulations demonstrate the significance of the third medium to suppress the torsional effect of the crossing forces on supporting bearers.

Keywords: Torsional effect; Turnouts; Railroad; Dynamic analysis; Ballasted railway track; Bearers, Sleepers; Crossties.

¹ Formerly Honours Student in Civil Engineering Program, School of Civil Engineering, University of Western Sydney, Penrith, NSW 2057 Australia

² Senior Lecturer in Civil Engineering, School of Civil Engineering, Western Sydney University, Penrith, NSW 2057 Australia; e-mail: o.mirza@westernsydney.edu.au

³ Corresponding author; Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education, School of Engineering, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK. e-mail: s.kaewunruen@bham.ac.uk; sakdirat@hotmail.com, Formerly, Technical Specialist, RailCorp, Sydney NSW 2000 Australia; and a visiting executive fellow at Department of Civil and

79 **Introduction**

80 One of the great accomplishments during the early 19th century was the development of
81 railways. The realisation of railways spurred exponential industrial growth for it enabled this mode
82 of land transportation, which focuses on mass-freightage, to be reliable and economical. The
83 effectiveness of rail is based upon the general concept of providing a track that is both minimal in
84 space and material, and yet be able to provide a low-friction, guided medium. The introduction of
85 special crossings and turnouts provided flexibility in the rail network as it allowed for vehicles to
86 switch between various tracks, and in-turn reducing the amount of tracks needed.

87 A turnout is a critical part of the railway where a track crosses over one another at an angle
88 to divert a train from the original track. The railway track and turnouts consists of rails, switches,
89 crossings, sleeper plates, sleepers, ballast and subgrade (as shown in Figure 1). As above
90 mentioned, turnouts are an essential part of a rail system as they provide great flexibility, but at the
91 same time, turnouts are a costly feature to a rail system as they suffer adverse operational loads, in
92 comparison to an open plain rail track, and require regular maintenance. This leads to the question
93 of whether a turnout can be justified for flexibility in comparison to the cost of maintenance
94 throughout the life of the turnout. Turnout components can be designed with stronger, hard wearing
95 materials as an option to help reduce maintenance costs. When designing, and maintaining, the
96 railway systems, great consideration is given to the interaction between the turnout components in
97 service. Due to the particular geometry of wheel–rail contact and sudden variation of track
98 flexibility, severe impact loads may occur during train passage over the turnout. Turnout
99 components are subjected to general wear, rolling contact fatigue and accumulated irreversible
100 (plastic) deformations (Kassa and Nielsen, 2008a; Kaewunruen, 2010, 2013a; 2013b).

101 During their life cycles, railway track structures experience static, dynamic and often impact
102 loading conditions due to wheel/rail interactions associated with the abnormalities in either a wheel
103 or a rail. Especially at turnouts crossing, the wheel rail interaction at the transfer zone often causes

detrimental impact forces and excessive dynamic actions (Remennikov and Kaewunruen, 2008; Kaewunruen and Remennikov, 2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2010). Recent studies showed that it is very likely that a railroad turnout bearers or crossties could be subjected to severe impact loads, resulting in a rapid deterioration of its structural integrity and durability (Esveld, 2001; Kaewunruen, 2007; Kaewunruen et al., 2014). Traditional turnout generally imparts high impact forces on to structural members because of its blunt geometry and the gaps between mechanical connections between closure rails and switch rails (i.e. heel-block joints). Although a new method of geometrical design has been adopted for tangential turnouts, the transfer zone at a crossing nose in complex turnout system still imposes high-frequency forces to track components. Generally, the turnout bearers for supporting points and crossing structures were designed using the beam on elastic foundation analysis or 2-D FE grillage modelling (Manalo et al., 2012). Kaewunruen (2014a; 2014b) indicated from recent authority work that some additional factors were often neglected from the grillage analyses, although they must be taken into account, including:

- Extra length of turnout bearers in comparison with standard sleepers
- Centrifugal forces through curved pairs of rails
- Forces and bending moments induced from points motors and other signaling equipment
- Impact forces induced by wheel-rail interaction
- Mechanical rail joints.

This investigation arose from an emerging risk of broken concrete bearers on a mixed-traffics line in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Due to the complexity of the loadings and damage modes in railway turnouts, this study aims to establish a three dimensional (3D) Finite-element (FE) model. The 3D FE model will adopts an elasto-plastic region of bending and shear deformation of materials. The 3D FE model was developed based upon a common tangential turnout used in Australia. The finding confirms that the crossing panel is where turnout bearers experience the greatest bending moment and shear force (Iwinicki et al., 2009). Despite a large number of investigations, there exists no report on torsional effect on damages of turnout

130 components in the real world (Sae Siew et al., 2015). A highlight of this study is the torsional effect
131 on the turnout structure where improved resiliency will help suppress such an important effect
132 (Kaewunruen, 2012, 2014c; Nimbalkar et al., 2012). The findings will enhance public safety in
133 railway networks with turnouts and crossings.

134

135 **Finite Element (FE) Modelling**

136 A previous research carried out by Manalo et al. (2010, 2012) analysed the turnout system
137 utilising a grillage beam method. The research was carried out taking in consideration the build and
138 specification of rail used in Queensland, Australia. Results obtained in the study showed that the
139 maximum bending moment and shear force can be witnessed within the switch panel. The results
140 using the grillage beam method seem to have discrepancies with the field observations where the
141 maximum bending and shear forces were evident within the crossing panel (Kaewunruen, 2012). A
142 number of research has been conducted to locate the critical section within a turnout, and many of
143 which conclude upon the critical section being located specifically at the crossing panel (Kassa and
144 Nielsen, 2009; Wiest et al., 2008a; Xiao et al., 2011).

145 This paper presents the 3D FE analysis using ABAQUS[®] considering the whole turnout
146 which fully comprises of sleepers, rail, guard rails, crossing nose, rail pads, baseplates and guardrail
147 support plates. The benefits of modelling in 3D are to incorporate the effects of the neighbouring
148 sleepers and to take in consideration the longitudinal forces of the continual rail. The boundary
149 conditions of the central 3D model can be simulated enabling vibrations to radiate beyond the
150 model (Karlsson and Sorensen, 2006).

151 ***Wheel/rail interface (W-R)***

152 General track design is based upon the consideration of static axle loads, total sum of axle
153 loads, and running speeds of vehicles as dependant variables. The standard also specifies that
154 vertical static forces are to be designed to accommodate for the combined loading of static wheels,
155 wheel diameters and wheel tread profiles, and for these loading to not jeopardise the safety of the

156 track system by causing excessive stresses and deformation under all normal track conditions.
 157 Andersson and Dahlberg (1998) established a linear FE model with modal damping that focuses on
 158 the vertical dynamics of a train passing through a turnout. Results showed that the rail discontinuity
 159 causes an impact increase between wheel and rail, referred to as a ‘jump’. The condition of the
 160 wheel and rail greatly influences the W-R contact force, for the greater the irregularities, the larger
 161 the contact force produced. The greater contact force will accelerate the wear and/or crack growth
 162 rate in the turnout crossing. Sun et al. (2010) provided an insight on the potential sites for impact
 163 and fatigue damage as the train wheel traverses through the nose of the crossing. Firstly, the wing
 164 rail fatigue damage is caused by contact from the far side of wheel. Secondly, the transition of the
 165 wheel between the wing rail and nose causes a dipping movement. This is due to the tracking on the
 166 wing rail to an upward motion on the ramp of the nose resulting in fatigue damage. Greater contact
 167 stress can be seen due to the acute contact area in the crossing nose. It is noteworthy that the
 168 crossing process will only force the wheel in contact to dip. The British Railways Board
 169 (Cherkashin et al., 2009) expressed that the permissible track forces (P_2) for railway vehicles
 170 negotiating a discontinuity in rail profile to not exceed 322 kN whilst operating at its maximum
 171 design speed. The P_2 force is calculated using the following formula:

$$P_2 = Q + (A_z \cdot V_m \cdot M \cdot C \cdot K) \quad (1)$$

Where

$$M = \left[\frac{M_v}{M_v + M_z} \right]^{0.5} \quad (2)$$

$$C = \left[\frac{\pi \cdot C_z}{4 [K_z (M_v + M_z)]^{0.5}} \right] \quad (3)$$

$$K = (K_z \cdot M_v)^{0.5} \quad (4)$$

the lesser of $Q = 0.13D \times 10^3$ or $Q = 125 \times 10^3$ (5)

172 Where D is the wheel diameter (mm), Q is the maximum static wheel load (N), V_m is the maximum
 173 normal operating speed (m/s), M_v is the effective vertical unsprung mass per wheel (kg), A_z is total
 174 angle of vertical ramp discontinuity taken as 0.02 rad, M_z taken as 245 kg as the effective vertical

175 rail mass per wheel, C_z taken as 55.4×10^3 N/m as the effective vertical rail damping rate per wheel
176 and K_z taken as 62×10^6 N/m as the effective vertical rail stiffness per wheel.

177 Lateral forces are designed as to not jeopardise the structural integrity of the rail and track.
178 Unless supported by appropriate technical justification, vehicles attempting to negotiate a lateral
179 ramp discontinuity in track alignment, when travelling on a curve at maximum normal operating
180 speed and at maximum cant deficiency, without exceeding a total lateral force level per axles of 71
181 kN, and is to be calculated using the following formula:

$$Y = W \cdot A_d + A_y \cdot V_m \left[\frac{M_u}{M_u + M_y} \right]^{0.5} \cdot [K_y \cdot M_u]^{0.5} \quad (6)$$

182 Where Y is the lateral force per axle (N), W is the static axle load (N), A_d is the maximum
183 normal operating cant deficiency angle (rad), V_m is the maximum normal operating speed (m/s), M_u
184 is the effective lateral unsprung mass per axle (kg), A_y is taken to be 0.0038 rad which is the angle
185 of lateral ramp discontinuity, M_y taken as 170 kg and is the effective lateral rail mass per wheel and
186 K_y taken as 25×10^6 N/m as the effective lateral rail stiffness per wheel.

187 ***Turnout Components***

188 The FE model comprises of entirely 3D deformable solids; straight and curved rail, sleepers
189 of varying length and a ballast layer as the track support. This study focuses on the behaviour of the
190 sleeper and ballast; therefore, a suitably accurate rail seat load within a tangential configuration is
191 required for the analysis. Steel rails were modelled in 3D to account for its cross sectional
192 properties, the width of the contact patch between the wheel and rail, the width of the rail web and
193 the width of the rail footing. The rail and switch rail profiles were validated against rail authority's
194 specifications (RailCorp, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Concrete bearers have been modelled as
195 rectangular blocks with dimensions nominated according to the specifications varying lengths
196 between 2.5 m to 7.5 m according to the turnout design as tabulated in Table 1.

197 The elastic modulus of steel rails and crossing is defined by the initial slope of the stress-
198 strain relationship to the extent of the upper yield threshold, as illustrated in Figure 2. For concrete
199 material, it is assumed that its compressive stress behaviour is to be linear given that it does not

200 exceed $0.4f'_c$. Beyond the linear threshold, stress is expressed as a function of strain accordingly to
 201 Equation (7). A graphical representation of the stress-strain relationship of concrete is depicted in
 202 Figure 3.

$$\sigma_c = \frac{f'_c \gamma (\varepsilon_c / \varepsilon'_c)}{\gamma - 1 + (\varepsilon_c / \varepsilon'_c)^\gamma} \quad (7)$$

where $\gamma = \left| \frac{f'_c}{32.4} \right|^3 + 1.55$ and $\varepsilon'_c = 0.002$ (8)

203 Indraratna and Nimbalkar (2011) proposed an idealisation of the ballast layer as a
 204 hardening-soil (HS) model. This method is an advanced method in analysing the mechanical
 205 behaviour in soil as it considers the plasticity theory, along with the effect of viscosity on the shear
 206 strain and a yield cap. Because this analysis focuses mostly on an elastic range, the evaluation takes
 207 upon the approach of simplifying the ballasted track support using elastic solid elements. A track
 208 support modulus of 50 MPa is adopted to comply with the design requirements and field data
 209 (RailCorp, 2012a, 2012b).

210 ***Boundary Conditions***

211 A sensitivity analyses has been undertaken for mesh sizes for each rail components. As the
 212 mesh sizes and the material densities are different between the two tied objects, a tie constraint is
 213 generated to allow for ABAQUS® to automatically optimise and refine the interface mesh. Tie
 214 constraints are applied to the rail and the concrete sleepers to represent the rail fastener. Instead of
 215 frictional interaction and the effect of submersed sleepers in a ballast layer, the sleepers are tied
 216 onto the underlying ballast layer to greatly reduce computational effort. As all members are tied,
 217 translational and rotational degrees of freedom will be equal throughout. All tie constraints will be
 218 taken to be surface to surface, as opposed to a simplified node to surface, as this will allow for
 219 uniform distribution between the tied components (Karlsson and Sorensen, 2006).

220 A fixed boundary condition is applied to the bottom most surface of the ballast to idealise
 221 the substructure and a symmetrical constraint is applied to the ends of the rail to idealise a

222 continuous rail within the relevant plane, in this case the Z-axis. The sleepers are attached to other
223 members with boundary constraints, and they can deform freely with the ballast bed.

224

225 ***Load Conditions***

226 The FE model predicts the behaviour of the turnout by considering multi-wheel impacts
227 which would simulate in-service and cyclic loading, and will be adapted as a set of concentrated
228 loads negotiating the turnout to represent a moving coupled locomotive. Loading configuration is in
229 accordance with Standards Australia (2004), using the contact position to generate the maximum
230 impact force. Design loads can be depicted in Figure 4a, which simulate the worst case loading
231 configuration that can be exerted onto a rail track. The coupled locomotive is simulated with four
232 300 kN axle loads and a single 360 kN axle load 2 meters ahead of the group.

233 The above load set is applied to the model at 600mm increments, or referred hereafter as
234 load sets. A total of 48 load steps (including model initiation) have been modelled to generate the
235 overall movement of the locomotive negotiating the turnout. Figure 4b illustrates loading
236 configurations for particular steps.

237 ***Validation***

238 The deflection of the sleeper is dependent on the mesh sizes of the ballast; the ballast serves
239 as a slave surface in which the sleeper is modelled to suppress into. Along with an accurate resultant
240 deflection, the time required to compute the analysis is also significant in selecting an optimum
241 mesh size. It is noted that the typical aggregate size of ballast is anywhere between 13 mm to 65
242 mm (RailCorp, 2012a). An initial analysis was carried out to determine the maximum deflection
243 under the said design train loading. A mesh size of 80 mm x 80 mm had been nominated. Figure 5
244 below shows the maximum vertical deflection, taken at the mid-point of each sleeper, with a single
245 pass of the coupled locomotive load. The results show that sleeper number 47 (out of a total of 51
246 sleepers), which is located directly underneath the crossing nose, is subjected to the greatest
247 deflection. The next step in analysing the sleeper behaviour would be to assess the deflection in

relations to the location of the load, in this case as a function of load step. The deflection response is presented graphically in Figure 6. It can be seen that the sleeper does not undergo any translations up until the 35th load step. This is an important step in dramatically reducing the computational time required to analyse the model with different mesh sizes. As we had located the critical sleeper in the preliminary test, it is advantageous to exclude all previous steps between the initial and 34th step from the analysis in determining optimum mesh size as this will reduce the computational time by almost 80%. Table 2 lists the maximum deflection of the chosen sleeper under train loading according to varied mesh sizes and Figure 7 depicts the critical response between load steps 35 to 47.

It can be seen from the results above that the change in the mesh size does not significantly affect the maximum deflection as seen by the largest deviation (< 0.3 mm) that is negligible. As previously mentioned, computational time is taken into great consideration, and it can be seen that although the 60 mm and 100 mm mesh yield the same result, the former takes almost 4.5 times the amount of time to compute compared to the latter. Given this, the 100 mm x 100 mm mesh will be accurate and the most efficient for this study purpose. Note that the track stiffness of this model has been benchmarked with the field measurement (Sae Siew et al., 2015).

Results and Discussion

Field observations suggested that impacts at turnout crossing frequently cause the most maintenance of supporting bearers and fastening systems. These impacts are due to the wheel rail interaction over the transfer zone (Kaewunruen, 2014a, 2014b). The FE model, which has been developed to simulate a turnout system subjected to a moving design load, reveals similar results. It is found that the sleepers, which undergo the greatest deflection of a coupled locomotive pass, are the sleepers underneath the crossing nose (maximum at sleeper #47). The sensitivity analysis illustrates the maximum deflection in all sleepers with the passing of a moving couple train load, 300LA (Standards Australia, 2004). From this analysis, it can be seen from Figure 8 that sleeper 47

274 experiences the greatest deflection, with a resultant of 2.54 mm. Figure 9 illustrates the deflection
275 response of the critical sleeper (47) in terms of the location of train, or load step. The sharp spike in
276 deflection clearly defines the moment at which each wheel axle impacts the above rail, in this case
277 the crossing nose.

278 The direction of translations is also an important factor, especially when predicting the long-
279 term stability of the ballast layer. It can be seen from the deflection shapes depicted in Figures 10
280 and 11 that the translation are not vertical, and tend to suggest the whole movement of the sleeper to
281 be a rotation or a twist.

282 Figure 12 further explores the effects of the sleeper deflection into the underlying ballast
283 layer. The below deflection is a resultant of 300LA loading (Standards Australia, 2004) as the front
284 axle impacts the crossing nose, to then exit the turnout on the diverging track. The stress parameters
285 are calculated based on the Von Mises yield criterion, which was explained in earlier section.
286 Examples of the shear stress distribution for a particular load step along the turnout system are
287 detailed below in Figure 13. Shear stress within this particular model is about the XY plane, S_{12} ,
288 or σ_{12} . The resultant stresses are based upon critical loading configuration. It is found that the
289 sleeper, which experiences the greatest shear and bending moment, is found to be the one directly
290 underneath the crossing nose (sleeper 47). It is important to note that torsional behaviour observed
291 is likely caused by the crossing angle, which influences wheel/rail contact path and the loading
292 location.

293 The critical sleepers within the specified length have been chosen accordingly to the
294 maximum resultant deflection during one passing of a moving load. The largest deflection in a
295 sleeper of lengths 2.6-2.8 metres has been recorded within sleeper 21 (sleeper right underneath the
296 heel joint), resulting in a maximum deflection of 1.28 mm. The largest deflection recorded within
297 the range of 2.801-5.200 metres has been established earlier as the critical sleeper, sleeper 47. The
298 maximum deflection values are generated using the sleeper deflection with relation to the load
299 steps. Critical loading occurs during load step 36 for sleeper 47 (sleeper right underneath the

300 crossing during the passage of a running wheel), and load step 18 for sleeper 21 (sleeper right
301 underneath the heel joint during the rapid change of train direction).

302

303 **Conclusions**

304 This paper presents a part of the investigation that is arisen from the field observations and
305 measurements on a mixed traffic rail line where broken concrete bearers and loosen fasteners were
306 reported routinely. A 3D FE model has been established for the analysis of a complete turnout
307 system. The primary objective of this study was to determine the critical location; be able to realise
308 the critical deflection, and validate shear force and bending moment envelopes of a turnout system.
309 To address this, ABAQUS® was employed to carry out all modelling and post-processing of a
310 complete 3D turnout.

311 Through the sensitivity analysis, it is clear that turnout bearers right underneath crossing
312 panel experience the highest load actions, resulting in the largest deformations. Importantly, we are
313 the first to report that the cute angle of crossing nose also induces torsional force on the supporting
314 track structure. Although the torsion can be coped with by the ballast aggregates, such an effect
315 causes damages to fastening systems and the bearers as evidenced in practice. Future work will
316 evaluate the effects of dimension, topology and stiffness of fastening systems to mitigate the
317 torsional crossing impacts.

318

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Table 1. Design properties of materials

Materials	Elastic modulus (MPa)	Compressive strength (MPa)	Tensile strength (MPa)
Concrete	38,000	36 - 55	4.0 - 6.30
Prestressing tendon	200,000	-	1,700
Steel rails	205,000	-	-

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Table 2 Resultant deflection of sleeper 47 and computational time with varying ballast mesh size

Mesh size (mm)	Deflection (mm)	Computational time (s)
60 x 60	2.54	24,784
70 x 70	2.32	12,638
80 x 80	2.28	10,824
90 x 90	2.59	5,655
100 x 100	2.54	5,547

Figure 1. Typical components of a railway turnout (after Kaewunruen, 2014a).

Figure 2. Stress-strain relationship of structural steel

Figure 3. Stress-strain relationship of concrete

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a) 300LA Load case

Figure 4. Railway Traffic Loads - Axle Loads

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b) Load steps: 300LA coupled locomotive design loading on turnout; (top) load step 2, (middle) load step 36 and (bottom) load step 48

Figure 4. Railway Traffic Loads - Axle Loads

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a) Tie constraint between rail and sleeper

b) Maximum recorded deflection at each sleeper (mid-point)

Figure 5. Mid-point deflections of each sleeper along the turnout

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a) Sleeper 47 (red) experiences the greatest deflection

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b) Deflection response of Sleeper 47 at each load step

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Figure 6. Displacement envelope of the sleeper right underneath the crossing (#47)

Figure 7 Effect of mesh sizes on the deflection of the sleeper right underneath the crossing (#47)

Figure 8 Maximum deflection of sleepers 1-51 under applied moving load

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Figure 11 Deflection mode of critical sleeper – 3D plane centre cut view

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a) Deflection of ballast layer for critical loading - XY plane

b) Deflection of ballast layer for critical loading - 3D plane

Figure 12 Deflections of ballast layer

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a) Stress distribution at load step 36 for 100mm meshed ballast (when the wheel runs over the crossing nose)

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b) Stress distribution at load step 47 for 100mm meshed ballast (when the wheel runs further away from the crossing nose)

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Figure 13 Shear stresses of turnout sleepers