



LONGITUDINAL BAULKS MADE FROM SYNTHETIC WOOD

Yuya Oikawa and Dr Günther Koller explain the advantages of a specialist synthetic material for sleepers, manufactured by Sekisui.

FFU synthetic wood was installed for the first time in the UK over the weekend of 20-21 September 2014. Network Rail fitted out two railway bridges on the Ashford to Hastings line with longitudinal baulks and cross member sleepers manufactured from FFU (fibre-reinforced foamed urethane).

The longitudinal baulks measure 41/37/745cm (w/h/l), a global first for installed FFU units of that size.

The longitudinal baulks were manufactured at Sekisui in Japan. The required construction height of up to 37cm was obtained by laminating single plies, approximately 30mm high by 410mm wide. The final product was straight on all sides, for precise installation.

The undersides of the sleepers positioned on top of the longitudinal baulks were milled at the works to achieve predefined track geometry. The dimensions of these baulks were 13/26/240cm (w/h/l).

The track on the Ashford to Hastings line was converted at the Military Canal Bridge 1800/A. The bridge is of an open steel-framed construction and has a length of 29.5m. In the Ashford direction, the Military Canal Bridge 1800/A is followed in close proximity by Block House Bridge 1800/B, which has the same technical parameters but is only 13m long. This was the second bridge to be fitted out with FFU over the same weekend.

One year after this installation, in October

2015, Network Rail gave the certificate of acceptance (PA05/06254) for FFU sleepers for this type of bridge sleeper structure to Sekisui.

In November 2015 and January 2016, further projects with Network Rail have been going ahead using longitudinal baulks with the baseplate directly fixed on them. The dimensions of these are up to 52/54/722cm (w/h/l). Hopefully in summer 2016 Network Rail will also give its certification for this kind of bridge structure to Sekisui.

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