BACKGROUND AND METHOD: Suicide research has identified regional and local clusters of increased suicide prevalence. As part of a comprehensive prevention strategy to fight railway suicides, we sought to identify such particular clusters on the German Railway net (total length 37,080 km) during a 6-year observation period (1997-2002). Data stem from the central registry of all person accidents on the German Railway net.

RESULTS: During the observation period, a total of 5,731 suicides (in average 18 cases per week) were registered. Against expectation derived from distribution patterns in the general suicide research, we found a preponderance in the southern part compared to the northern part of Germany and a significant downward trend from west to east (p=0.004). Most suicides occurred on open track (66%) compared to suicides at railway platforms (34%). We identified 16 places of high risk with 6 to 29 suicides per railway km. Of these high risk places, 75% were in the proximity of psychiatric hospitals.

CONCLUSION: Increased awareness for regional and local suicide clusters, initiatives to reduce the accessibility and warning infra-red beams are among recommendations for suicide prevention derived from these data.