

A year of rebuilding our focus on safety



everyone
home safe
every day

Dear all,

My final update of the year falls just as Christmas looms round the corner. I know that, for many of you, this week can be the culmination of being even more flat-out than usual, as juggling has to expand even further to include last-minute shopping (e.g. starting Christmas shopping!) trying to balance Christmas team lunches and, of course, making preparations for your own family celebrations, whilst also trying to deal with readiness for complicated engineering works during the closures.

Some of you might have noticed the update to my e-mail footer below my name, which relates to my wanting to promote the changes Network Rail is making to workplace adjustments.



Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director

Reasonable adjustments are changes we want to make to remove a disadvantage concerning someone's health or disability; such changes could be finding a different way to do something, or providing equipment, services or support. These, of course, are specific to an individual person. I would like to make three points:

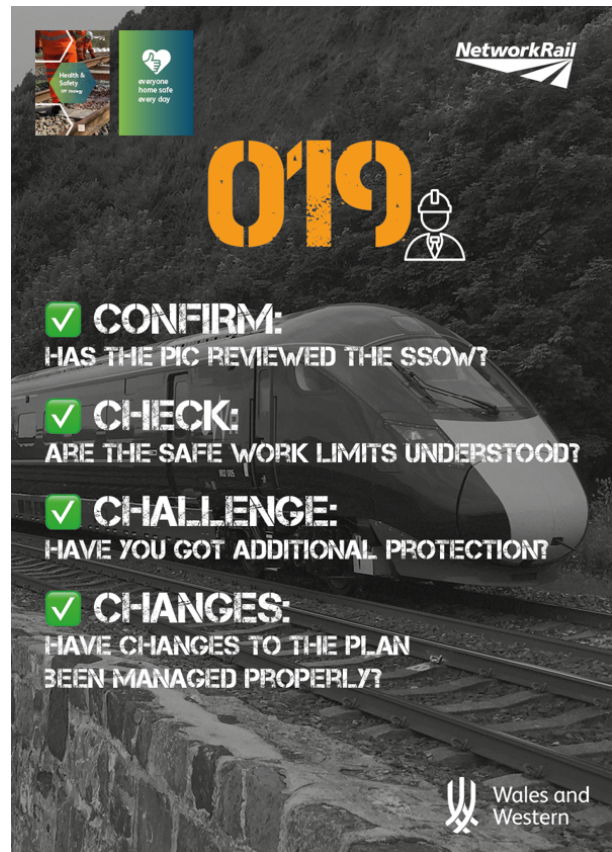
- The changes we are talking about here are about increasing awareness and making better information available to workers and managers. There aren't any actual changes to the legislation, or duties.
- It almost – but not quite – goes without saying, health or disability can equally include mental health which may include emotional, psychological or wellbeing issues affecting how someone in your team might think, feel and behave. Importantly, we must never forget that some mental health problems can, of course, be hidden because many people find it difficult to talk about their mental health.
- As managers, our job isn't just to respond to requests – but to be proactive in seeking out our staff members where an adjustment could reduce a barrier that they may be facing. It goes to say,

that's about a number of things – but it's about kindness and decency in approach, especially how we listen to feedback.

Of course, it needs little reminding that 2024 saw the fifth anniversary of the tragedy at Margam. The deaths of Gareth Delbridge and Michael Lewis have driven some of the most profound workforce safety improvements in the railway industry. Five years on, it remains challenging to recount the events at Margam without being taken by the magnitude of how they have impacted those involved.

It's for these reasons, and others besides, that I wanted to thank each of you for joining me during 2024 in rebuilding our focus on safety. Our Lost Time Indicator score, our Fatality Weighted Index measure and our maintenance backlog are, in all cases, 40 to 50% better than they were a year ago.

I wanted to thank the very many people who have taken time to read my messages, and also those who have fed back. Because, on occasions, safety and health can be perceived as being in some form of competition with other factors. Rather than saying safety is our number one priority, I'd much rather frame it as: Literally nothing else is important unless our safety outcomes are achieved. That's an important subtlety as it reframes safety as a qualifying criteria, rather than placing it as something which we should try to do or compete alongside other priorities.



It's for this reason that I communicate with you each week in Wales and Western to the extent that I try to give as much permission as possible to place safety as the very basis for what is done, rather than something which should be sought after.

As we move out of 2024 and into 2025, it's vital to me that we continue to drive improvement in our trackworker safety. The reason is one of moral duty as there isn't a single person in our workforce whose health and wellness is worth taking any risk of complacency on.

It's for this reason that, despite irritating some with my relentlessness, I remain convinced that healthy paranoia and doubt are the best defence against error. Hence my unapologetically annoying tactic of maintaining a basic principle, which is: *"If you haven't checked – are you sure you can claim you know?"* We must bring to our safety culture this mindset of curiosity, which I think strikes a very healthy balance between two critical ingredients to a strong safety culture – those being the power of doubt and the importance of resisting complacency.

I'm aware of so many of our teams and suppliers who are already making changes to their family celebrations in order to support our railway works – and it falls to me to say how incredibly grateful the industry is for those sacrifices. It goes to say that there is never a good time to close the railway to do vital upgrades, but with Christmas being a traditional period of reduced travel, as workers in a service industry

we find ourselves having to disrupt ourselves to try our best to lessen the disruption of the passengers we serve.

As ever, tell me what you are thinking – let me know what's going on. You can [reply directly to me](#) if you wish – I look forward to hearing from you.

Stay safe,

Rob

This update is provided by the Wales and Western Communications team. For any queries, please contact walesandwesterncomms@networkrail.co.uk



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