

You can't fix what you don't see



everyone
home safe
every day

Dear all,

Last week I visited Shrewsbury DU with our CEO Andrew Haines, and it was a superb few days. Before I share some of my reflections I want to thank Ian Harris, Infrastructure Maintenance Delivery Manager (IMDM) North Wales, and the team at Shrewsbury DU for hosting us. You were as impressive as ever - respectful, candid, and committed to each other's safety.

I've said it before, but there's no substitute for seeing the front line with your own eyes. It grounds you, shows you the reality, and reminds you what really matters.



Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director

One moment from the visit was particularly poignant and has stayed with me. We met a team leader who, years ago, had half a dozen recruitment offers from Network Rail blocked because a DBS check brought back results linked to a past criminal record. He'd reached the point of despair trying through official channels so in 2019 he decided to try something different, and he wrote to Andrew.

Upon hearing from this man, Andrew didn't hide behind process. He stepped in. He unblocked the appointment, and gave that man a chance. Five years on, this colleague has had three promotions, delivered exceptional work, and made a positive mark on his team.

For me, that story isn't just about good leadership, it's about decency. Andrew's, kindness, energy, and selfless drive for improvement are extraordinary. But it's his belief in justice and fairness, and his absolute intolerance of inequity, that stand out. Inequity angers him, and he puts his energy into changing it for the better.

And here's why that matters for safety. Safety isn't only about processes, checklists, and PPE. It's about people. And people are safest when they work in an environment of fairness, respect, and basic decency. When people know they'll be treated fairly, they speak up about risks. They challenge unsafe practice. They go the extra mile because they know the organisation values them as human beings.

As I said, there is no substitute for seeing the frontline with your own eyes and as a leader, if you don't see the work, you can't understand the risks. And if you can't understand the risks, you can't lead on safety.

Through our safety conversations on the day I learned:

- Replacement vans for S&T teams are now too short to carry a 1435mm stretcher bar which is one of our most common track components. That's not just a design flaw, it's a potential safety hazard.
- Training sandpits are great, but underdeveloped. With the right investment, they could be major safety assets.
- Severn Bridge signalling team showed me how worn rail lubrication changes the feel of a mechanical lever - a reminder that the railway is a system, not a set of isolated parts.
- PPE for women and toilet access remain below standard. This isn't just comfort, it's about dignity, decency, and safety.

The regional leadership team recently launched a renewed focus on quality safety conversations with our band 1 and 2 leaders in the region, because if we aren't on site, having these conversations, then how can we build and lead a robust safety culture in the region. We are committed to getting everyone home safe everyday and visible leadership, understanding your challenges and doing something about them, is one of the ways we can do that.

Our safest days are when nothing happens. No faults, no incidents, no near misses and I know that that is the hidden success our people deliver every day. It deserves recognition. It deserves thanks. And it deserves leaders who fight for fairness and safety with the same unshakable sense of decency that Andrew showed that team leader.

As always, I'd welcome your thoughts - feel free to [email me directly](#).

Stay safe,

Rob