

# The taboo of the system



everyone  
home safe  
every day

Dear all,

When we see tensions rise culturally and politically, people cling to symbols and build closed communities that give them a dopamine hit of identity. It may give brief comfort, but it also makes divisions more obvious and pushes groups further apart. We aim for balance and inclusion, yet obstacles often stop us getting there.

This connects to the importance of human systems and cycles, and how they feed into larger networks, whether in culture, society, or safety.



**Rob Cairns,**  
Regional managing director

Unintended consequences are a major factor in safety risk and ultimately, harm. Most incidents happen because of an overreaction or underreaction to something else. For example, track workers can spend long periods waiting for a line block, meaning valuable time is lost that could reduce other risks. Other examples include delayed maintenance creating pressure elsewhere, rushed handovers increasing mistakes, or ignoring small defects that later combine into serious problems.

Some risks can sit quietly for years and only become real when another risk triggers them. I sometimes call these fault lines. Like in geology, tension can build quietly and suddenly cause a problem if we are not ready.

What worries me most is whether we are really seeing all the risks. Do we have the vision to see safety at a system level? Are we deliberately spreading our focus, so we do not favour the obvious over the hidden? It's easy to focus on what is visible or urgent, but safety is bigger than that. Passenger safety, track worker safety, and public safety are all connected. Small issues can combine into bigger problems if we ignore the links.

For passengers, safety is more than clear announcements or safe boarding. It's platform gaps, communication, emergency plans, and accessibility all working together. For track workers, safety is more than rules or protection zones. It's planning, competence, risk controls, and learning combining effectively on site. For the public, safety is more than fences or signage. It's infrastructure, community engagement, education, and emergency coordination all working together.

The challenge is seeing the full picture, understanding dependencies, and balancing focus. A safe system is strongest when it's small, and visible risks are considered and managed together.

It is human to deepen divides in times of tension. Recognising this is not cynicism, it is awareness. As leaders, we must not be naive about these instincts; we need to guide our teams with that understanding because inclusion and balance takes strength and leadership.

The role of leadership here is not about job role or titles, it is something far more fundamental; **decency**. It is looking out for everyone in your team. If we forget them, we forget ourselves. It is having oversight of these interconnecting elements, holding a vision that will protect the people you are responsible for and balance human instincts within your influence to keep everyone safe.

As always, I encourage you to [get in touch](#) with your thoughts and if there are any safety related topics you would like to hear more about, please do let me know.

Stay safe,

Rob