

# The little signals we send everyday



everyone  
home safe  
every day

Dear all,

I've just come back from a week off, not a glamorous break, just some time at home catching up on life.

On one of my afternoons off, I was driving to visit friends, and I found myself crossing a bridge over one of our high-speed rail lines further north. Whilst in stand still traffic, I glanced down from the bridge and saw two colleagues in orange PPE standing at the trackside on the inside of a curve, deep in a cutting. There was no cess, no obvious safe position, and it looked like they were doing their best to find the least risky spot they could.

It really shook me. I remember feeling frozen, stuck between two uncomfortable thoughts.

**1) Say nothing.** Walk away and forget it.

**2) Raise it,** and risk those colleagues getting into trouble for what might just be them trying to get the job done.

I pulled over and rang the route director, who shared my concern but could confirm there was a line block in place at the time. So, it turned out they were safe. A false alarm, thankfully. The real takeaway wasn't the outcome – it was what went through my head. I wasn't scared of being wrong. I was worried that if I raised it, people might think I was point-scoring, or didn't understand how difficult site work can be. I was also worried that by not raising it, I'd be letting something dangerous slide.

And then one thought hit me like a brick; what if that was my son, my daughter, or my partner standing there? Would I be comfortable just driving on by?

That's why I rang. Not to punish anyone – but to be sure. To know someone checked. To know someone cared enough to ask the question. What stuck with me wasn't the sight itself, but how torn I felt. That feeling probably plays out in lots of moments, big and small, across the railway.

It's easy to keep quiet. Easy to convince ourselves that we're meddling, or that someone else will raise it. But safety doesn't get better by luck – it gets better when people act.



**Rob Cairns,**  
Regional Managing Director

That's what culture really is. It's not the posters or the slogans – it's the little signals we send every day. What we speak up about. What we let slide. What we praise, and what we quietly ignore. All of it adds up. We don't experience culture in separate bits – they feel it all at once. And if we say one thing and do another, the message gets confused. Confusion leads to hesitation. Hesitation becomes risk.

We already run a very safe railway – and that's down to thousands of people making smart decisions, every shift, every day. But even with a strong track record, the hardest risks to spot are often in the gaps; between teams, between systems, between assumptions.

Good people don't take risks on purpose. And we shouldn't design systems that quietly ask them to. So, when something doesn't feel right – even if we're not sure – we have to feel confident raising it. Not to get someone in trouble, but to protect them.

If we want to lead a healthy safety culture, we have to stop seeing safety as something that belongs to someone else – or something that only matters when things go wrong. We're all part of the system. And when something slips through the cracks, the right question isn't "Who messed up?" It's "What in the system allowed that to happen?"

Because risk doesn't always shout – sometimes it builds slowly, quietly, and only becomes obvious when it's too late.

Let's keep looking out for each other. Let's not let fear of judgement stop us from doing the right thing. And let's make sure our culture makes sense – in our words, in our actions, and in the way we treat each other.

Stay safe,  
Rob

