

Blue Monday and adapting our leadership



everyone
home safe
every day

Dear all,

I have to admit to feeling a bit flat this weekend. It felt like the sun never broke through the mist into proper daylight. I did quite a bit of "work work" as we have a challenging session to prepare for this week on our Oxford project.

In this week's message, I want to share some thoughts on how our challenges have changed over time and what that might mean for us, as we focus on safety and industry growth in 2025.

Recent figures show that after the pandemic, revenues are slowly getting back to where they were before. This is important for all of us because if passenger numbers rise without the necessary revenue, it creates problems for the investment we need to keep our network running.

As a country, we have to be careful over the next 5 years to ensure our borrowing costs don't get so high that we end up needing to borrow just to cover the interest. No matter how you look at it, with all the uncertainty we face, **it's clear that there will be more pressure on our railways to live within their means and only invest according to the revenue they can generate themselves.** That is both daunting, and an exciting opportunity in the same breath.

The cost of HS2 is staggering—nearly £400 million per mile—more than eight times the cost of France's most recent high-speed line, based on 2019 prices. If HS2 estimate changes, that will only serve to increase the current £230k per meter. Currently, Britain has some of the highest railway costs in the world, with the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) costing £18 billion, or £1.4 billion per mile.

These high costs however make many critical projects financially unfeasible. Projects that could thrive abroad and are essential for the growth and capacity I mentioned earlier.



Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director

We can learn a lot from the past, but we need to apply those lessons in today's very different railway environment. **This means taking the time to understand our current situation, being ready to lead, and not being afraid to make necessary changes.**

A major challenge we face is that most of our railways were built in a time when safety standards were shockingly low. Standards that we would never accept today. In 1925, 230 railway workers lost their lives the previous year, and despite this terrible statistic, conditions didn't improve much until the 1960s.

Today, we see violence against women rising to alarming levels, and as we mark **Blue Monday**, we acknowledge that loneliness is causing more deaths now than ever, with increasing mental health issues and suicides, especially among young people.

Our railway needs to be managed and maintained differently from how it was originally built. To achieve this, we must be willing to let go of our tendency to cling to the past and the overly positive view we often have of it, which can hinder change.

When I talk about decency being central to good safety leadership, I mean **we must protect that decency amid the rapid changes we face**. There are significant challenges ahead, so I want to keep a strong focus on the leadership priorities we discussed last year to get through tough times, whilst adapting to what we already know the future holds. These challenges are already different to those we faced only last year.

We need to really manage the increasing focus on individualism while ensuring it doesn't lead to division. It's essential to encourage constructive dialogue and reduce the tolerance for debates that create conflict.

Last year we spoke about placing leadership as the primary vehicle for both the 'what' and 'how', and what levels of proactivity we deemed acceptable of managers. That remains something at the very core, of what we still must do.

It remains vital to me that we make the link between a safe organisation, and a diverse organisation, with **a deliberate move towards space being made for all viewpoints and a culture where viewpoints were upheld and respected**, even if they were not agreed with or unable to be acted upon.

Finally, we spoke about our commitment to never being overly bureaucratic or avoiding plain speaking in understanding our responsibilities to make sure we met our duties.

I am committed to our region being a safe place - 'safe' in this context in terms of being safe to take the risk to speak as we saw, and have our feelings and perspectives heard, without fear of reprisal.

As always, I invite your thoughts. You can [reply directly to me](#) if you wish, and I hope the conversations I encouraged last week about how safe our female colleagues feel took place, and will lead to positive outcomes.

Stay safe,
Rob