

Delivering safely, whatever the weather



**everyone
home safe
every day**

Dear all,

The way I see the onset of winter weather and railway work is that, compared with warmer months, it's basically just a different job altogether.

I remember performing the role of engineering supervisor for numerous track renewal jobs in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Firstly, the coldness was really hard to manage. If you were standing watching an excavator, the amount of PPE you had to wrap yourself in was such that, were you then to consider walking anywhere, you'd pass out with heat! You could spend ages trying to manufacture a fitment of your balaclava that would pass muster as not being a hoodie concealed by your hard hat.



**Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director**

I also distinctly remember tasks that were just really hard, or manually exhausting – lifting troughing lids or even the emotional high of going to collect the marker boards from a mile down the track, and lugging them back with the bittersweet excitement of the shift being nearly done, then jumping in a Jarvis Escort estate, invariably with possession boards still flashing! These were days when speeding need not be considered, as the vehicles were so slow they were incredible.

In amongst my rambling, the point I really wish to convey is how incredibly difficult, and to an extent emotionally draining, work can be during the winter months, and we should never make assumptions about it being anything other than that. It's a period of time which stands out more than any other in terms of our needing to look out for each other in every respect of the meaning.

Secondly, climbing into a warm car after being cold is a really hazardous thing. Most rail workers working occasional nights are unlikely to ever get adequate sleep when switching between shifts, and I really would protest if I felt any of our teams were feeling obliged to carry out any significant driving after a night shift; it's just not safe.

I visited Bristol last week (pictured below) to see one of our earthworks sites. Site visits never fail to make me open my eyes a little to how things really are, and I always try to think about how our frontline staff experience our railway. I was enthused by the rigour of the safety arrangements, and pleased by how well the mobile modular cabins provide far better immediate points of welfare than at any point in the past.

The access point was fairly uncared for, and that's about the existing railway and the condition of it rather than a consequence of the project. At first glance, that might look like a dig at our maintainer – but quite the opposite. Such large parts of our primary asset, such as track and signalling, quite rightly get the majority of focus and spend, but there remain large portions of the perimeter of our asset that have just fallen beyond reasonable repair. We can't magic that problem away, but we can think about it in terms of the risk it poses, and ensure lighting and walking routes are set out properly.



It won't have escaped anyone's notice that it's been an especially challenging time for the region lately, thanks to winter weather arriving with a vengeance.

Storm Bert brought flooding across our two routes, closing parts of both the main and branch lines, while services in Devon were hit by snow as well as torrential rain.

Keeping our workforce safe while tackling incidents such as these is, of course, a priority – but there's also the need to consider how we continue to safely deliver vital planned work that makes our railway more reliable.

As part of our 019 Standard trackside worker safety campaign, I've spoken previously about making sure we understand and can deal with any changes which happen immediately before starting work.

I'd like to thank every single person who worked tirelessly through the storms – especially our teams bearing the brunt on the frontline – so that we could get the railway back up and running again as quickly and safely as possible for our passengers.

As we move further into December and with more challenges to come, we can all play our part to make sure everyone gets home safe every day by preparing ourselves for whatever the weather may throw at us – whether we are out on track, driving to site or simply walking to the station or the office.

There'll be more on this topic in the next edition of the Focus safety bulletin, so please look out for it. In the meantime, please continue to share your thoughts and feedback on safety matters – you can [reply to me directly](#) if you wish.

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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