

# Balancing safety, performance and cost



everyone  
home safe  
every day

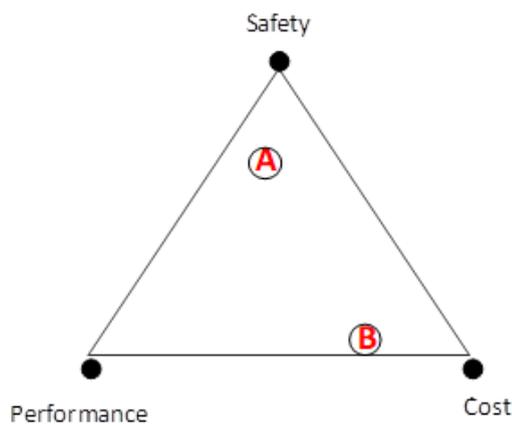
Dear all

For as long as I can remember, there was a sense that it was ok to declare railway decisions as trade-offs between the three fixed points of safety, performance and cost.

That is to suggest that a railway can be safe but at the expense of performing well, and at the expense of cost. Or that a railway may be cost effective, but in return for reduced safety and reduced performance. This would sometimes be used mischievously to fuel rhetoric of cost management pressures, or to account for inadequate performance, or to remind companies why they have no right to expect value for money.



**Rob Cairns,**  
Regional Managing Director



*A is a safe railway, which fails to meet cost and performance outcomes*

*B is a railway which meets cost objectives, but not safety and performance outcomes.*

It is absolutely true to say that any decisions can be at the expense of safety, cost and performance. But this tricks people into a damaging contradiction of supposing that safety and cost, and safety and performance, are in direct competition with the other and can therefore only be achieved *at the expense* of the other. A safe decision can also very often be a decision that meets affordability and reliability objectives. But, at the same time, a decision to achieve cost objectives can also be less safe and lead to a less reliable railway. It is with this in mind that we should be very alert to how traditional thinking can have unhelpful influences on our culture and decisions.

A railway that runs no trains is likely to be safer than one which does run trains, and it's also likely to be vastly cheaper. But to pose these instances as trade-offs against each other is obviously ridiculous. We

must be alert and careful that we don't accidentally, or unintendedly, sleep walk into similar logic, beliefs or assumptions.

During major trespass incidents, there is a contradiction between the overhead line power being switched off – trapping passengers on impacted trains – and the overall system safety risk, which is markedly increased by stranding passengers on trains and the unthinkable risks posed by self evacuation. Equally, a train driver who chooses not to drive through 150mm of flood water – and therefore chooses to delay the train – may cause other risks by doing so, such as to diabetic passengers or people self-evacuating.

As another example, we have suppliers who have told me that if we ran fewer trains, they could work more effectively on our infrastructure. Also, if they were able to renew assets that weren't always so old, it would be far more profitable for them. I mean...absolutely perfect! I also know suppliers who try to assure us that a price is fair, because that was also the same price they charged on the last job.

These are examples of people clutching at the logic which suits their situation. This is not necessarily the logic that our passengers saving up for a ticket to visit friends, or travel to a job interview, would wish us to be drawn in by. Ultimately their money as tax payers is temporarily in our care for safe keeping, and we should never be under any illusion as to whether that is a privilege – because it is!

The reason I share these example is to illustrate how we can all become accidentally, and subtly, manoeuvred into taking decisions that make no sense by the many competing pressures of a fractured industry. Cost, profit, risk and revenues can often lay in very different places. I also share these examples to remind us of the importance of having our thinking tested, as the pressure upon us can often cause us to fixate on individual outcomes, possibly at the expense of unintended consequences. I say this reflecting on my message last week about being aware that we are programmed to notice the things that aren't routine to us while, at the same time, we stop noticing things that are constant and non-changing.

In closing, I would like to recap on my key priorities from my main messages over the summer:

1. Importance of planning, and clear focus on outcomes. We must give ourselves the ability to plan and prepare, so that we can pace ourselves and use our energies effectively
2. Being aware that we are programmed to notice the things that aren't routine to us, and at the same time programmed to stop noticing the things that are constant and don't change
3. Recognising the duty we each have to fully investigate and understand the challenges of those on front line roles, and how we influence the experiences they have
4. The two way relationship associated with evolving and sophisticating our safety environment
5. The linkage between need to lead and advance safety, and transforming the relationship we have with our front line workforce within our maintenance and operations teams
6. Importance of our teams being given the psychological safety for their annual leave to be planned and respected – there is never unspoken or implied obligation for people to neglect proper leave
7. A safe organisation at its very heart must be one where people can have their viewpoints heard, as many of those opinions will be people's perceptions as to how future risks may reveal themselves.

Stay safe

Rob

This update is provided by the Wales and Western Communications team. For any queries, please contact [walesandwesterncomms@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:walesandwesterncomms@networkrail.co.uk)



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