

Safety on the frontline



**everyone
home safe
every day**

Dear all,

Last week I enjoyed visiting our teams in Devon & Cornwall. As I mentioned before now, I chose not to proceed with the traditional business briefings earlier this year in favour of visiting individual DUs and signalling locations.

I remember taking a bit of a personal risk at the time by acting on my feelings and cancelling the large and expensive off-site meeting, which many team members whom, through the nature of their job, are unable to join and that can't be right. When creating our Health & Safety strategy, I was very decided that I wanted to personally prioritise being clear on our intent, never being overly bureaucratic and using normal language. I want to get a better understanding of our people, their motives, drivers and difficulties.

Meeting our teams and people is the single best part of my job and I wanted to share my safety reflections from the site visits in this message. There was a great mix of experiences in recognising positive safety leadership (calling out things people do well).

I visited Exeter Panel and Liskeard signal box, which are both accessible on foot from the platform using a staff crossing. The line speeds are extremely slow and the crossing was a mere few metres. In both cases the staff hosting me, Craig Russon and Derek Buist, took a very inflexible approach to my safety – insisting on PPE and to wait for line clear conditions to be confirmed before my crossing. The sensory effect this had on me was incredibly powerful. It caused me to



**Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director**

subconsciously begin to fall in line with the prevailing culture I was being introduced into, being positively influenced by the surroundings I was faced with.



I honestly felt safe, but also that I was entering a situation where my safety appeared no longer up for debate, so I shouldn't even bother testing the boundaries. It reminded me how profoundly impactful those first impressions of symbolism of safety leadership start, as soon as arriving at our workplace or site.

We all hold an individual responsibility to do this each day in everything we do. It often feels slightly uncomfortable and out of kilter with the natural desire to be relaxed with people, but we should be settled on that – always remembering that people naturally do things with local rationality that make sense to them, given what they have been asked to do and how they are asked to do it.

I visited Tavistock Junction and Exeter DU where I had open conversations with teams there and I wanted to thank everyone I met for being so welcoming and honest with me.

I left the West Country on Thursday evening reflecting on a number of matters that didn't sit comfortably with me, which were a consistent message raised by those I met:

1) Are we investing equitably in all parts of our region? Are we making facilities to the right standard, as far as we reasonably can? That's

different from giving everyone brand new buildings, but rather – do we understand the things that make the difference to our people?



While at West DU, congratulating Steve Mortimore on 52 years' service

This is vastly different from saying that passenger revenue levels should indicate levels of spend. A safety critical task is no less or more important regardless of where it is carried out on the region. We need to be able to split our thinking around that. How can we unlock local knowledge and abilities to empower our people to support our priority of 'live within our means'?

2) Are people within certain parts of the organisation being stretched to very different levels with no obvious good reason? How must some of our S&T and off-track teams feel, when going home at the end of each shift, knowing that they have a work bank which, by its nature, is expanding at a far greater rate than they could ever begin to reduce it by? What kind of stress does this cause people who, like most of us, want to go home each day and feel they are making a difference? I know this is not isolated to S&T teams and is a message reflected from colleagues across the region, in both frontline and office-based roles.

I share these questions openly. I don't have the answers and can't make these problems disappear – but my commitment is to pursue these questions until I get clear answers on whether there are things that I should be doing, or what I should do differently. Recognising I don't have the answers, I really want to hear from you about what you see as the issues causing these problems.

Lastly, I was taken aback by how many personal responses I received to my message last week, with so many instances of staff members sharing their deeply personal experiences with me. It was a distinct reminder that we often don't realise what difficulties our colleagues are facing beyond the workplace. It is more proof of the importance not to judge others. As Ted Lasso said, we need to 'be curious, not judgmental'.

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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