

# A new year of discovery and reminders



everyone  
home safe  
every day

Dear all,

Firstly, I'd like to wish everyone a very happy new year, and I hope that people had a good Christmas break.

I think, for most of us, the new year poses a chance to think about the changes we want to make – and on my part, the things I want to try to do are being a bit more controlled about the hours I work, and take a bit more time to engage in non-work things to help give my brain a rest.

Whether it's been a feature of needing to learn the job, or simply that we faced so many challenges I'm not sure – but last year felt really intense and full on.



**Rob Cairns,**  
Regional Managing Director

I intend to try to do this by being really thoughtful about picking things which, by doing them, will deliver returns in multiple areas. This year, as a priority, I want to also visit those remaining few Delivery Units and signalling locations which I didn't get to last year.

I'm a big believer that learning is a combination of discovering new things, and also reminding yourself of things that might once have been familiar but may have fallen from view slightly.

I used the turning of the new year to refresh myself with our corporate [Health & Safety Management System](#). Page 8 reminds us how important leadership is for safety. Sections 10 & 12, around page 20 (*ish*), talk about the importance of communications, culture and working together as critical factors of a safe organisation. Although it's maybe two or three pages long, the bits that jump out for me are three points that define a progressive safety environment:

1. Culture tends to be a reflection of our values
2. People get to speak up without consequences
3. Recognises people make mistakes.

I'm sharing [the same video](#) as I did last summer, just as a recap as it had such a significant impact on me in 2005 during a CDM (Construction, Design and Management) course. It's a bit old and dated, but I think the message still stands up pretty well, and it speaks directly to what I think safety culture is about in terms of those three items mentioned above. It stresses the importance of speaking up about even small issues and the courage needed to prioritise safety.

In our [Regional Health & Safety Strategy](#), we committed to linking safety and diversity more closely. For me, true diversity is about (i) recognising the individual limits of your own position in the world AND (ii) being not just aware but comfortable in the knowledge of how our own traditional thinking can very quickly serve to negatively affect our decision-making culture.

With regard to (i), in my case, I'm not able to bring any more to any situation than my own viewpoint, based on my experiences and how I recall them. That's both a great deal and, in the same breath, not very much at all. This has a huge safety dimension when thinking about how often we overlook warning signs until they become serious problems. Our strategy points out that success and failure come from the same source. We need to focus on both failures and daily performance variations. To ensure safety, we must reflect on what could go wrong and anticipate future issues. While we have systems for compliance, personal intuition is crucial for identifying early risk indicators. These often arise from seemingly minor situations. I believe in these key principles for maintaining safety:

- Allow time to plan, so we manage our efforts effectively.
- Recognise that we notice unusual things while overlooking routine issues.

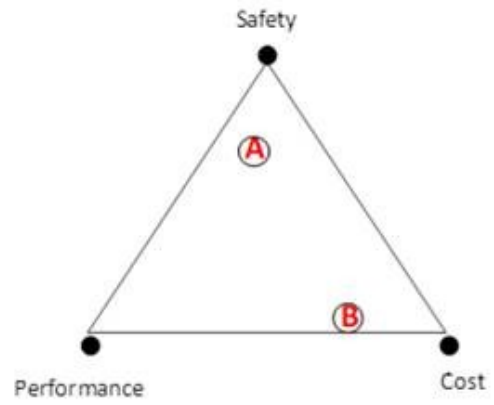
In relation to (ii), since the dawn of time, there's been this idea that railway decisions often involve balancing safety, performance, and cost. It's like saying we can have a safe railway, but it might not perform well or be cost effective. Sometimes, this is used to justify cost-cutting or poor performance. It's true that every decision can impact safety, cost or performance. But thinking of them as competing factors can be harmful. A safe decision can also be affordable and reliable, while aiming to cut costs may make things less safe. For example, suggesting that a railway with no trains is a valid trade-off for safety and cost is silly. During incidents, like trespassing, switching off overhead power can trap passengers and increase safety risks. Similarly, if a train driver avoids floodwater, they might delay the train but could create risks for those needing immediate help. I've heard suppliers say that running fewer trains would help them work more effectively, but that reflects their situation rather than what's best for our passengers.

Ultimately, taxpayer money is in our hands for safekeeping, and we must remember that's a privilege. These examples show how easy it is to be nudged into poor decisions given industry pressures. Cost, profit, risk, and revenue can often conflict. It's crucial to challenge our thinking, as pressure can lead us to focus too much on immediate results, overlooking unintended consequences.

As ever, tell me what you are thinking – let me know what's going on. You can [reply directly to me](#)

if you wish – I look forward to hearing from you.

Stay safe,  
Rob



*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.*

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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