

Shared Learning

Key learning following a serious incident



Fatal Road Traffic Collision

Issued to: All Network Rail line managers, safety professionals and accredited contractors

Ref: NRL25-04

Date of issue: 08/08/2025

Location: M40 Northbound (Junctions 12–13)

Incident Summary

At approximately 0245 on Wednesday 8 May 2024, two Vital Human Resources Limited (VHRL) employees were involved in a fatal RTC on the M40 Northbound. Returning home post-shift from Hemel Hempstead, their vehicle collided with the rear of a Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV). The driver sustained non-life-threatening injuries. Tragically, the passenger later died. Both had chosen to forgo their pre-booked hotel accommodation to return home for personal reasons. This incident underscores the critical risks posed by fatigue, policy non-adherence, and gaps in monitoring and assurance.

During the investigation, the parallel police investigation meant the driver could not be interviewed, and the hire vehicle lacked telematics to support post-incident reconstruction. However, the revised Fatigue Risk Index (FRI) score of 39.7 % indicated a high risk of microsleep. Given the early-morning timing following a night shift and being over 60 minutes into a 90-minute journey, it is reasonable to conclude that the driver’s alertness was likely impaired due to fatigue, even if the exact cause - such as microsleep or loss of concentration - cannot be definitively confirmed.



What went wrong?

Planned Control	Actual Outcome
Post-shift hotel provided to mitigate fatigue	Hotel unused - both employees chose to travel home overnight
Telematics-enabled fleet vehicle required by VHRL policy	Short-term hire vehicle had no telematics or monitoring
Fatigue Risk Index (FRI) compliance monitored via PeopleSoft	PeopleSoft scores based on incorrect data; adjusted FRI score was 39.7 %
Sentinel app used for sign-in/out to support fatigue tracking	Manual sign-in used, undermining data reliability
Assurance of contractor rest periods	No mechanism to confirm if booked hotel accommodation was used

Behavioural and systematic insights

- Personal responsibilities (childcare, appointments) motivated a decision to return home rather than rest.
- Night driving following a shift increased fatigue risk, equivalent in impairment to alcohol.
- Vehicle lacked data-capturing systems, limiting post-incident reconstruction and assurance.
- Sentinel swipe protocol was bypassed, impairing fatigue and attendance data quality.
- Policy assumed rest would be taken if provided - no check was in place to verify.

Key lessons

- Fatigue must be treated as a live risk, even below FRI trigger points.
- Behavioural choices under pressure (e.g. returning home) can override planned controls.
- Short-term hire vehicles must meet baseline monitoring requirements.
- Sentinel compliance must be actively monitored, not assumed.
- Booking rest does not guarantee rest - assurance processes must verify usage.

Recommendations and Local Actions

Network Rail

- Confirm Sentinel swipe-in requirement in Scheme Rules v5 and brief accordingly.
- Explore feasibility of validating hotel room usage as part of fatigue assurance

VHRL

- Review process for inputting shift data into PeopleSoft to ensure FRI accuracy.
- Install geofencing and telematics in all fleet and hire vehicles.
- Deliver refresher driver training on fatigue, post-shift travel risk, and lifesaving rules.
- Brief all drivers on consequences of non-compliance with rest policy and Sentinel protocol.

Key Takeaway

This fatal incident was not the result of one failure, but a series of unverified assumptions. Behaviour, fatigue, monitoring gaps, and policy execution all intersected. Preventing recurrence requires not only policies but living, verifiable compliance and behavioural alignment under pressure.

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