

Learning from experience is key to a safe railway

Simon French, the Chief Inspector of the RAIB said:

“I am pleased to observe that the UK's railways continue to provide a safe and convenient means of travel, comparable with the very best in the world. However, in order for these high levels of safety to be maintained, and improved even further, it is vital that the sector continues to learn from experience. Over many years, UK railways have continued to develop their technology and operating methods in order to address the gaps they have found in their safety defences, or newly identified risks. I see no sign that this willingness to adapt and improve has abated.

“The Rail Accident Investigation Branch's annual report for 2017 is a record of our contribution to the important process of learning from accidents and incidents, including our report into the tragic accident at Croydon that killed and injured so many. During 2017 we also investigated a number of accidents that could have been very much worse had the circumstances been only slightly different. These included a derailment of a passenger train when it struck debris from a landslip on the approach to Watford tunnel, and the subsequent collision in the tunnel with a train travelling in the opposite direction.

“The annual report highlights our activities during 2017, and lists some of our key outputs and the recurrent safety issues that give us particular concern. These include:

- the industry's continued high reliance on signallers taking the correct action to ensure the safety of level crossing users when giving permission for road vehicles to cross a user worked crossing;
- the danger to trains when earthworks and structures fail;
- narrowly avoided accidents involving track workers and moving trains;
- the actual and potential consequences of the actions of fatigued railway workers; and
- the potential for serious accidents when errors are made during installation and commissioning of new infrastructure particularly when working under pressure”.

Newsdate: 17 May 2018