



Rail Accident Investigation Branch



# Penkridge Investigation - Communication

## Rail Accident Investigators Seminar, 2025

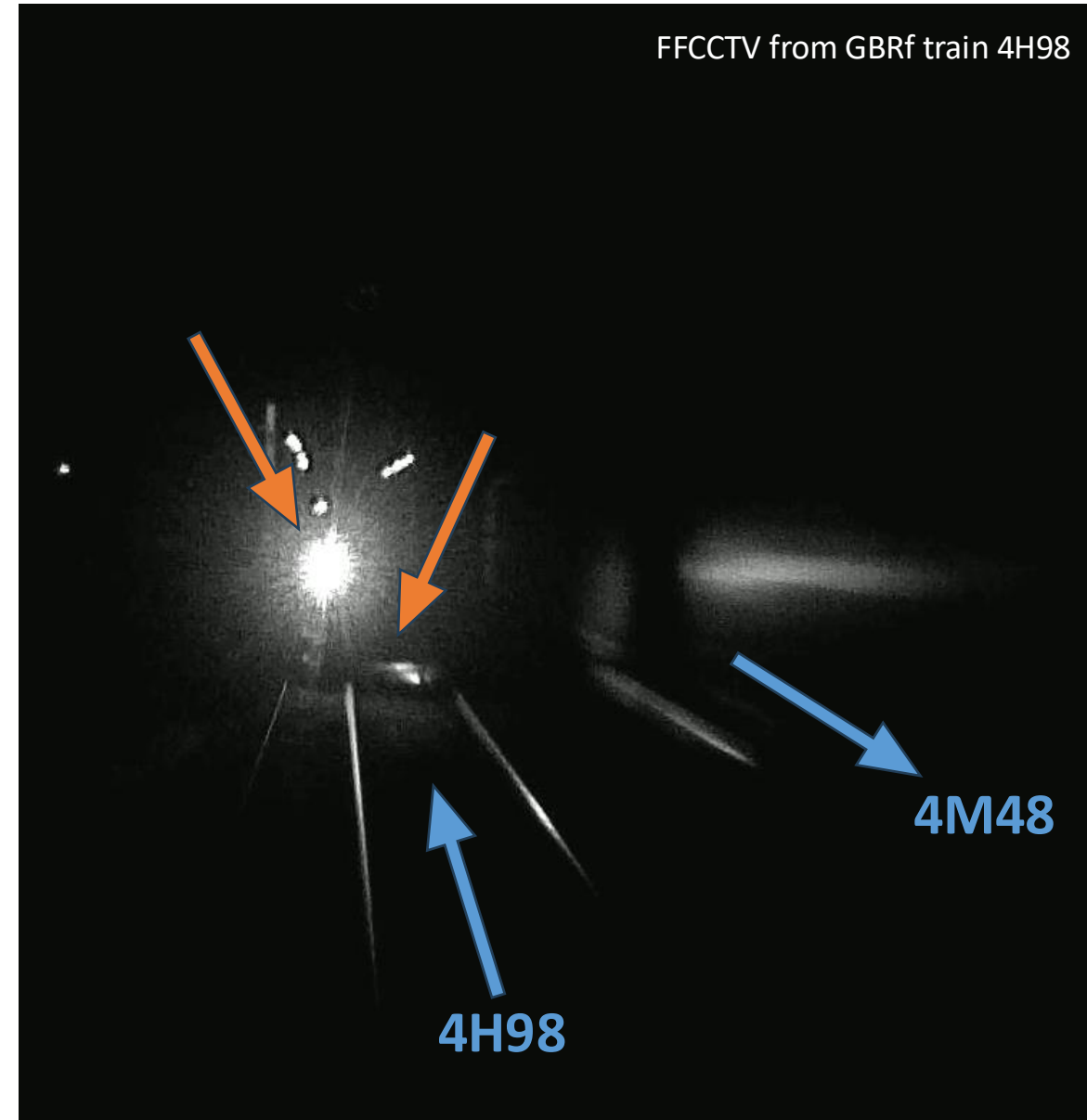
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Inspector

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# Summary of the incident

- 10 July 2022, just before midnight
- Two track workers had a very near miss with freight train 4H98 as it travelled at 61 mph on the Down line, just south of Penkridge station
- The staff were part of a team trying to identify an OLE fault
- Another train, 4M48 was passing on the adjacent line
- One track worker suffered a minor injury, but both were shaken



# A critical part of the network

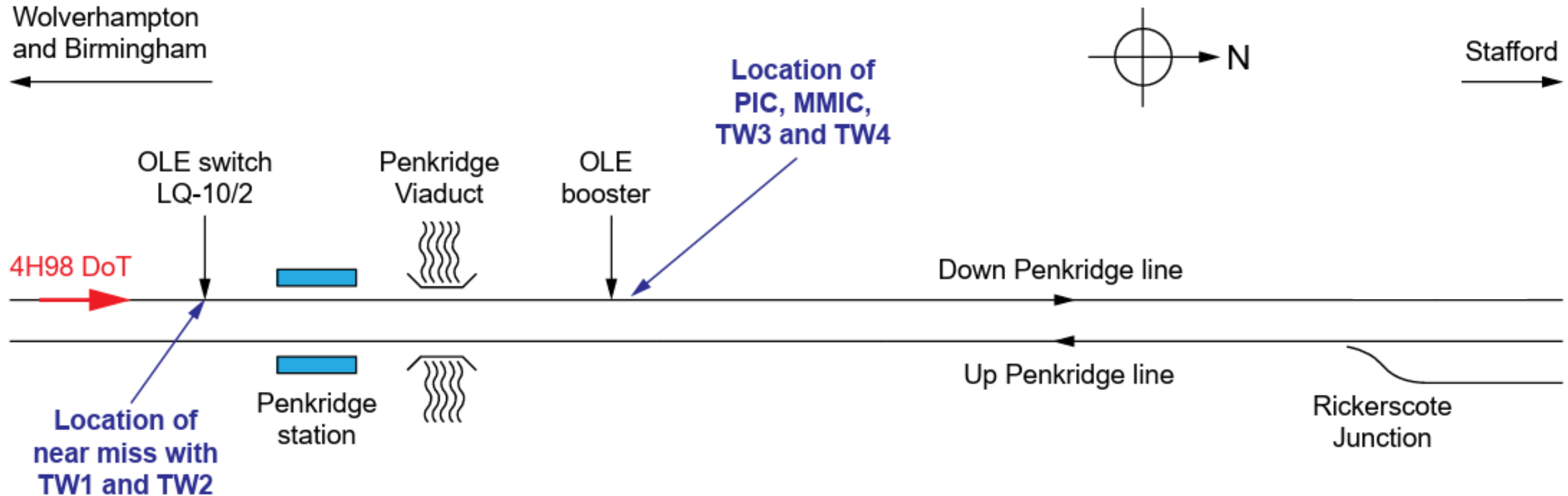


Penkridge Station

Network Rail  
Routeview image

OLE Switch

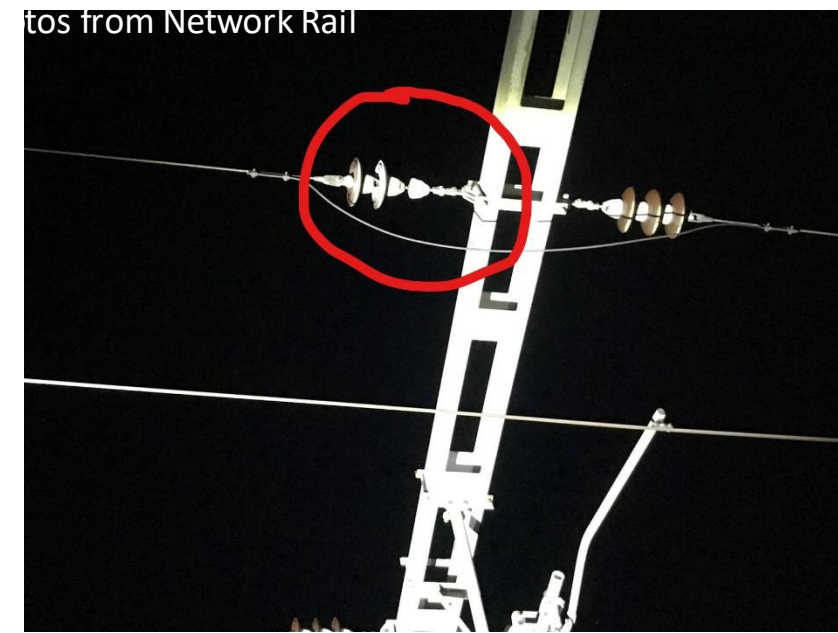
# Site layout





# Cause of the incident

- An elusive OLE fault
- Reports of arcing in various places every time they re-energised
- The team started inspecting in the cess, but then the PIC took a line block on the Down line to get a closer look
- Later in the shift, they needed to operate an OLE switch south of PenkrIDGE
  - The PIC sent the two track workers to do this
  - Rest of the team remained north of PenkrIDGE to look for any arcing



# Cause of the incident

- The signaller called the PIC at 23:54 to suspend the line block to allow a train (4H98) to pass on the Down line
- The PIC believed that the two track workers were in the cess, so handed back the line block before calling them
- The two track workers were actually in the four-foot of the Down line, as they believed the line block was still in place
- When the PIC did call them, another train (4M48) was passing the group on the Up line, so they couldn't hear each other
- 4H98 then approached from the south, with the track workers still in the four-foot

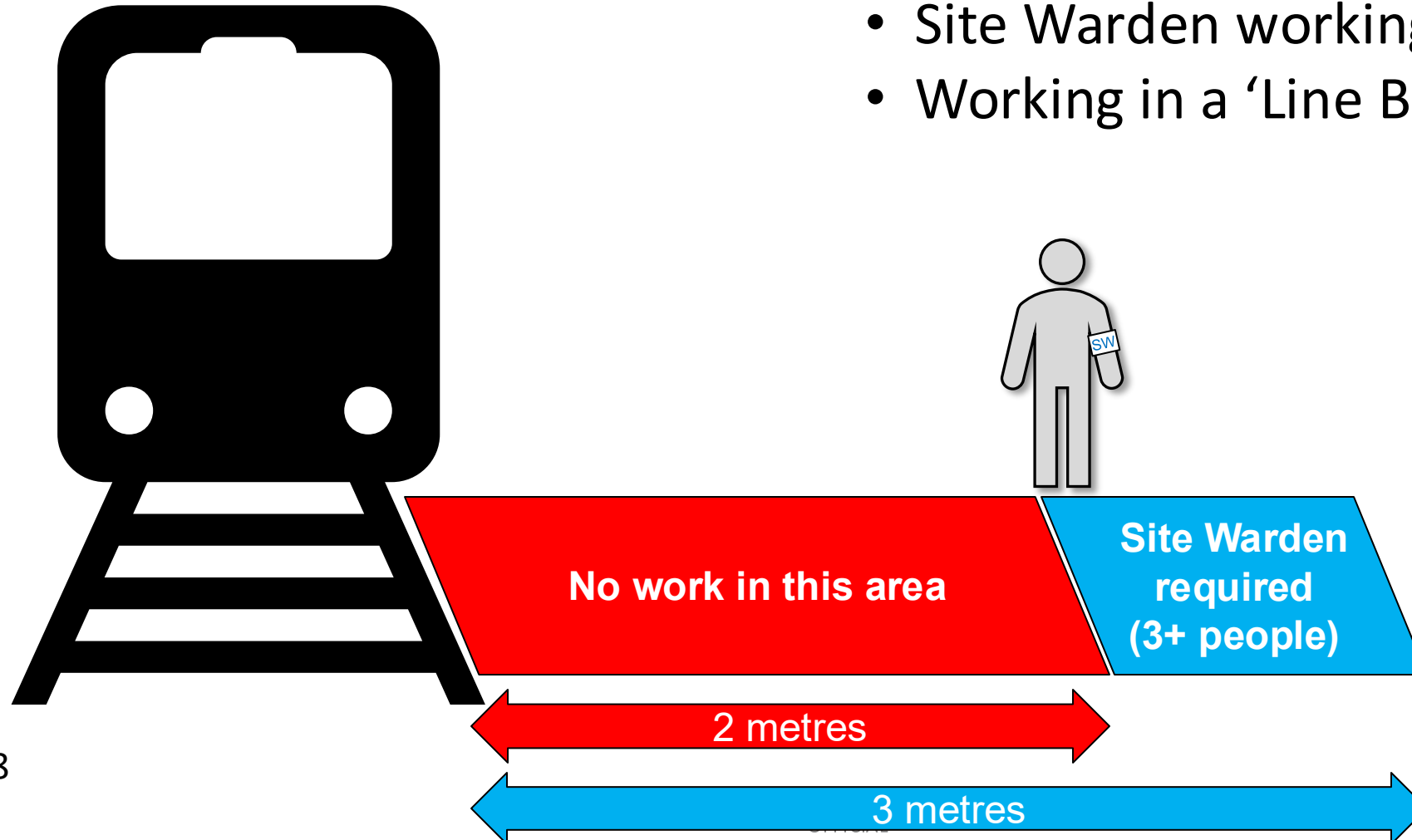
# A case of miscommunication?

- A variety of non-compliant behaviours on display
  - A team desperately trying to get the job done
  - Lots of pressure – a main line had been shut for over 5 hours
  - They could have done this in a different way
- A critical conversation happened between the PIC and the track workers just before they split
  - This was a conversation, not a ‘brief’
  - The agreement was that the track workers would “remain separated”
  - But what does that mean?
  - It meant a different thing to the PIC and to the track workers

# Working “Separated”

Different names for the same thing:

- Working with a ‘separated system of work’
- Site Warden working
- Working in a ‘Line Block’





# The track worker's view

- Initially, the staff were working 'separated', inspecting from the cess
- At around 22:30, when the PIC took the line block on the Down line, the team worked separated from the Up line, which was still open
- When the track workers left the PIC, the line block was still in place, and they believed this would remain the case
- Their perception was that they were 'separated' from the single open line

# The PIC's view

- Traditionally, OLE inspections were done in daylight, from the 4-foot, with unassisted lookout providing a warning of approaching trains
- Inspections are now routinely done from the cess, using a separated system of work with all lines open
  - The team in this area refer to this as “working separated”
- The PIC believed that the instruction to “remain separated” effectively meant “remain in the cess” as they would do for inspection work

# Investigation difficulties

- Investigations like this rely heavily on witness accounts
- There was very little of the hard, factual evidence that we normally prefer
- RAIB undertook a number of interviews, some of which ended up being quite long
- The industry did individual interviews and a group discussion
- Heavily conflicting witness evidence about critical moments
- So how do we rationalise this?

# The industry approach

- In order to try and get a clear and consistent account, the local investigation took a different approach
  - They got all the people involved in a room, and got them to discuss the incident
  - Some quite heated moments
  - Multiple levels of the organisational hierarchy in the room, so a risky strategy as arguments could soon become personal
  - But it did get somewhat to a result
- This is not compatible with RAIB's interview process...

# RAIB's approach

- RAIB will usually interview individually:
  - Allows witnesses to be entirely open and their statement protected
  - 'Quieter' people aren't subdued by 'noisier' people
  - A well defined, controlled and practiced process
  - Allows RAIB to use its legal powers if needed
- But it is not without its risks:
  - Relies on the skill of the interviewer
  - Can become an iterative process, when checking a witness's accounts against their colleagues

# My approach to Penkridge

- Building good rapport is everything!
  - I always want people to tell me information because they want to, not because they have to
  - Be honest about what you are and aren't going to write
  - Saying it isn't a witch-hunt isn't enough, people need to believe it
  - I had met the union representative for some of the staff a few times before, and they reassured their members that I was "alright"
  - While it is important to know what happened and why, my normal method is to ask 'how can we stop this happening to someone else'?



# My approach to Penkridge

- We got to a point where we knew all we were going to know
- There were still some unknowns and some conflicting accounts
  - As investigators, we don't like this!
- But critically, we knew enough to be confident about the safety learning and the suitability of the recommendations
- Finally – this incident shows the value of FFCCTV. Without seeing the video, nobody would have appreciated how close this was. It was also essential in encouraging the staff to be truthful in their accounts.

# Thank you!

