



Len Porter
Chief Executive

Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

1 October 2013

Dear Patrick

Given the recent major train accidents in Spain, France, Switzerland and Canada the RSSB September board meeting considered a paper that examined what steps the GB rail industry has taken to mitigate the risk from similar accidents occurring in this country.

This letter is intended to give confidence in the GB rail position in that respect. However, in the words of former Secretary of State James Baker in his report into the 2005 Texas City refinery explosion: "The passing of time without a process accident is not necessarily an indication that all is well". In the UK, the time between train accidents (resulting in fatalities or major injuries) has increased significantly over the last decade. Nevertheless, as a measure of risk in the rail industry the Safety Risk Model currently predicts that a train accident leading to greater than or equal to 5 fatalities will occur, on average, every 5.8 years. In this context, the last train accidents that resulted in passenger fatalities were at Grayrigg in 2007 and Ufton in 2004. Also, whilst the number of train accidents in GB resulting in fatalities has been low over the last 10 years there remain a number of significant near miss incidents recorded each year that had the potential to be more serious accidents. Managing train accident risk is, therefore, an area that remains high on the industry's agenda.

As a result of the accidents that occurred in the late 1980s through to the early 2000s (e.g. Clapham Junction, Southall, Ladbroke Grove, Hatfield, Potters Bar) the GB mainline rail industry has improved its safety performance through commitments to:

- Significant investment in new technology e.g. Train Protection & Warning System (TPWS) and new rolling stock.
- Improved data collection, analysis and information sharing.

- Transparency in the publishing of safety performance data and risk information and increased duty holder understanding of risk and responsibility for its management.
- The development and use of risk models, including the proactive monitoring of precursor risk through the development and use of the Precursor Indicator Model.
- Adopting risk based decision making with guidance being provided in industry documents such as *Taking Safe Decisions*.
- Understanding the influence of human factors and safety culture.
- Investigating accidents in a manner that does not seek to allocate blame and learning from both GB and international incidents and accidents.
- System risk review through the RSSB board and supporting sub groups.

There is no doubt that this improved approach has contributed significantly to GB rail having arguably the best safety record in Europe and comparing favourably to the best in the world. It is no surprise, therefore, that the most advanced European and other international rail administrations are keen to learn from our rail sector especially when it comes to our safety management information systems, risk models, human factors expertise and governance structures.

We recognise that we have moved into a new phase in GB railway history, one in which we must commit to reducing cost whilst improving our business performance. It is understood, of course, that this must be done without compromising business risk (safety risk being a part of business risk). If we are to succeed we will need to pay even more attention to business risk management underpinned by modern holistic asset management. The industry appreciates the need to make the next steps towards a leading edge capability in this respect but it is not easy and will require even more sophisticated risk based decision making capability through:

- Better asset register, data and information management systems.
- Improved models to manage whole of life system performance, cost and risk in an integrated manner.
- An enhanced understanding of human factors and human behaviour.
- An enhanced cross industry research, development and innovation programme focused on delivering the Rail Technical Strategy (RTS) and other identified industry needs. The good news here is that the GB rail RTS is considered to be best in class and is already driving European RTS thinking. This should result in European research funding for activities suited to the delivery of our own RTS.
- Learning as an industry including giving due consideration to all accidents and incidents at home and abroad.

The bullet points above summarise a considerable technical challenge that will demand “systems” thinking and significant investment in order to allow risk based decisions to be taken that will lead to the necessary cost reduction in the fullness of time. In the meantime, considerable investment will continue to be required in infrastructure and rolling stock inspection, maintenance and renewal as laid out in the strategic business plans for the industry and Network Rail.

In summary we're in good shape but there is no room for complacency. With the necessary level of carefully targetted investment through CP05, we have the potential to maintain our leading edge in terms of improved business performance at reduced cost and risk.

Should you wish to discuss this letter, I would be pleased to do so.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Len Porter', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Len Porter

cc: Richard Price and Anna Walker, ORR
RSSB Board

Attachments:

1. Bretigny-sur-Orge derailment summary
2. Quebec runaway and derailment summary
3. Santiago derailment summary
4. Aldershot, Ontario derailment summary
5. Granges-près-Marnand collision summary