HS2

Safe at Heart Strategy

2026–2030

Safe at Heart

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Front cover image: Staff surveying progress at the Euston station site
Left: Construction at Old Oak Common station

"What we achieve on our best site, on our best day, is industry-beating. But we are not yet consistent across all sites."

Mark Wild
Chief Executive Officer, HS2 Ltd

Leadership Statements

More than 30,000 people are building HS2, and every one of them has the right to go home safe and well every day, as do the communities living alongside our sites. That is what Safe at Heart means in practice.

We are building a railway. Everything in this strategy comes back to that: a railway that is safe to build, safe to bring into service, and safe to run and maintain for decades to come.

Our supply chain colleagues are delivering world-class construction and engineering across the route. They also see risk before anyone else. My job, and the job of everyone working on this programme, is to create the conditions that support them to do their best work, safely. That means clear standards, decisions made when they are needed, and a client that stays close enough to the work to understand it.

By industry standards, we are doing well. During the reset our accident frequency rate has fallen, lost time incidents have reduced and we have exceeded our Health and Safety Performance Indicators. I'm proud of the work we've achieved so far, but we know that low incident rates still mean people are getting hurt while working here.

What we achieve on our best site, on our best day, is industry-beating. But we are not yet consistent across all sites and it is our collective responsibility to change this. Addressing our gap in consistency is what will take us from good to great.

The biggest change we are asking for is in HS2 Ltd. Our focus needs to be on the way we work, our decisions, our pace, and our capabilities, because these are the things that make the work harder or riskier for the people doing it. Safe at Heart is how we build the organisation we need to deliver what we have promised.

We are one of a long line of big projects in this country, and others will follow us. As the client, HS2 Ltd sets the bar. What we ask for, pay for and check on this programme should raise the standard for construction and rail well beyond it. That is a legacy worth having.

Our approach to health and wellbeing is about prevention: spotting risks early, designing them out, and acting before people are harmed. Mental health matters as much as physical safety. If someone on this programme is struggling, that is a safety issue and we will treat it as one.

The decisions we make will shape not only this programme but the railway that people will work on long after us. That responsibility sits with line managers first. If you manage people or manage work on HS2, health and safety is yours. It does not pass to a safety adviser.

That is why we hold ourselves and each other to five behaviours: consistency, openness, inclusion, challenge and planning. They are how Safe at Heart is felt on every site and in every office, and how we make sure everyone on this programme stays safe and well.

Mark Wild
Chief Executive Officer, HS2 Ltd

Above: The Curzon Street station site in Birmingham

"To build on our good record to date and continually improve, we must create an environment where people feel safe to speak up, challenge decisions and ask for change."

Mike Brown
Chair, HS2 Ltd

Leadership Statements continued

HS2 is at peak construction. The programme reset provides a planned route to completion with the end of heavy civil engineering and the transition to systems installation coming at the end of the decade. This stable foundation means we can plan with more certainty and review our processes to make sure they are fit for purpose – this includes health, safety and wellbeing.

As we look forward to a new and complex phase of the programme, health, safety and wellbeing will remain a fundamental part of how we work. This new safety, health and wellbeing strategy will ensure we stay focused, measure improvement and remain disciplined during key transitions, with consistent leadership and clear accountability at every level.

To build on our good record to date and continually improve, we must create an environment where people feel safe to speak up, challenge decisions and ask for change. This is not just about physical safety, it's about psychological safety too.

The role of the board in this is clear: to provide rigorous scrutiny, constructive challenge, and steadfast support to programme leaders in embedding consistent standards, expectations and behaviours across HS2 and its supply chain.

I am confident that the steps we are taking will place health, safety and wellbeing at the heart of every decision and every action, in pursuit of our absolute commitment that everyone goes home safe and well, every day.

Mike Brown
Chair, HS2 Ltd

Why Safe at Heart Matters

What it means for all of us

We are building a railway. Safe at Heart means everyone building it goes home safe and well every day, whether you are on site or in an office, working for HS2 Ltd or for one of our delivery partners.

Physical safety, long-term health and mental wellbeing are equally important. If you're struggling, we'll treat it as a health issue.

Everyone should feel confident raising concerns and stopping unsafe work when something does not feel right. Safe at Heart depends on all of us taking responsibility for safety and wellbeing and looking out for one another.

How we work together

Five behaviours define how we work together. They shape how we plan work, make decisions, manage risk and learn from experience.

- **Consistency –** applying standards the same way, on every site, and in every office
- **Openness** – speaking up when something's not right, and being heard when you do
- **Inclusion** – making sure the people closest to the risk are involved in decisions
- **Challenge** – questioning decisions or situations that do not feel right – without fear
- **Planning** – identifying and managing risk before work starts, not reacting once problems happen

What we're focusing on

Our work is organised around seven focus areas of equal priority:

- Health, safety and wellbeing of our people
- Informed learning
- Public and community
- Occupational health and wellbeing
- Safe supply chain management
- Health and safety by design
- Safe railway operations

HS2 Ltd visit to the Chiltern tunnel south portal

Why Safe at Heart Matters continued

What this means for you

You are one of around 30,000 people building a railway. Whatever your job, this strategy is about the conditions you work in and the decisions you make.

If you hold the spanner or the spade

You can stop work if it is not safe, and you will be backed when you do. You see risk before anyone else does, so say so early. Your mental health matters as much as your physical safety.

If you supervise

You set the conditions for safe work and honest conversations. Check how your team are doing as often as you check the physical risks. Ask for challenge, listen when you get it, and make sure lessons are learned when something goes wrong. Look for the cause, not for someone to blame.

If you manage people or manage work

Health and safety is yours, not the safety team's. You answer for the risk in the work you control, for whether your team have what they need to do it safely, and for whether the pressure to deliver is quietly winning. If you let a shortcut go, everyone below you learns the standard is negotiable.

If you work for HS2 Ltd

Our joint venture partners are world class. Our job is to create the conditions that let them do their best work: clear standards, decisions when they are needed, and a client close enough to the work to understand it. You are also part of the change we are asking of ourselves.

How we will lead

HS2 Ltd is the client for the railway. We set the standards, pay for the work, bring the industry together and check that standards are met. Risk is changing: more is happening at once, and new risks turn up where teams and contractors hand work to each other. You will see us spending more time where the work happens, closer to our partners and the workforce, spotting risk earlier and deciding faster.

Why this matters

What we decide here, on site and in the office, shapes a railway people will run, maintain and travel on for decades. We are one of a long line of big projects, and others will follow us. What we do here sets the bar for what comes next.

We all do our part to stay safe and well.

Every day, everywhere, everyone.

Our Safe at Heart Commitment

"We all do our part to stay safe and well.

Every day, everywhere, everyone."

Safe at Heart is HS2's enduring commitment to health, safety and wellbeing. It means everyone working on, or affected by, this programme goes home safe and well every day.

This commitment applies to everyone – on site, in offices, across the supply chain, and in the communities where we work. It brings together physical safety, long-term health, and mental health and wellbeing as one responsibility.

Safe at Heart guides the decisions we make, how we plan work and how we act. It sets the standard we expect of ourselves and of each other.

This commitment remains constant as the programme changes – through construction, systems installation and railway operations.

Above: A worker alongside one of our tunnel boring machines in London

Top: HS2's Chief Commercial Officer talking to apprentices
Bottom: Construction worker inside the Euston tunnel

The Challenge

We have already seen what focused effort can achieve. During the programme reset, our accident frequency rate has fallen, we've reduced lost time incidents, and overall health and safety performance improved. This shows that sustained, collective action from leaders, delivery partners and the workforce can reduce harm and raise standards. It also tells us where the problem is. Commitment is not the issue – it is strong right across the programme. Doing it the same way everywhere is.

But the context is now changing.

HS2 is moving out of its most intensive construction phase into a more complex environment. Construction work will continue, but it will increasingly overlap with systems installation, testing and preparation for operations. As this happens, the nature of risk changes. New hazards emerge at the boundaries between contractors, between disciplines, and between phases of the programme. Activities such as electrical installation, bringing systems into service, and connecting systems across the railway bring risks that must be anticipated and managed differently from traditional construction work.

This changes how we organise and control work, not only what work we do. This transition also includes a shift in regulatory oversight, as we prepare to move from construction regulation under the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to railway regulation under the Office of Rail and Road (ORR).

The Challenge continued

Our 2026 culture assessment heard from 298 people in 43 focus groups and 623 survey responses. It found strong commitment and visible leadership in many places, alongside real differences in how seriously mental health and wellbeing are taken, how well lessons stick, and how confident people feel about speaking up when they are under pressure.

Taken together, this creates a clear challenge. We must sustain improvement as we adapt to a more complex risk environment. That requires more consistent leadership and behaviours, stronger control at handover points between teams and stages of work, and ensuring our strategy is reflected in how work is planned in our offices and carried out on site. This is all part of our journey to go from 'good' to 'great'.

Where we are and where we are going

Our 2026 culture assessment used the Parker–Hudson maturity scale:

Level 2

Reactive – we respond to incidents.

↓

Level 3

Calculative – we have the systems, the standards and the intent.

This is where HS2 is today, and **this is our good**.

↓

Level 4

Proactive – we find and fix problems together, before harm.

↓

Level 5

Generative – safety is simply how we work.

This is great, and by 2030 we get as close to it as we can.

Our Strategic Goal

On site at the Water Orton viaducts, Warwickshire

Our Safe at Heart commitment defines what we stand for.

Our strategic goal sets out what we must achieve to turn that commitment into a fundamental and lasting improvement in health, safety and wellbeing across HS2.

This strategy defines where we must focus our effort over the next four years. It aligns with the government-approved 2026–2030 funding period for HS2.

Our approach is informed by our health, safety and wellbeing culture baseline, programme data, and analysis of health and safety risks and incidents.

Our strategic goal is clear:

To deliver a sustained improvement in health, safety and wellbeing, designing health and safety into systems from the start; leaving a legacy of a railway that is safe to operate and maintain, a more capable workforce, and improved industry standards.

In practice, this means improving the health, safety and wellbeing of the people building, testing, living by, and operating the railway. We must also make sure health and safety is built into the programme from the outset and strengthened over time.

Health and safety performance is shaped by the decisions people make when work is planned, when conditions change, and when something does not feel right. Achieving our strategic goal depends on those decisions being fully understood, consistent and supported at every level.

Our Strategic Goal continued

We will achieve our goal through three interconnected phases:

Today – Civils

Closing the gap between our best sites and our average ones, through stronger leadership and the behaviours we all share.

Tomorrow – Systems
up to 2030

Ensuring a safe transition from civils to systems, designing out risk from the start through cross-programme learning, controlled, manufacturing-based methods, and systems integration and installation.

The Future – Legacy
+15 years

Achieve a safe operational railway, a more capable, skilled workforce, and improved industry standards for safety and preventing mental and physical health conditions in construction.

How We Lead

Staff inside the Chiltern tunnel

How we lead as client develops as the programme changes, but what we are for does not. Through civils and stations we lead as an informed client: we set the standards, pay for the work, oversee it closely and use our data to see where risk sits. That is the right model for building structures, and it is working.

As we move into installing, integrating and testing railway systems, the job changes. Success stops being about completing individual assets safely and becomes about bringing infrastructure, systems, people and operations together into a railway that is safe to run and maintain. That needs an intelligent client: closer to the technical detail, able to judge what we are given, and able to make the call when a partner needs one. Our Integrated Client Teams are already making that shift, and this strategy sits alongside our Project Execution Plan and Delivery Strategy in supporting it.

At every stage we hold ourselves to the intelligent customer standard: knowing what we need, understanding why we need it, specifying it clearly, overseeing the work while it is done, and being technically capable of judging what we are given. In construction that is how we discharge our client duties under Regulation 4 of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. How we discharge those duties in detail sits in our Delivery Strategy and our Health and Safety Assurance Plan.

Whatever stage we are at, what we want does not change: working with world-class partners to keep people safe and well across HS2.

The characteristics of our informed client approach are:

- **Setting standards** – clear, consistent and applied without exception
- **Improving performance** – using data and insight to identify and address risk early
- **Finding solutions** – working together to solve complex challenges
- **Learning lessons** – turning experience into practical, programme-wide improvement
- **Engaging industry** – sharing knowledge and learning to raise standards beyond HS2
- **Creating the conditions** – the standards, resources, access and decisions that let our partners work safely and get on with it

How We Lead continued

Leadership behaviours in action

Leadership is most visible in the decisions that are made every day. That includes how work is designed, how risks are assessed, how pressures are managed, and how people respond when something does not feel right. Our role is to make sure those decisions are based on a clear understanding of the risks, applied consistently and supported at every level.

Five shared behavioural themes – consistency, openness, inclusion, challenge and planning – define how we work together across HS2 and the supply chain. These are not abstract values; they are practical expectations that guide decision-making, shape relationships and support effective delivery.

Underpinned by strong communication, engagement and partnership, they are used to guide leadership, management and supervision, while they also inform how we plan and assure works. By clearly defining the expected behaviours, we can challenge each other more effectively and improve performance. Importantly, they help to ensure Safe at Heart is experienced consistently, everywhere.

Living these behaviours is how we do our job as client. Doing them consistently builds a just culture – one where people trust each other, risks surface early, decisions are informed and problems get solved together. Accountability for that sits with line managers at every level, not with the safety team. This is what moves us from good to great.

Five shared behavioural themes

- **Consistency**
- **Openness**
- **Inclusion**
- **Challenge**
- **Planning**

Top: The launch of the Acton Recruitment Hub
Bottom: Inspecting progress at the Colne Valley viaduct

Our Focus Areas

Our focus areas reflect the current nature of our work and the emphasis on our priorities:

A steel worker at one of our viaducts

Health, safety and wellbeing of our people

We will prioritise occupational health and wellbeing across the programme. It will be given the same importance as safety, and led and managed just as effectively. In collaboration with our supply chain, we will strengthen our leadership, management and supervisor capability to ensure consistently high standards and increasingly effective risk management across all our sites and offices.

This includes embedding clear expectations for safe work planning and enhancing informed client capability.

Informed learning

We will accelerate our efforts to build a just culture by harnessing new technologies to strengthen our ability to predict and identify risk, enhance the way we capture, analyse and share data, and improve risk-based assurance.

Our work includes improving the consistency and timeliness of our investigations, while strengthening how we share, apply and embed learning from our partners and the wider industry.

Public and community

We will protect the public and communities affected by our work by aiming to prevent and mitigate their exposure to risks.

This includes reducing road risk, managing impacts from construction and land and property activities, and strengthening engagement to maintain trust as the programme evolves.

Our Focus Areas continued

Inspecting shuttering at the Euston traction substation

Occupational health and wellbeing

We will protect and enhance the long-term health and wellbeing of our people by designing out occupational health risks at source. We will adopt a prevention-led strategy to health risks and proactively review and improve the management of psychological and psychosocial risks programme wide.

Health and safety by design

We expect our designers to demonstrate how their designs can be constructed, used, operated and maintained safely and without causing harm to health and wellbeing. Safe construction and operation are enabled through design, with risks eliminated wherever possible across the railway lifecycle.

Safe supply chain management

We will set clear expectations and accountabilities and convene our supply chain to continually raise standards, innovate and reduce risk across the lifecycle of all contracts. Our aim is to deliver strong, consistent leadership together with our supply chain.

Safe railway operations

We will safely authorise our infrastructure through HS2's Project Authorisation Strategy, which sets out the requirements and controls for protecting our maintenance and operations workforce from live rail risk and ensuring safe travel for future customers. We are making forward-thinking decisions today that protect everyone who will travel on, operate or maintain the railway in the future.

Our Focus Areas continued

Health is as important as safety on HS2

In our focus areas, we are clear that occupational health and wellbeing are as important as safety. We have built strong foundations, but more work needs to be done.

Increased leadership visibility, targeted training and significantly improved incident reporting have enhanced our understanding of risk. This growing maturity in reporting and insight will help us move towards consistent prevention and elimination of the top five causes of long-term occupational health disorders relating to cancers, respiratory disorders, skin reactions, vibration and noise.

In addition, we aim to take a proactive, prevention-led approach to psychosocial risk, aligned with ISO 45003 and emerging industry codes of practice, moving beyond reactive support to systematic identification and control of underlying causes.

We will integrate health and wellbeing into every stage of the programme. This includes:

- health by design – including strengthening standards, guidance and training for design teams
- establishing a single HS2 occupational health standard
- strengthening leading indicators and data insight
- embedding health and wellbeing within governance structures
- prioritising the elimination and reduction of key risks, alongside proactive management of psychosocial factors

Left: An operative at Victoria Road crossover box

Our Four-Year Roadmap

Delivery of the Safe at Heart Strategy will be guided by a four-year roadmap that sets out how we will strengthen our health and safety culture, while preparing the organisation for the next stages of the programme. This includes the transition from civils construction into systems installation, testing and commissioning.

A good part of the roadmap is aimed at HS2 Ltd itself. Over the next four years we will hold a mirror up to our own organisation and change how we set standards, make decisions and back the people doing the work.

Our 2026 health, safety and wellbeing culture assessment has informed the development of the roadmap. The assessment included feedback from people working for HS2 Ltd and our delivery partners and it provided a range of insights, from the need to improve how we share lessons-learned to the opportunity to place more emphasis on health and wellbeing.

The roadmap includes five key actions:

Building the Safe at Heart culture

Strengthening health and safety leadership at the frontline

Improving how we learn

Treating health and wellbeing equally with safety

Designing for safe and healthy construction, operation and maintenance

Top: Our 2,000th apprentice at Curzon Street viaduct
Bottom: Camden Council Leader Cllr Sagal Abdi-Wali in discussion at Euston Skills Centre

How We Achieve and Measure Progress

Delivery of the Safe at Heart Strategy will be guided by the **four-year roadmap** – setting clear outcomes to achieve our health and safety goals. Implementation will be driven through **Health and Safety Implementation Plans**, prioritising performance improvement, high standards, continuous learning, supply chain engagement, and scaling effective solutions.

We will measure the progress of these plans to understand where risk exists, how hazards are changing and where action is needed to prevent harm. This includes leading performance indicators that provide early insight, so we can act before harm occurs.

Who is accountable?

Individual leadership teams are responsible for their Health and Safety Implementation Plans. Progress against the overall strategy will be reviewed regularly by programme leaders as well as HS2 Ltd's executive and board, including through established committees.

Performance will be subject to independent assurance to provide confidence that standards are being applied consistently across the programme, and we will publish an annual summary of health and safety performance as part of HS2's public reporting.

Annual culture assessment

We will run an annual health and safety culture assessment across HS2 Ltd and our delivery partners, tracked against the 2026 baseline. It will tell us whether this strategy is working, where to target the Health and Safety Implementation Plans as the programme changes, and how far we have moved from good towards great.

Conclusion

The Safe at Heart Strategy places evidence at the centre of decision-making, ensuring that our actions are informed by robust data, learning and insight, rather than assumption. By understanding what the evidence tells us, we can target our efforts where they will have the greatest impact. Equally, we recognise that lasting improvements in health, safety and wellbeing are driven by behaviours as much as processes.

Strong leadership, visible commitment and a culture where people learn, speak up and take responsibility are how the behaviours that keep people safe become normal. That starts with the change we are making inside HS2 Ltd, and it is delivered with world-class partners and the people holding the spanner and the spade. We are building a railway that will be run, maintained and relied upon long after this programme ends. Making it safe to build and safe to run is what we owe the people who come after us.

A visualisation of platforms at Interchange station, Solihull

HS2

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