



# IRSC 2022

INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY  
SAFETY COUNCIL

SEVILLA, OCTOBER 16-21, 2022



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# COVID: THE IMPACT ON SAFETY LEADERSHIP INTERVENTIONS WITHIN RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS



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# BACKGROUND



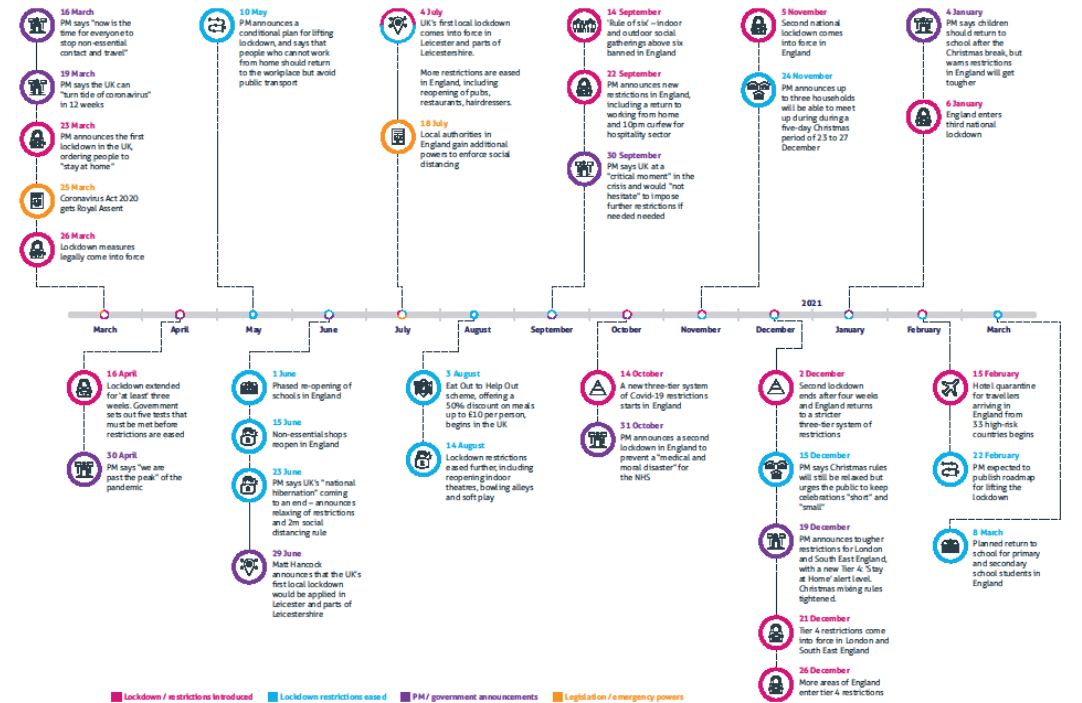
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# COVID 19 IN THE UK

- 16th March 2020 PM says “now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact and travel”
- 23th March 2020 PM announces the first lockdown in the UK, ordering people to “stay at home”
- 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020 – measures legally in place
- 10<sup>th</sup> May PM announces a conditional plan for lifting lockdown, and says that people who cannot work from home should return to the workplace but avoid public transport
- 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020 Second national lockdown comes into force in England
- 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 England enters third national lockdown

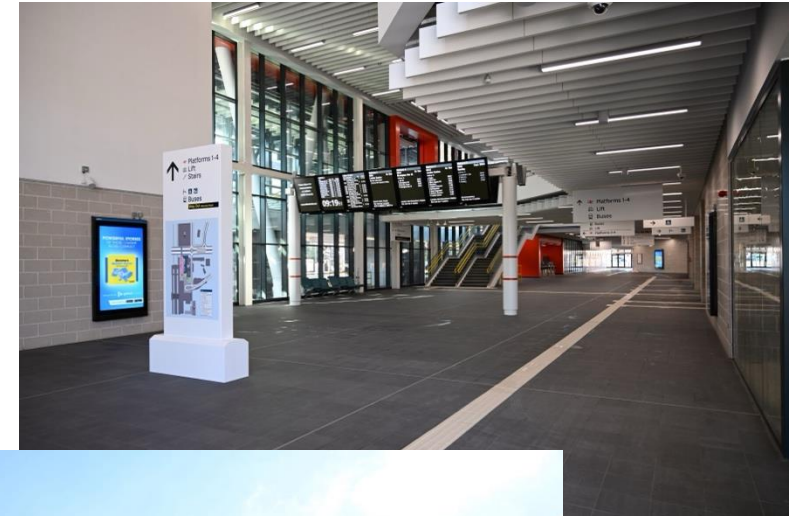
Timeline of UK coronavirus lockdowns, March 2020 to March 2021



Source: Institute for Government analysis.

# THE UK RAIL CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

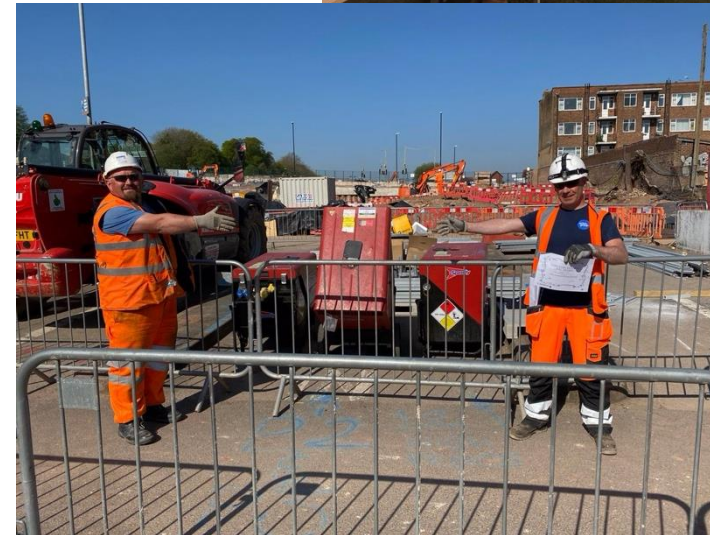
- Experienced profound change due to the impact of COVID
- *“Despite the reduction in physical harm, 2020/21 saw a relatively high number of workforce fatalities”* (RSSB 2021).
- One area of particular concern is the construction of rail projects where up to a third of all workforce harm is sustained by infrastructure workers (RSSB 2021).



# COVID AND THE UK RAIL CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

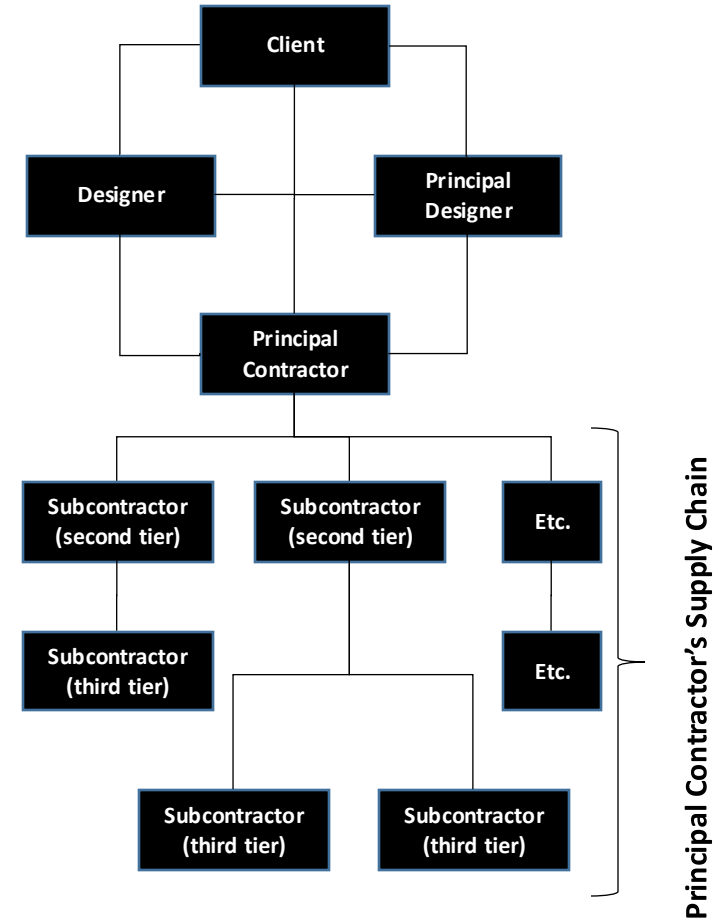
- Projects halted or changed or new projects paused.
- New ways of working:
  - social distancing
  - new hygiene
  - additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) measures,
  - working from home for roles that are not essential to front-line work

All new controls whilst maintaining safety in the conventional aspects of work.



# THE ORGANISATION OF WORK

- Nearly all projects, particularly medium to large projects, are delivered through joint working of multiple organisations.
- A common project organisation structure is developed, referred to as a 'Project Delivery Organisation'.
- Delivering safety is a significant challenge(HSE, 2019):
  - Multiple organisations Temporary nature of arrangements
  - Challenge for safety leadership
  - How to engage the workforce in safety





# SAFETY PERFORMANCE AND SAFETY LEADERSHIP

*“A genuine and consistent management commitment to safety”*

*“Safety is the output from an organisation’s adaptive processes in response to both internal and external factors, and that this response is steered by a leader”*

(Schein 2010, Clarke 1999, Zohar 1980, Mearns and Flin 1999)

Leaders have had to adapt to new ways of working:

## Internal factors

- maintaining communications
- resource allocation
- new technologies

## External factors

- government legislation
- industry restrictions

# DEVELOPING PREVIOUS STUDIES

*“Evaluating attitudes to safety leadership within rail construction projects”* Stiles et al (2018) Safety Science

## Evaluating attitudes to safety leadership within rail construction projects

### Abstract

Safety leadership is widely discussed, commonly relating to improving safety performance within an occupational environment. Whilst there is considerable research on the characteristics of positive and negative safety leadership behaviours, research to date does not evaluate these in the context of rail construction projects, with no specific consideration of the complex interfaces and challenges faced by temporary configurations of Client, Principal Contractor and Supply Chains within this sector. Twenty-one in-depth interviews were undertaken with representatives from Client, Principal Contractor and Supply Chain, to identify attitudes to safety leadership and consider how this may impact on safety performance. The level of understanding of safety leadership as a topic was evaluated against how well the study participants could explain the concept, and whether they could provide any examples of real world application. A total of 26 different examples of safety leadership interventions from the rail construction sector were identified from this study. These mostly aligned to nine good safety leadership areas identified within the literature, such as increasing visibility around safety, workforce involvement, providing recognition for good safety performance and ensuring effective communications. Half of the intervention examples provided were based around communications, in particular opportunities for leader engagement or the sharing of information. This

Industry factors

Organisational factors

*“Impact of COVID-19 on health and safety in the construction sector”* Stiles et al (2021) Human factors and ergonomics in manufacturing & service industries

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

### Abstract

Construction has been significantly affected by COVID-19 yet is critical to the post-COVID economic recovery. Specifically, construction needs to be constantly aware of safety and risk balanced with timely project delivery. Guidance for COVID-19 must therefore be implemented in a way that reflects working practice and pressures. There is, however, a potential knowledge gap regarding the practical feasibility and impact of applying COVID-19 measures within construction, made more difficult by factors such as the temporary nature of projects and complex working arrangements. This paper presents a commentary on safe construction during, and beyond, COVID-19, covering the human factors challenges and practicalities of implementing COVID-19 measures. We observe that while guidance is strong on risk management, understanding of how best to implement this guidance is not yet stable. Also, care must be taken that implementing guidance does not detract from general safety, which is also challenged by increased pressures on delivery arising from COVID-19. There may, however, be opportunities for safer working practice arising from new awareness of health, hygiene and safety risk. The role of safety leadership is overlooked in guidance yet is vital to ensure safe construction during and beyond COVID-19. This guidance needs to be integrated into existing safety management systems because this takes account of the impact of COVID-19, and

Importance of leadership

# LEADERSHIP FOR SAFETY IN A POST COVID WORLD

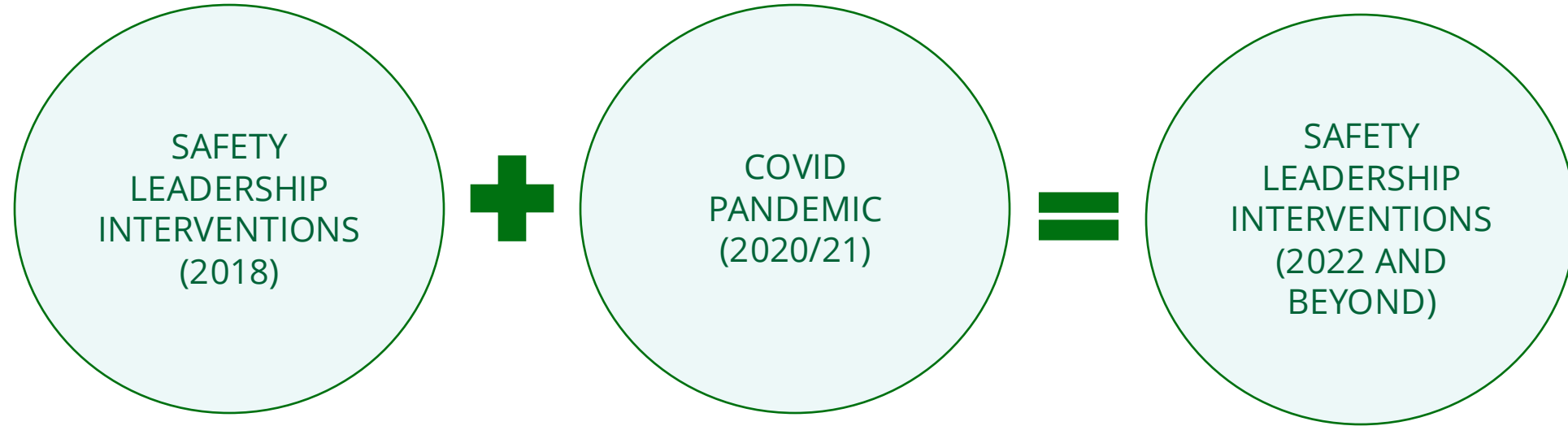
## Study objectives and approach



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# STUDY OBJECTIVES: HAVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES HAVE EVOLVED, REGRESSED OR CONTINUED AS BEFORE?



This study provides an indication of the current deployment of safety leadership interventions within UK rail infrastructure projects and evaluates the reported impact of COVID.

# SAFETY LEADERSHIP INTERVENTIONS

Stiles et al (2018) 26 interventions:

SHELT	Intervention	Observations	Safety briefings	Near miss reports
Site leaders call	Mindful leadership	Reward schemes	Leadership briefings	Safety in appraisals
Safety objectives	Investigation action	Just/fair culture	Safety audits	Back to the floor
Leadership tour	Stand down events	Behavioural safety	Safety inspections	Safety committees
Worksafe	Safety forums	Safety training	Open days	Supervisor forums
		Safety moments		

# STUDY: LEADERS SURVEY

15 leaders completed survey

20 multichoice questions plus 2 free text questions

Rate each of the 26 interventions

Free text questions:

- Are there any new safety leadership interventions that you have introduced since COVID?
- Do you have any further thoughts on how safety leadership has changed since COVID?

3. INTERVENTION: SHELТ (or equivalent) - Senior Management meeting to discuss safety \*

Did not use before or after COVID

Did use before COVID but not now

Use less since COVID

Use the same before and after COVID

Use more since COVID

Did not use before COVID but do now

Not sure

4. INTERVENTION: Site leaders call (weekly) across all organisation \*

Did not use before or after COVID

Did use before COVID but not now

Use less since COVID

Use the same before and after COVID

Use more since COVID

# STUDY: LEADERS INTERVIEWS

7 leaders completed the interview

The four questions were:

- In general terms, do you believe COVID had impacted on safety leadership interventions within the rail sector?
- What safety leadership interventions are the most impactful in a post COVID world, and why?
- Have there been any benefits of COVID in terms of safety leadership, and if so, what are these?
- What do you believe the biggest challenges to safety leadership are in a post COVID world?



# LEADERSHIP FOR SAFETY IN A POST COVID WORLD

## Study findings



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# STUDY FINDINGS: LEADERS SURVEY

Intervention Type	Did not use before or after COVID	Did use before COVID but not now	Use less since COVID	Use the same as before COVID	Use more since COVID	Did not use before COVID but do now	Not sure
SHELT or equivalent			2	11	2		
Site leaders call (weekly)	3		1	7	4		
Safety objectives within appraisals				12	3		
Safety leadership tour			3	9	3		
Worksafe procedure	1			11	3		
Back to the floor	2		2	6	3		2
Prompt intervention (immediate on site)				12	2		1
Mindful leadership	1			5	8	1	
Follow up on investigations				15			
Stand down/Step up/open day events			1	11	3		
Safety forums/committees (workforce)			1	12	2		
Safety forums/committees (supervisors)			1	10	2		2
Observation/close call/near miss cards			2	12	1		
Reward schemes	3		1	9	2		
Use of fair and just culture tools				12	2	1	
Behavioural based safety programmes	1			10	4		
General safety training			1	10	4		
Safety briefings (RAMS, SSOW, TBT etc)				15			
Leadership deliver safety briefings			1	11	3		
Safety moments			1	9	5		
Site safety audits/inspections			1	13	1		
Totals	11	0	18	222	57	2	5

Most of the safety leadership interventions were used the **same since COVID** as they were previously.

Many of the interventions are also reported as being used **more since COVID**;

- mindful leadership
- safety moments
- behavioural based safety programmes

There were some interventions where participants reported **less use since COVID**;

- safety leadership tours
- SHELT
- back to the floor
- observation/close call/near miss reporting

## STUDY FINDINGS: LEADERS INTERVIEWS

In general terms, do you believe COVID had impacted on safety leadership interventions within the rail sector?

Theme	Description
<b>Impact role dependent</b>	Little/no operational impact from COVID on frontline leadership
	Senior level reported impact from having to engage differently with their workforce
<b>Engagement</b>	Difficult to engage in the pre-covid ways
	More engagement with workforce and supply chain
<b>Hygiene &amp; Welfare</b>	Higher hygiene standards and cleanliness
	Higher standards of welfare provision

# STUDY FINDINGS: LEADERS INTERVIEWS

## What safety leadership interventions are the most impactful in a post COVID world, and why?

- Any intervention that shows visible leadership has impact
- No substitute for personal interaction
- More face to face engagement
- Need to adapt
- Leadership interventions need to return to pre-covid levels of frequency

## STUDY FINDINGS: LEADERS INTERVIEWS

Have there been any benefits of COVID in terms of safety leadership, and if so, what are these?

Theme	Description
Hygiene	Focus and investment from leaders (time, resources and money)
Self-awareness	Opportunity to build on higher level of self-awareness and the impact of personal behaviour on others
Embracing technology	Adapt to new technologies as a means of communication.
Mental Health & Wellbeing	Unprecedented focus on mental health and wellbeing understanding the impacts of stressors (work-related and other) on individuals behaviour at work
Leadership Focus	Leadership focus on engagement at a level not previously experienced.

## STUDY FINDINGS: LEADERS INTERVIEWS

What do you believe the biggest challenges to safety leadership are in a post COVID world?

Learning

Expectations

Workforce Mindset

Leadership Skills

Maintaining New Standards

Half of the participants reported that the challenges to safety leadership remained the same as before the pandemic, but COVID has exacerbated these due to a shrinking workforce, changing attitudes and societal expectations.

*It was also stated "As an industry we came together to address one particular problem (COVID), and keep people working under the restrictions. There were consistent rules for all, even in deployed differently. If the industry could come together the same again, what else could we improve".*

# LEADERSHIP FOR SAFETY IN A POST COVID WORLD

## Study Conclusions



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## STUDY FINDINGS

Safety and health focus unprecedented

Leadership – in person – most effective

Changing workforce expectations

Need to evolve leadership interventions to meet the new demands

Better learning and working together



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