

# Welcome

I am privileged to have been asked to write the first words of this special edition. I'd like to use them to ask a question: how are you feeling today?

It's a simple question, but in the fast-paced and frenetic world of our railways, there has never been a more important time to talk and listen - openly and honestly - about how we feel.

The facts are stark. In the rail industry, the rate of suicide in the workforce is 1.6 times higher than the UK average, and 60% of workers have experienced mental health issues.

This industry, in all its forms, is a fundamental part of UK life. Every single day, our country depends upon the people who work to keep our railways moving, and I know that this industry is defined by the dedication, professionalism and passion of its people.

But those incredible high standards and some of the unique challenges we face - long hours, shift-working, workplace violence, and the risk of exposure to traumatic incidents such as suicides - can have a real impact on our mental health.

As Rail Minister, I am all too aware of the huge sacrifices that frontline workers are making during this particularly worrying and uncertain time. I know that many of you are facing immensely difficult personal circumstances and have had your working lives changed beyond recognition.

That's why it is crucial that everyone in the industry - from the cleaners and signallers to the engineers, drivers and station staff - gets the right support for their own mental health now and in the future.

And I have never been more confident

that, as an industry, we are working together to set the standard for having those vital conversations.

This industry has been driving real change to improve the quality of wellbeing support for anyone who works in it. And I have heard so many truly inspiring stories of how the industry has also been helping others outside of it who are affected by mental health issues.

A few months ago, I heard about Kelly Holyoake, a train dispatcher at a south London station who saved the life of a man who was about to take his own life at the station.

She started up a conversation by simply asking him how he was, and then continued that conversation even after the British Transport Police arrived. Her courage meant she eventually talked him out of it - saving a life through small talk.

That conversation, between two individuals, was just one of thousands like it. Statistics show there were nearly 2,000 life-saving interventions on the railways last year - and that six people were saved for every one that took their life.

It is the kindness and bravery of people such as Kelly, alongside the efforts of the wider rail industry, charities such as Samaritans and Calm, the British Transport Police and emergency services, which helps keep people safe on our rail network.

It is clear that we all share a commitment to transforming the way we perceive and discuss mental health, helping to spark more conversations... and more stories like Kelly's.

There have been some fantastic initiatives to help aid this. I was delighted to support the Samaritans' 'Brew Monday' campaign with the Transport Secretary back in January, in an effort to turn 'Blue Monday' on its head and into something positive by encouraging people to get together.

Samaritans has so far trained more than 20,000 railway employees in prevention techniques. Hundreds of rail industry employees have donated their time to the Million Hours Challenge to support the Samaritans, whose Small Talk Saves Lives campaign has been running successfully since 2017. A new rail suicide prevention website has also recently launched.

I'm proud that the rail industry is upending expectations and transforming the concept of suffering in silence to small talk saving lives.

It is only by talking about these issues more that we can reduce the taboo and increase awareness of mental health issues. Let's all commit ourselves to having that friendly conversation and taking that opportunity to chat, - it might just make all the difference between suicide and being saved. ■

**CHRIS HEATON HARRIS**  
Rail Minister

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