

Report 15/2017: Serious irregularity at Cardiff East Junction.

On publication of RAIB's report concerning a serious irregularity at Cardiff East Junction Simon French, Chief Inspector of Rail Accidents said:

"This alarming incident, in which a train came close to travelling down a track that would have put it on an unprotected collision course with other trains, serves as a timely reminder of how easily things can go wrong when railway infrastructure is being upgraded and renewed.

"It happened very close to the end of a huge engineering project, to renew the track, signals and train control systems over a large area of south Wales. Thousands of people worked hard on that project, many of them over the Christmas and New Year period at the end of 2016, and they delivered the renewed railway on time – a great achievement. But over the years that the project had been in progress, some bad habits had crept in. Well-meaning people were taking each other's word that things had been done, instead of insisting on seeing the proof. The end result, in this case, was that no-one checked that redundant points, due to be removed altogether in a few days or weeks, had been locked in the correct position. Good project governance includes making sure that the right procedures are in place and that people follow them, at all levels, all the time. We have concluded that the project governance arrangements, and the processes that should provide Network Rail with assurance that these are being followed, need a thorough review in the light of what happened at Cardiff.

"It is also important, when organising intensive periods of commissioning work, to properly manage the working hours of the people doing the job. Back in 1988, the disastrous collision at Clapham Junction happened in part because working for weeks on end without any days off was part of the culture in some areas of the railway. Rightly, things have changed a lot since then. However, the events at Cardiff showed how easy it is to forget the lessons of Clapham and slip back into those habits under the time pressures of a big commissioning.

"RAIB is now investigating the collision at Waterloo on 15 August this year, which also took place during the commissioning stage of a large and high-profile project involving track and signalling changes. We will again be looking closely at how such projects are managed, and whether the lessons learned from the tragedies of the past are still being applied effectively on today's railway."

Newsdate: 30 October 2017