

HS2

Safe at Heart Strategy Approach 2026 – 2029





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Front cover image: Installing arch segments at Greatworth green tunnel
Image left: Work taking place on the exterior of Westgate ventilation shaft

Foreword



When I joined HS2 Ltd in December 2024, I continued to place health and safety at the heart of what we do. I was also clear about the links between safety and efficiency. They are not competing priorities. They are the same priority.

A well-run, well-designed and well-supervised site is both safer and more productive. When safety improves, everything follows. That is why we will refresh our Health and Safety Strategy as part of the fundamental reset of the HS2 programme. This document signals that intent.

HS2 has changed significantly since our last strategy was published in 2023. The cancellation of the railway to Manchester refocused the

programme on the route between London Euston and Birmingham Curzon Street. A reset was needed to end the cycle of spiralling costs and delays.

The reset has required us to think differently about how HS2 Ltd operates as a client – not just in health and safety, but across everything we do: how we manage cost, schedule and performance across a programme of this scale and complexity. Being a more active, intelligent, data-led client is central to how we will complete the railway for the lowest achievable cost. That means identifying issues early, intervening where necessary, and taking ownership of outcomes rather than monitoring from a distance.

Reshaping our Health and Safety Strategy will reflect that shift. It is where we will put these principles into practice first. It is where the stakes of getting it right are highest. Every person working on HS2 deserves to go home safe and well, every day. That is not an aspiration – it is a responsibility we all share, from the boardroom to hundreds of construction sites. We also have a duty to safeguard the communities we impact along the route.

Our safety performance today is good, but it still needs to be better. Last year the number of injuries continued to fall, but on a programme of this scale it is vital to keep making improvements. If performance levels off, experience from other major projects tells us that one of our colleagues risks being fatally injured. That is not a risk we are willing to accept.

The new strategy will build on what already works. Safe at Heart remains the right foundation, but we need a step change in how HS2 Ltd leads – setting clear standards, staying close to performance data, and intervening early when things are not right. That is what every person on this programme deserves.

We are developing the new strategy in collaboration with joint venture partners and contractors. Their commitment is essential for its success. Together, we are responsible for the safety of around 30,000 people across 350 sites. Nothing matters more than bringing everyone home safe and well, every day.

Mark Wild

Chief Executive Officer, HS2 Ltd

Executive summary

Our refreshed Health and Safety Strategy will set out HS2's priorities for 2026 – 2029.

Why now

The programme is being reset to establish a realistic cost and schedule baseline. That reset requires HS2 Ltd to operate differently – as a more active, intelligent client across all aspects of how we build the railway, including health and safety.

This strategy approach is part of that shift. The principles established here – clear standards, closer performance monitoring, early intervention, and genuine partnership with our supply chain – reflect how HS2 Ltd will operate.

What will change

Our new strategy will allow us to mitigate new risks as the programme evolves. Key components of the new strategy that apply across all of HS2's operations will include the following.

- Safe at Heart as the foundation – the programme-wide commitment that health, safety and wellbeing are central to every decision we take, every day, for everyone.

- HS2 Ltd as intelligent client – this involves setting clear principles for how we operate and work with our supply chain partners. For safety, this includes setting clear, non-negotiable standards, acting upon data and insight to improve performance, identifying risks early, and intervening decisively when needed.
- How we work together – five behavioural themes (consistency, openness, inclusion, challenge and planning) define how HS2 Ltd and its supply chain partners work together in practice, not just in principle.
- Transformation journey – setting out how we will act upon the intent of this strategy approach and achieve our aims over the next three years.

What success will look like

By 2029, we aim to achieve the following.

- Year-on-year improvement in health, safety and wellbeing performance, including progress against key metrics such as Accident Frequency Rates and the Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate. We'll also have reduced exposure to the top five causes of occupationally acquired ill health and disease, while proactively supporting mental wellbeing in the workplace.

- Higher standards for health, safety and wellbeing, consistently applied across all parts of the programme.
- A demonstrable improvement in our health, safety and wellbeing culture across all operations and contracts, elevating it to the highest industry standards.
- A new benchmark for other major projects through our Intelligent client approach.

- A legacy of learning and innovation that benefits future infrastructure projects.

The aims of this strategy approach have been developed in partnership with our joint venture partners and contractors. Its success depends on all of us.

Image: Steel formwork being prepared on site



Introduction

This strategy approach is for everyone involved in building HS2: about 30,000 people on more than 350 sites, our joint venture partners and contractors, and HS2 Ltd colleagues in offices and support roles. Importantly, it also covers our safety responsibilities in the communities affected by construction.

It sets out our approach to health, safety and wellbeing for the period 2026 – 2029. It applies to all phases of the programme, from construction taking place now, through to railway systems installation and preparation for operations.

The new strategy supersedes the Health and Safety Strategy published in May 2023. The programme has changed significantly since then. The railway to Manchester was cancelled, refocusing on the route between London Euston and Birmingham Curzon Street. A programme reset was initiated in late 2024 to establish a realistic baseline for cost and schedule. The strategy reflects those changes and the different demands they place on how HS2 Ltd operates.

It is part of a health and safety management system which covers how HS2 Ltd mitigates risks, while establishing minimum standards for our supply chain. Those standards are set out in the Health and Safety Approach for Contractor and Joint Venture Partners document.

How this document is organised

The strategy approach has five sections:

- 01 The challenge** – why we need to act now
- 02 Our aim** – what we are working towards
- 03 The strategy approach** – the four components: Safe at Heart, HS2 Ltd as the intelligent client, how we work together, and the transformation journey
- 04 Governance** – how we will oversee progress
- 05 How we will measure success** – the outcomes we are working towards

01

The challenge

The challenge

Every day on HS2, thousands of people step on to worksites trusting that the job will be planned well, led well and controlled well — so they can do their work with confidence and go home safe, healthy and well. That is the standard we owe to every person on the programme, whatever their employer, role or shift. We also have a duty to anyone affected by our work, including local residents and businesses.

The scale of the task

About 30,000 people work across 350 sites, supported by more than 3,700 UK businesses to date. In 2024/25, the workforce completed 71 million hours – an 8% increase on the previous year. At this scale, risk is constant: changing conditions, fatigue, time pressure, and the split-second decisions people make every day.

Our performance is good, but we need to aim higher. The true test of a programme like HS2 is not what we say our standards are – it is how consistently people experience them, especially when the pressure is on. When standards vary between sites or contractors, when supervision is stretched, when people don't feel able to challenge, or when we don't learn quickly enough from what we see, risk builds up quietly. It doesn't always show up immediately in headline numbers – until someone is seriously hurt.

The number of total injuries each year has continued to fall despite the total number of hours worked increasing. However, after years of improvements in some of our health and safety

measures, the gains are harder to make. Long-term, it requires a step-change in our approach to avoid a 'plateau' in performance. Evidence from other major infrastructure programmes shows that static performance typically precedes either sustained improvement or serious injury. On a programme of this scale, we cannot afford to wait and see which way it goes.

The programme reset

The reset of HS2 will put the railway back on track with a realistic baseline for cost and schedule. It will also require a significant improvement in productivity. We will not allow increased pace to erode safety standards. Safety and productivity are not competing goals. They are inseparable, and will continue to be, as we look beyond civils and into all future operations of HS2.

A safe site is a planned site. A planned site is a productive site. When people have clarity, consistency, and the confidence to challenge, we reduce disruption, rework and the conditions in which harm occurs.

02

Our aim

Our aim

With the challenges we face and the ongoing reset, there is a clear case for change.

We have a choice. We can accept current 'good' performance, treat it as a destination and hope our controls hold as pressure rises. Or we can build a system that protects people better because it performs reliably at scale.

This is our aim – to continue improving our health and safety performance by creating the conditions to move from good to great.

This includes setting clear standards and applying them consistently, putting people at the centre, strengthening ownership at the front line, developing our safety culture and learning faster than the work changes – so everyone goes home safe, healthy and well. Every day, everywhere, everyone.

It's about making our system strong enough, across 350 sites and thousands of partners, to provide the same safe outcomes reliably every day.

By 2029, we will have improved our performance, strengthened our culture, and built a legacy of safer working that benefits the whole industry.



Image: Workers lifting equipment on site

03

The strategy approach

The strategy approach

Safe at Heart

Safe at Heart is our programme-wide philosophy. It has guided our approach since 2015 and remains the right foundation for the next phase of HS2. Safe at Heart means health and safety are core to every decision and action, no matter what your role or where you work. It applies to everyone – on site, in offices, across the supply chain.

This philosophy is distilled into a universal commitment that relates to everyone.

Our commitment

We all do our part to stay safe and well. Every day, everywhere, everyone.

What this means in practice

Health, safety and wellbeing are inseparable.

Occupational health and wellbeing are as important as physical safety. Reducing and where possible eliminating exposure to the top five causes of occupationally acquired illnesses remains a priority.¹ So does creating workplaces that help people to thrive by fostering and supporting mental wellbeing – including an environment where people feel safe and confident to speak up.

People working on HS2 should speak up as normal practice when something feels unsafe, uncertain or could be improved – because openness strengthens learning, trust and performance.

We will continue to learn from incidents, near misses and successes, and share that learning widely to improve decisions, planning and practice across HS2.

Safe at Heart is the standard we hold ourselves to every day, shaping how we think, decide and act – both individually and together.

Safe at Heart in 2026 – 2029

The new strategy will sharpen our focus on our priorities.

Our new Safe at Heart commitment will sit at the centre of everything we do. It represents our ultimate goal: ensuring everyone goes home safe and well.

Achieving this goal requires a step-change in our safety culture across the programme, supported by new and improved ways of working with our supply chain partners.

Our transformation journey will focus on tackling the most persistent, programme-wide health and safety challenges. We will develop a Transformation Journey Roadmap that will set out our priorities in more detail, with measurable outcomes. It will be informed by a safety culture survey to establish a baseline for culture performance. The transformation journey will be supported by annual Supply Chain Health and Safety Implementation Plans, developed by our joint venture partners to bring the strategy to life on-site and in our communities.

¹Top 5 OH illnesses – respiratory diseases, noise-induced hearing loss, skin conditions, occupational cancers and hand-arm vibration

The strategy approach

HS2 Ltd as intelligent client

We are changing how we operate. Previously, we set standards and relied on our supply chain partners to achieve them. We monitored from a distance and intervened only when serious problems arose.

That is no longer sufficient. The programme now requires a different leadership approach as the challenges evolve.

What being an intelligent client means for health and safety

- Setting standards – Our health and safety standards are clear, consistent and non-negotiable. They define the minimum performance expected across HS2 and the supply chain. They are applied without exception. Meeting these standards is fundamental to working on the programme.
- Improving performance – We maintain a clear, accurate view of health and safety performance across contracts and sectors. We identify risk and under-performance early and act decisively and proportionately to sustain safe, reliable delivery.

- Finding solutions – We invest in learning, innovation and evidence-based solutions to address complex safety and health challenges. We work with our partners to share insight and solve problems collectively, recognising that lasting improvement is achieved together.
- Learning lessons – We learn systematically from incidents, near misses and successes, and translate that learning into practical change. Insight is shared across the programme so that improvement is sustained and repetition is avoided.
- Engaging industry – We work openly with our supply chain and industry partners, sharing learning beyond HS2 to strengthen capability and raise standards across the infrastructure sector. Through collaboration, we extend the impact of Safe at Heart beyond the programme itself.

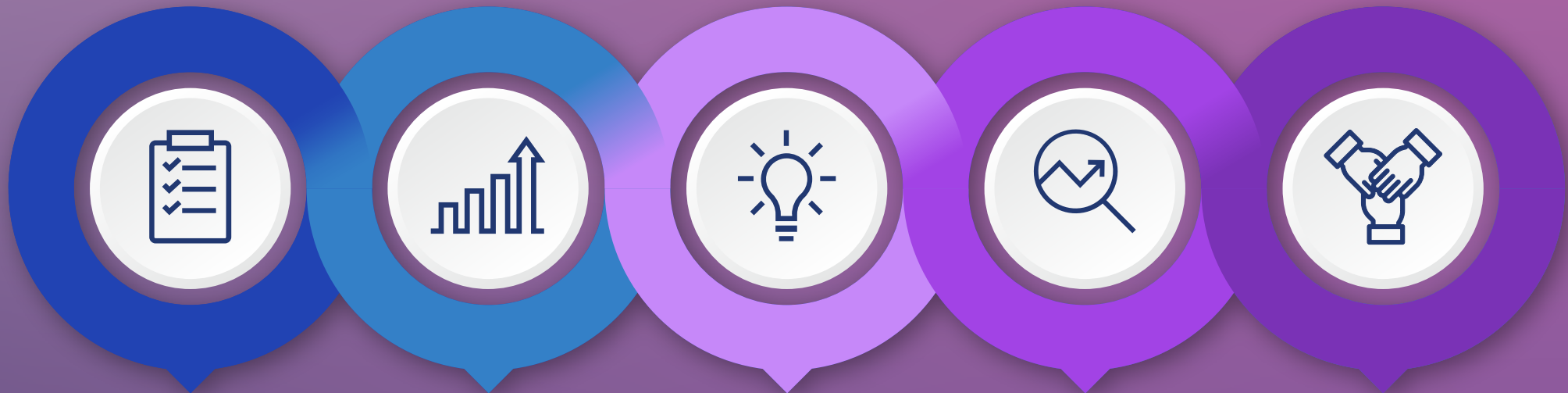
Building the conditions for improvement

Being an intelligent client is about creating the conditions for learning and high performance. When things go wrong, we seek to understand what happened and why – and strengthen our systems, decisions and behaviours. When things go well, we recognise and share achievements to reinforce effective practice.

Our aim is to be demanding in standards, fair in how we work, and supportive of improvement.

The strategy approach

Intelligent client approach for health and safety



1. Setting standards

Our standards guide every decision, every day, by everyone.

2. Improving performance

We monitor and improve performance in HS2 and our supply chain.

3. Finding solutions

We research how we can keep everyone safe and trial new ideas and ways of working.

4. Learning lessons

We learn from what works and what doesn't – ensuring lessons are shared and improve how we work.

5. Engaging industry

We work with the wider industry to improve health and safety performance – taking lessons from HS2.

The strategy approach

How we work together

HS2 Ltd will set clear standards and leads programme-wide improvement, while our joint venture partners and contractors determine how those standards are met in their areas of work. Together, we are responsible for creating the conditions that enable safe, reliable work across the programme.

Five behavioural themes will guide how we work together: Consistency, openness, inclusion, challenge and planning.

Behaviours in practice

These themes are not abstract values – they describe how HS2 and its supply chain partners are expected to work together day to day. They make expectations explicit and practical. HS2 Ltd’s behaviours are focused on oversight and the supply chain’s are geared towards action.

Theme	HS2 Ltd – Oversight	Supply Chain – Action
Consistency	We set and role model consistent standards and decision making, so safety expectations are clear and predictable across every site and situation.	We apply the same high standards every day and act consistently under pressure, so safe delivery is reliable and trusted.
Openness	We build trust by being open, acting on feedback and sharing learning so everyone benefits.	We share concerns and lessons openly and expect honest conversations that help to prevent harm.
Inclusion	We make better decisions by bringing people’s insight into the room at the right time.	We bring our people’s voices into planning and problem solving so risks and improvements are surfaced early.
Challenge	We strengthen decisions by inviting challenge and acting on insight that improves health and safety.	We proactively question unsafe practices and take actions that make work healthier and safer.
Planning	We create plans that are reliable, using learning and insight to anticipate change, manage uncertainty, and prevent harm early.	We don’t just accept the status quo. We review conditions, update controls, and pause to reassess when risk shifts.

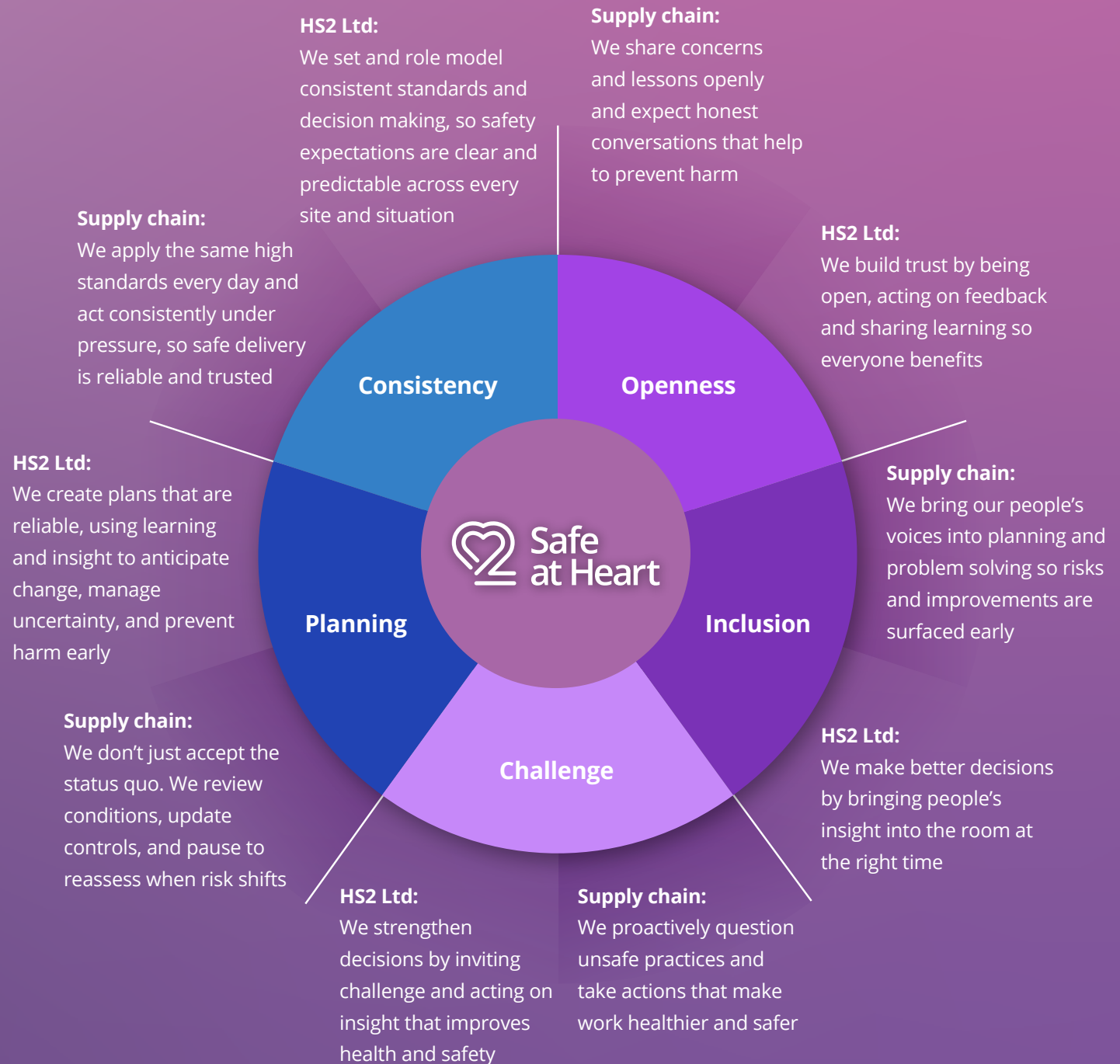
The strategy approach

How we work together

These behaviours express how we will work together and are used to:

- guide leadership and supervision on site;
- inform planning, assurance and learning activity;
- support consistent decision-making across the programme; and
- provide a common language for challenge, reflection and improvement.

The behavioural themes help ensure Safe at Heart is not interpreted differently in different places, but experienced consistently by everyone, every day.



The strategy approach

Transformation journey

We have set out what we want to achieve. The transformation journey explains how we will get there.

Over three years, we will strengthen how we work – building better leadership, systems and learning so people can make safe decisions consistently, even when work is complex or pressured. Our goal is a mature safety system that learns faster than risks emerge and where safe decisions happen reliably across all sites, even without direct oversight.

Through the transformation journey, HS2 will:

Create clarity and consistency

- Set clear, non-negotiable standards and expectations.
- Apply those standards consistently across all sites and contracts.
- Ensure all workers experience the same level of protection.

Strengthen ownership and decision-making

- Equip leaders and managers to apply standards confidently, even under pressure.
- Improve the quality of planning and decisions about change.
- Intervene early and proportionately when risk increases.

Embed learning and adaptation

- Turn learning into changed practice.
- Apply insight from incidents, near misses and successes
- Make sure our governance, systems and incentives support safe behaviours.

The Strategy

We will develop a Transformation Journey Roadmap, as part of a full Safe at Heart strategy refresh covering the next three years, which will detail the strategic priorities and the improvements we'll make. It will be reviewed and updated each year and will include the following.

- Safety culture – fully assessing and establishing a baseline, to inform our year one priorities.
- Key actions – client-led activities to tackle our most persistent programme-wide health and safety risks and challenges.
- Measures – a series of relevant metrics that we will use to measure progress and assess the overall safety of the workforce and the public.

To compliment our refreshed strategy, we will develop the annual Health and Safety Implementation Plans which will translate Safe at Heart into day-to-day practice, tailored to scope, risks and context. They will give occupational health and wellbeing, including mental health, equal attention to physical safety.

04

Governance

Governance

Strong and consistent governance is essential. It ensures that risks are identified early, shared openly and addressed proactively.

Delivery of the strategy – through the HS2 Ltd transformation journey and Supply Chain Health and Safety Implementation Plans – will be overseen through a programme-wide governance framework, providing both assurance and constructive challenge. This framework includes:

- scrutiny and oversight from the HS2 Ltd Board;
- the HS2 Ltd Health, Safety and Security (HSS) Committee;
- the Strategic HSS Performance Review;
- the programme-wide Safety, Health and Wellbeing Executive Leadership Team (SHWeLT);
- contract-specific SHWeLTs; and
- structured performance reporting and analysis.

Together, these bodies make sure performance is monitored consistently, trends are identified, and action is taken when required.

Image top: Apprentices at HS2 Ltd
Image bottom: A site safety briefing taking place



05

How we will measure success

How we will measure success

We will measure progress clearly and transparently through the transformation journey, annual plans and related performance indicators. These plans will translate the strategy into practical actions and sustained performance improvements.

We will monitor progress as part of our governance framework, including regular performance reporting and discussion at established oversight forums.

Health and safety performance indicators, focused on leading measures, will provide evidence, help us to understand progress at a detailed level and offer insights into emerging risks or opportunities for improvement.

In addition, we will publish an annual summary of health and safety performance as part of HS2's public reporting. This includes key outcome measures, such as:

- near misses;
- observations;
- RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) injuries;
- lost time injuries;
- AFRs (Accident Frequency Rates); and
- total injuries.

Image: Moving equipment inside the Green Park Way ventilation shaft





Conclusion

The new strategy will mark a step-change in our approach to health and safety across HS2.

We are building on strong foundations. Safe at Heart has guided us since 2015 and remains the right philosophy. Our workforce and supply chain partners are committed to safety, health and wellbeing.

But good is not good enough. The risk of a performance plateau, the programme reset, and the scale of what lies ahead requires us to do more.

HS2 Ltd will be an intelligent client – setting clear standards, acting upon data and insight to improve performance, intervening when needed and learning continuously. We will work in an effective partnership with our supply chain.

By 2029, we will have improved our performance, strengthened our culture, and built consistently high standards across the programme.

Our goal is straightforward: everyone goes home safe and well, every day. That is what every person on this programme deserves – and what we are all here to make possible.

Image: Inspecting progress at Curzon Street station

Annex

Safe at Heart – Examples from 2024/25

The following examples show Safe at Heart in practice during 2024/25.

Stored energy awareness

A safety film on cleaning out concrete lines was developed following incidents involving stored energy. The film was endorsed by the Federation of Piling Specialists and shared across the industry.

Managing health risks

New principles for managing extreme heat exposure and hand-arm vibration control were developed and integrated across all contracts, protecting workers from long-term occupational health harm.

Sharing learning

We launched The Core, an online resource for HS2 and its supply that shares learning from incidents and promotes best practice. It enables rapid communication of safety alerts and solutions across the programme. In parallel, the [HS2 Learning Legacy](#) shares technical lessons learned from the construction of HS2 with the wider industry, and includes a wide range of resources about health and safety.

Supplier engagement

We assessed suppliers' understanding of Safe at Heart and identified opportunities to improve how we work together on safety.

Supervisor development

We reviewed frontline supervisor programmes to ensure consistency in safety leadership across all sites and contracts.

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