

Freight wheelset safety scheme launches

May 16, 2022



A new safety scheme has launched which will fit more than 15,000 of Britain's freight locomotives and wagons with technology that enables the condition of wheelsets to be monitored in real-time.

Defective or worn wheelsets can cause broken rails and damage to wagons if left untreated and can lead to safety issues and delays on the railway for both passenger and freight trains.

The two-year project, part of the Freight Safety Improvement Portfolio's (FSIP's) £22m fund, will see 30,000 radio frequency identification (RFID) tags being fitted to both sides of freight locomotives and wagons. When the tagged train passes a reader on the side of the track – at one of 22 sites – information regarding each wheelset is captured. This is then sent to engineers via cloud-based technology to see if any maintenance work is needed.

Steve Rhymes, head of network management at Network Rail, said:

"This is a prime example of how the rail freight industry works together to continue to innovate and put safety first using technology.

"Each freight operator is fitting them to each side of their wagons and locomotives, which means we are

harvesting data every time a train or vehicle operates – much of which has not been visible before. It's a collaborative effort which delivers joint benefit.

“We are introducing improved systems and processes for data sharing with freight operators and freight customers to provide a cohesive approach to wagon maintenance leading to even further safety for our railway and ultimately less disruption and delays to passengers and freight trains.”

The scheme has been welcomed by freight operating companies and freight customers. Freightliner Group has already fitted 73 per cent of the tags, funded by FSIP, to locomotives and wagons.

Deanne Haseltine, the company's head of engineering compliance, said:

“This scheme has already made a positive difference to the whole industry by helping us to accurately pinpoint and identify defects to individual wheelsets at the earliest opportunity.

“Having the ability to identify faults and plan repairs to wheelsets in advance means we can safely remove a wagon from service if needed and avoid unnecessary disruption on the network and to our customers.”