

Office of Rail and Road finds light rail body supports safety improvements

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The Light Rail Safety and Standards Board (LRSSB) is adding value to the light rail and tramway sector and supporting continued improvements in managing safety, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has announced in a review published this week.

The rail regulator has made six recommendations after assessing whether LRSSB is on track with delivering the recommendations set out by the Rail Accident Investigation Branch following the fatal Sandilands derailment in November 2016.

ORR's review of LRSSB found the safety and standards board is providing guidance and tools to improve the sector's understanding of risk.

But ORR also highlights the need for a long-term strategy and plan for LRSSB's work, which should set out clear governance and funding arrangements.

ORR's six recommendations are:

1. UK tram operators, owners, and infrastructure managers should continue to support the role of a safety and standards body for the light rail sector.
2. LRSSB should review and update its terms of reference to clearly define its role and purpose.
3. LRSSB should review – in consultation with its members, the Department for Transport (DfT) and ORR – the current model of voluntary membership and adoption of LRSSB outputs.
4. LRSSB should develop a stakeholder engagement strategy to strengthen its collaboration with a broader range of stakeholders including relevant trades unions, Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB), highway authorities and vehicle/tram manufacturers.
5. LRSSB should – in consultation with DfT and ORR – develop a long-term strategy to clearly define the governance arrangements to deliver plan of work.
6. ORR should consider whether there is a continuing need for any memorandum of understanding or agreements in relation to light railways and tramways.

ORR's HM Chief Inspector of Railways Ian Prosser, said: "As the safety regulator of Britain's railway, we've been monitoring the progress of LRSSB since it was established in 2019. We can see there is real value in continuing to have a safety and standards body that meets the specific needs of the light rail and tramway sector.

"These recommendations will also help ensure the light rail and tramway sector continues to have a structured approach to the continuous improvement of safety standards."

Carl Williams, LRSSB Chief Executive, said: "When the organisation was first established, we invited the ORR to carry out a review of the LRSSB's work during its first three years of operations, and we now welcome the feedback contained in this report.

"Moving forward we are committed to implementing its recommendations and, as the LRSSB continues to grow and evolve, we look forward to working with an even broader range of organisations from across the sector to continuously drive safety improvements through standardisation, collaboration, research and shared best practice."

Photo credit: ORR