

# Rail Wellbeing Live: Inspiring healthy lives across the railway

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In the rail industry the working pressures, hours, shift patterns and exposure to potentially traumatic events can lead to many struggling.

As well as costing the sector hundreds of millions of pounds a year through illness-related absenteeism, more importantly than that is the impact on members of the railway family.

It is estimated that the absence rate in the railways is more than double the rate reported across the private sector. Even more worrying is the suicide rate, which is 1.6 times higher than the UK average.

But that is changing, and the rail industry is hard at work to be seen as leaders in the way it looks after the wellbeing of those working in the sector.

At the heart of that is the launch of [Rail Wellbeing Live](#), on 4th and 5th November, which is set to be the biggest free wellbeing event in the history of the industry.

The event will feature 140 speakers and 80 sessions, focussed on tackling the historic issues around

wellbeing found among the 240,000-strong UK rail workforce.

John Halsall, chair of the Rail Wellbeing Alliance and managing director for Network Rail's Southern Region, said: "Rail Wellbeing Live has the opportunity to revolutionise attitudes to wellbeing in our industry.

"It's an idea we came up with about nine months ago, to have a conference dedicated to the rail industry about nothing but physical and mental wellbeing.

"Obviously COVID-19 meant we had to completely rethink our approach, but the team have done a brilliant job in creating a virtual event. This is even more exciting because we've gone from maybe having 1,000 people, to now targeting 10,000.

"It's about starting a conversation and encouraging everyone to share and talk about issues relating to health, creating an irresistible positive energy across the industry that will make it safer and better for all of us."

The 80 sessions will be hosted by a mix of wellbeing experts, industry leaders and some surprising famous faces, namely comedian and mental health campaigner Ruby Wax, Embarrassing Bodies star Dr Dawn Harper and BBC Breakfast's resident GP, Dr Rangan Chatterjee.

A full agenda is now available on the website, with people not expected to join all the sessions, but rather 'pick n mix' the topics that interest them.

John said: "The event itself is aimed at everybody as broad as you can think of in terms of the rail industry, from contractors, supply chain, material providers, train and freight operating companies, ROSCOs, Network Rail and everybody and anybody that does anything in the rail industry.

"It's a really lovely mix of fun stuff and the serious stuff, because nobody just wants to be lectured about why they should sign up to the gym and shouldn't drink beer.

"There is a brilliant range of subjects from laughing yoga and what to eat when you're on shift, through to topics such as money worries and a great night's sleep.

"I would urge everyone to sign up to a couple of sessions. What is 30 minutes compared to 220 days of hard work most of which is not dedicated to your own personal happiness.

"It doesn't seem too unreasonable why you wouldn't dedicate a little bit of time to looking after yourselves when we all work so hard."

Ill-health in the rail industry is estimated to cost £316 million per year with a 3.9 per cent absence rate – more than double the private sector average.

Poor mental health overall costs the UK economy £35 billion per year. And this year, the British Medical Association have said COVID-19 could have considerable consequences on people's mental health.

Unfortunately, John has experienced the devastating consequences of those struggling with their mental health. In the last two years, four members of his team of 7,000 have taken their own lives.

He said: "It is truly heart-breaking. I knew one of them well. When that happens you've lost one life and family and friends of those people are left wondering 'what should I have done'. It is this ripple effect of destruction.

"I've spoken to a few people, some of whom have attempted to take their own lives and they have said it is hard work talking and they don't want to talk.

"I suspect every case will be different, but for me the more stuff that is going on, the more conversations taking place, the more we are talking about it at all levels, then the more remote possibility there is that maybe we might just say something that will help somebody.

"Taking your own life is as bad as it gets. But then you can also have people drinking too much, eating the wrong stuff because they are on shift and not getting enough exercise, which can lead to diabetes as a result of their weight, or maybe it is that they just aren't sleeping."

**Rail Wellbeing Live** has been set-up by the Rail Wellbeing Alliance, a cross industry group with the involvement of dozens of train operating companies, suppliers and bodies.

For John, the two-day event next month is the start of the journey to create real change in improving health and wellbeing.

"We want this to be every year. It could maybe be combined with stand down sessions so companies can use Rail Wellbeing Live as a campfire, if you like, for all of the industry to get together and talk about stuff," he said.

"This is the beginning of the journey. Wouldn't it be great if people outside of the rail industry looked in at the rail industry and said 'you know those guys are leading this race'.

"Some people think we are barely out of steam so it would be lovely if industries that are traditionally apparently ahead of us would look to us as an industry as one that when it comes to the health and wellbeing the rail industry knows how to look after its own.

"One that really knows it, gets that, has radical new ideas and instead of us being seen to be on the backfoot, we are on the front door in keeping all railway workers safe and happy."

For all the latest information and to register for the event, visit [www.railwellbeinglive.co.uk](http://www.railwellbeinglive.co.uk)

