

PART 1 – Introduction

Important Safety Messages

This Safety Bulletin highlights the following important safety messages:

- **Plan the work before accessing the railway.** A Safe System of Work (SSOW) must be planned using the risk control hierarchy, with safer alternatives considered before Red Zone Working is selected. **Red Zone Working must only be selected where all reasonably practicable safer options have been considered and ruled out.**
- **The SSOW must be reviewed and authorised before work starts.** Staff must not access the railway until the required protection arrangements have been established and the necessary authorisation has been obtained.
- **Those responsible for planning protection arrangements must be trained, assessed and competent to do so.** They must be able to assess the hazards associated with the work and location and select the appropriate SSOW¹.

These requirements have been formally recommended in the RAIU's Urgent Safety Advice Notice (USAN), USAN 006 (published on the 9th January 2026) and the RAIU Investigation Report into two near miss events involving track workers at Bray Tunnels (published 22nd June 2026).

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¹ The Track Access Index (TAI) is an internal IÉ guidance document intended to be utilised at the planning stage of work or by Track Safety Co-ordinators (TSCs) when creating a SSOW when on or near the line. The TAI breaks the IÉ network into quarter mile sections highlighting all hazards contained within the section. The three factors (hazards) with the highest scoring rate are: sighting distance availability (minimum distance at which an approaching train must be visible to the TSCs); position of safety (at least 1.5 m (5 feet) between the TSC and the nearest rail of any line on which a train is approaching) availability; and train frequency. Other hazards include: line speed; curves; and limited clearance. As a result, the model has produced a colour coded hierarchy of risk for each quarter mile section of the network. Yellow = Low Risk; Orange = Medium Risk; Red = High Risk; Black = Very High Risk.

PART 2 – Near miss, between Ballyhaunis and Castlerea, on the 13th July 2026

On the 13th July 2026, two staff members accessed the line under Red Zone Working conditions. At 14:05 hrs, the 13:10 hrs passenger service from Westport to Dublin Heuston approached the two members of staff, near the 118 ½ MP between Ballyhaunis and Castlerea, at 67 mph (108 km/h), see Figure 1 (staff members circled).



Figure 1 – Members of staff on the line (taken from the train's forward-facing CCTV)

On seeing the staff members, the train driver sounded the horn; on seeing the train, the staff members moved to a position of safety, reaching it approximately four to five seconds before the train passed. The driver of the train applied the emergency brake, and the train came to a stop. There were no injuries to the staff member. The available sighting distance was insufficient to allow the two staff members to reach a position of safety with an adequate margin before the train arrived. The TAI identifies the location as an Orange Section (Medium Risk).

IE-IM have issued the remit for the internal investigation of this incident.

PART 3 – Previous occurrences

3.1 – Synopsis of recent occurrences

Near miss at Ardgillan, Dublin, on the 27th February 2023

During a track patrol a patrol ganger was bending down to inspect an insulated joint when a train approached through a shallow left-hand curve at 90 mph (145 km/h). On seeing the train, the patrol ganger moved to a position of safety, reaching it approximately two to three seconds before the train passed. The available sighting distance was insufficient to allow the patrol ganger to reach a position of safety with an adequate margin before the train arrived. The TAI identifies the location as a Black Section (Very High Risk).

Near miss at Clonnydonnin, Westmeath, on the 9th October 2023

A patrol ganger started a track patrol in foggy conditions, during the track patrol the foggy conditions became worse to the point that visibility was poor. A train then approached at 78 mph (126 km/h); when the patrol ganger saw the lights of the train, they stepped clear of the running line onto the adjacent siding (not a position of safety) approximately two to three seconds before the train passed. The available sighting distance was insufficient (due to fog) to allow the patrol ganger to reach a position of safety with an adequate margin before the train arrived, was insufficient due to poor visibility. The TAI identifies this location as a Red Section (High Risk).

Near miss at Bray Tunnel No. 4, Wicklow, on the 6th December 2023

During a track patrol a patrol ganger entered Bray Tunnel No. 4 without the required T2 Protection and/or Signal Protection. A track Recording Vehicle entered the tunnel, on seeing the TRV, the patrol ganger moved to a refuge, arriving in the position of safety between eight and ten seconds before the train passed. The TAI identifies this location as a Black Section (Very High Risk).

Near miss at Killiney, Dublin, on the 11th October 2024

Two Overhead Line Equipment (OHLE) Workers were carrying out an OHLE inspection. When a Down direction DART service (Train E224) stopped at Killiney, both OHLE Workers moved to the Up cess in anticipation of its departure. When Train E224 departed Killiney and as it passed the OHLE Workers, Up direction DART service (Train E821) approached Killiney on the Up line; one of the OHLE Workers appeared to step backwards towards the running line and was guided back towards a position of safety by the other OHLE Worker. The sighting distance, for the location, was insufficient; the TAI identifies this location as a Red Section (High Risk).

Near miss at Bray Tunnel No. 2, Wicklow, on the 11th April 2025

A Permanent Way Inspector (PWI) and Track Engineer entered Bray Tunnel No. 2 (which had an area with no position of safety) while they were carrying out a site survey when a train approached the tunnel, with the train driver sounding the horn. When the PWI and Track Engineer heard the train horn, they ran out of the tunnel. The TAI identifies this location as a Black Section (Very High Risk).

Near miss at Powerstown, Carlow, on the 18th October 2025

A PWI was on the line to inspect a culvert. As the PWI approached overbridge OBW 79, on the ballast shoulder, a train approached in the Up direction. The PWI reached a position of safety around four and a half seconds before the train reached them. The sighting distance, for the location, was insufficient; the TAI identifies this location as a Red Section (High Risk).

Near miss at Heuston, Dublin, on the 18th October 2025

Two SET Technicians were deployed (with torches, as it was dark) to rectify a fault at points. A Down direction train (Train D222) departed Heuston Station on the Relief line, as it approached through the underbridges on a curve at approximately 20 mph (32 km/h), the driver of Train D222 saw the headtorches of the two SET Technicians on the line and saw them moving to different sides of the line. The FFCCTV footage was inconclusive, but it is likely that they were in position against the wall at least eight seconds before Train D222 arrived; the TAI identifies this location as a Yellow Section (Low Risk).

Near miss at Clonygowan, Offaly, on the 24th November 2025

During track patrol, a patrol ganger was walking in the Up direction in the five foot when they heard a train approaching in the Up direction (i.e. the patrol ganger had their back to the approaching train) at 79 mph (127 km/h). The patrol ganger, on hearing the train, moved clear, but only reached a position of safety less than three seconds before the train arrived. The sighting distance, for the location, was insufficient; the TAI identifies this location as a Red Section (High Risk).

3.2 – RAIU safety recommendations made in 2026

The following RAIU safety recommendations are relevant to the issues identified in this bulletin and remained open at the time of publication.

USAN 006 Recommendation 4 – IÉ-IM, in terms of track access are to carry out the following:

1. Identify access opportunities on all lines, including new access opportunities where possible;
2. Identify work that needs to be done on or near the lines;
3. In light of 1 & 2, assess what work can be done in the available access, taking into account all other risks including (and not limited to) safety of the line;
4. Make appropriate management and supervisory arrangements to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable that the identified work is done in the identified access opportunities.

USAN 006 Recommendation 5 – IÉ-IM are to make appropriate and effective management and supervisory arrangements to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that:

1. Any maintenance work not able to be done in access opportunities, for example T3 Possessions, including in response to faults and incidents, is planned and carried out in such a manner that each level of the risk control hierarchy / general principles of prevention is / are demonstrably considered before the next one down is considered, including specifically Line Blockages using technological means of protection or warning where appropriate;
2. Where, due to other risks of physical circumstances, work cannot be carried out in any other manner other than with trains running (for example urgent repairs), technological means of additional protection and / or warning must be provided and all other precautions are taken to prevent injury; and,
3. Where necessary to prevent immediate risks, for example to the travelling public and where it would be unreasonable to wait for technological means of protection and /or warning, all other precautions, including management and supervisory arrangements, are taken to prevent injury to persons working on or near the line from moving trains.

Safety Recommendations from investigation into two near miss events involving track workers at Bray Tunnels

Safety Recommendation 2026003-01 – IÉ-IM should review and enhance its training and assessment arrangements relating to the planning of a SSOW, to include:

- Structured, scenario-based exercises and assessments involving the planning of protection arrangements in a range of representative operational environments, taking account of location-specific hazards (including all relevant documentation such as the TAIs and Patrol Length Features Forms);
- Reinforcement of the application of relevant guidance contained within the PTS Handbook.

Safety Recommendation 2026003-02 – IÉ-IM to review and standardise the process for documenting location specific instructions to make it easily accessible to those planning a SSOW.

Safety Recommendation 2026003-03 – IÉ-IM to review the rules and instructions on accessing and working in tunnels to improve their consistency and clarity, in order to facilitate a clear understanding by staff planning a SSOW.

Safety Recommendation 2026003-05 – IÉ-IM should review and revise its rules and procedures relating to SSOWs (with particular emphasis on simplifying and clarifying the terminology used for Signal Protection and Line Blockages). IÉ-IM should then clearly define the circumstances in which each SSOW may be selected and implemented.