

Safety

Our commitment to safety is unwavering and is articulated through our Values. We are dedicated to safety which is always front of mind, and our way of life.

By its nature, the transport industry involves the risk of injury to passengers, employees and third parties. This is why we take seriously our duty of care to ensure that our customers, stakeholders and any third parties we interact with can use our services, and our people can carry out their work, safely.

Our more than 100,000 employees deliver more than two billion passenger journeys each year on more than 60,000 buses, trains and other vehicles, sharing increasingly congested road and rail infrastructure every day with other users. The industry we operate in therefore has significant inherent safety challenges, but we are determined to achieve our long-term goal of zero harm.

We maintain robust safety management systems throughout the Group, and a clear focus on ensuring compliance with policies, processes and procedures. Be Safe, our safety behavioural change programme, builds on this, making safety a personal core value for every employee.

Coronavirus

Since the coronavirus pandemic began, our overriding priority has been to protect our customers and our employees as we continue to run vital services.

As a transport provider, our frontline teams are themselves key workers, providing transport to take essential workers to and from their workplaces throughout the UK and North America.

We are extremely proud of our colleagues across the Group and we recognise their dedication, professionalism and commitment in making this possible.

Our response

Our established safety culture, and the well-rehearsed emergency response processes embedded throughout the Group, put us in a strong starting position to respond to the pandemic in a comprehensive and effective manner.

In addition to our robust safety systems and behaviours, we have rolled out additional measures to help limit, as far as we possibly can, the spread of coronavirus.

These measures have included:

- Cleaning protocols for our vehicles and buildings – we enhanced our already stringent vehicle cleaning protocols across all divisions, using antiviral products and disinfectants, and trialling and deploying new products developed to address the coronavirus pandemic. In depots and stations, enhanced cleaning protocols have been introduced, including disinfecting and sanitising high touchpoint areas at increased frequencies. Ozonation, which is a highly effective deep cleaning method for vehicles, has been rolled out across First Transit and Greyhound, and is being deployed as required in First Bus and First Rail alongside products to give extended protection from recontamination after cleaning.
- Social distancing – we have enabled social distancing on our vehicles where we can through a variety of methods, and throughout all our workplaces, depots, terminals and stations. We have encouraged and enabled our customers to use contactless or card payment where possible and are looking at further ways to reduce cash handling whilst still ensuring everyone that needs to is able to travel on our services. Wherever possible employees have been working from home throughout lockdown periods.
- Live bus capacity tracking – in June 2020 we launched an update to our First Bus mobile app that enables customers across the UK to live track not only the location of their next bus but also its available capacity. We continue to develop ways to help customers social distance on board our fleet. First Bus was the first major bus operator to roll out live capacity tracking, including for wheelchair spaces, reducing uncertainty for customers and allowing them to make more informed decisions about their essential journeys.
- Employee equipment – we have worked closely with government, health authorities and regulators, as well as our customers, unions and other stakeholders to stay at the forefront of evolving guidance and advice on safety equipment for our employees. At the start of the pandemic, we rapidly mobilised effective supply chains to ensure that our employees could be provided with appropriate equipment in line with the latest guidance for our different operating environments and role requirements. Across all divisions we have made face coverings, hand sanitiser and anti-viral wipes available to employees. In First Bus, for example, our vehicles have Perspex screens to provide an extra protective barrier for our drivers. In certain states in the US, in line with current advice and contract customer requirements, we are using infrared thermometers to screen employees for coronavirus symptoms.
- Vulnerable employees – we are protecting our most vulnerable employees and have taken steps to shield them wherever we can. For example, taking them off the front line and, in the UK, by offering them the option to remain at home through the UK Government's furlough scheme. See pages 50 and 51 for more on how we support the mental health and wellbeing of our employees.
- Industry collaboration and best practice – as a leader in all of our markets we have been at the centre of industry efforts to tackle the unique challenges posed by coronavirus. This has included working with the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) and rail providers in the UK, the National School Transportation Association (NSTA) and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) in North America as well as taking the lead on preparing a driver risk assessment alongside CPT for the UK bus industry.

Be Safe

Be Safe is our Group-wide programme to embed safety as a personal core value for all colleagues through behaviour change. The core elements of our Be Safe programme, including daily conversations ('touchpoints') to reinforce good safety behaviours, are proving to be even more important for safety engagement in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

Weekly Be Safe debrief sessions for managers and supervisors have continued throughout the lockdown period, respecting social distancing measures by bringing teams together via remote-working IT tools. These weekly debriefs, where Be Safe touchpoints are reviewed, are used for knowledge sharing and to strengthen understanding around best practice.

Committed to safety

As lockdowns begin to ease it is paramount that we continue to do all that is necessary to safeguard the health and wellbeing of our employees and our customers. This is our overriding priority and will continue to guide our decisions as we move towards a 'new normal' way of living.

Across all our businesses we continue to work with governments and health authorities to ensure we comply with and promote the guidance for the safety of our employees and passengers. This guidance varies by location and by business, and we are working closely with suppliers to ensure we have adequate stocks of the appropriate equipment in place to minimise the risk of transmission and keep customers and colleagues safe.

The situation continues to evolve but, as we have done throughout, we are continuing to follow and also develop best practice in areas such as the cleaning and decontamination of vehicles, depots, terminals and stations.

Our overall response to the fast-moving coronavirus outbreak has at all times been overseen by an Executive steering committee led by the Chief Executive, considering the health, safety and welfare of colleagues, customers and those coming into contact with our business, while ensuring business continuity within all functions and departments.

The Executive steering committee is supported by a working group made up of representatives from all divisions and certain functional areas within the business. Weekly review meetings have taken place with each division since March 2020 to assess the safety and wider impacts of the pandemic across the Group.

Progress towards zero harm

We are proud of the safety culture we have worked hard over many years to establish. Our response to the coronavirus pandemic demonstrates that safety is an ever-present focus for the Group. We are constantly striving for ways to build on our achievements and make the safest possible environment for customers, employees and all those who interact with our business.

This year, our safety teams have helped ensure the safe implementation of a number of significant changes within the Group, including the introduction of many new trains, alternative-fuelled buses (including electric, hybrid and biogas), and the mobilisation and start up of our Avanti rail franchise.

Through our ongoing efforts and relentless focus on everyday safety procedures, and behaviour change role-modelled from the Boardroom to the front line through our Be Safe programme, employee lost time injuries across the Group reduced by 12% this year. The overall severity of employee injuries has also reduced, with major injuries down 18% against the prior year.

Collisions with injury reduced by 5% and passenger injuries per million miles reduced by 3%, primarily driven by safety performance improvements in First Bus and First Rail.

Notwithstanding the improvement in these metrics, we are not complacent, and consider that every injury sustained is one too many. We continue to make progress in reducing incidents and harm by prioritising the safety of our customers and people in our operating procedures, investment strategy, culture and future plans.

Safety leadership and governance

Strong leadership from the top is vital to our safety culture. Our Executive Safety Committee (ESC), chaired by the Chief Executive, oversees the Group's safety strategy and the performance, procedures and practices of our divisions and operating companies. It supports the Board Safety Committee in promoting a positive safety culture across the Group. Discussions also take place monthly at business review meetings with each division.

The ESC monitors relevant legislation and updates to standards as part of our control framework and commitment to maintaining safety compliance. It also provides visible safety leadership, with members undertaking regular site safety tours, giving senior management and frontline colleagues the opportunity for direct engagement on safety and other matters. This direct connection and interaction at site level allows individual and local perspectives to be shared, and is pivotal in supporting the ESC and senior leadership in their role of promoting a positive safety culture across the organisation.

Other key activities for the ESC this year included overseeing the introduction of our new Global Standards, setting common standards for Safety Validation of Change, Driver Monitoring and Safety Audit across the Group. The standards were designed to improve consistency of safety across the Group while respecting current strengths, practicalities and resources.

Each period the ESC looks at safety assurance across the Group, including reports from security and risk teams. The ESC also undertakes in-depth reviews of performance. For example, a deep dive into our incidents of slips, trips and falls resulted in new preventative measures and campaigns.

Information on our approach to safety governance can be found in the Governance section which starts on pages 76, and in our Board Safety Committee report on pages 108 and 109. Information on employee health and wellbeing can be found on pages 50 and 51.

Case Study: First Student's industry-leading safety culture

Culture

The First Student safety programme is designed to develop employees who are personally dedicated to safety. Our programme includes:

- Six 'critical behaviours' that our safety experts focus on, and that link to collision and on-road risk prevention, and to injury prevention, both across the division and specifically within our maintenance facilities.
- Daily 'touchpoints' that location managers plan with team members. These are focused on our six safety critical behaviours and on reinforcing good safety behaviours.
- Debrief sessions that managers conduct on a weekly basis with a primary focus on refining coaching techniques. This provides opportunities for peers to learn from one another.

The culture of safety we have built and continue to foster has resulted in four consecutive years of reduced injuries, down 34% over that period. Our Fatalities and Weighted Injuries (FWI) metric has reduced by 22% in the past three years.

Our drivers

Our rigorous background checks go beyond federal and state regulations, and our driver training programme is customised to the driver's experience level, and exceeds training standards in 41 states. Drivers also receive ongoing training. First Student's focus on driver training pays off and is evidenced in our industry-leading safety record.

Technology

To further elevate safety, we partner with school districts to develop programmes and deploy and pilot new technologies. Zonar GPS technology ensures effective, real-time responses to safety concerns, while also monitoring vehicle performance. Zonar captures five different types of data: latitude, longitude, time, odometer and fuel consumption. It provides near real-time transmission of vehicle data, driver performance data and spatially encoded event information. Zonar has been rolled out across all of our First Student fleet.