

The TRUth About Standards: Unlocking Collaborative Power for Safer, Stronger Projects

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As project managers we are used to the relentless need for structure and defined order, and it will come as no surprise, that many, particularly infrastructure projects work to strict regulations and standards, both in delivery and implementation.

That is not to say that everyone within the profession is fully on board with the need, of what some perceive to be ever increasing levels of red-tape.

In the following article we examine how rigorously set standards can benefit overall project outcomes. Its authors Frank Lee, a veteran of the industry and Chief Executive Officer of the Institute for Collaborative Working (ICW), and Tara Sinclair, Communications Manager, TRU West Alliance, share a fascinating case study on the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) Programme, demonstrating the impact that formal standards, and their influence on encouraging collaboration in even the most complex of commercial arrangements, can have on the levels of project success achieved.

According to latest figures “ TRU West consistently outperforms in safety metrics: with one event recorded every 53,315 hours worked, compared to one every 40,000 hours reported by comparable projects”.

Find out why in the full article below:

Many within the project industry associate **collaboration**, and the **ISO 44001 standard**, with improving commercial performance and streamlining operations across complex supply chains.

While this is true, the full potential of structured collaboration extends far beyond efficiency gains. **The Institute for Collaborative Working (ICW)** recognises that the benefits of structured collaboration extend into areas fundamental to project success and public value.

When organisations fully commit to structured collaboration, it establishes consistent working practices, shared competence expectations, and stronger coordination across delivery partners. It enables the alignment of objectives, supports joint planning, encourages transparent information sharing, and fosters leadership with a whole-project perspective, moving beyond siloed or contractual mindsets.

A compelling example lies in the involvement of ICW Ambassador members, **Network Rail** and **BAM**, alongside ICW Corporate Members, **Amey** and **Murphy**, who are working in collaboration with multiple participant organisations on the **Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) programme**. The programme demonstrates how collaboration, underpinned by ISO 44001, is not just a tool for operational efficiency but also a catalyst for cultural change. By embedding collaborative principles from the earliest stage, through planning, procurement, and delivery, TRU has created an environment where safety risks are identified sooner, mitigated more effectively, and addressed collectively. This approach led to the programme being awarded the very first ICW Leading Edge in Collaboration award in June 2024.

As more projects adopt this structured approach, the evidence continues to build: collaboration is not only commercially beneficial, but also essential to creating safer, more resilient rail systems.

The following case study illustrates that when collaboration is approached as a strategic discipline, the rewards are both tangible and transformative.

CAST STUDY- TRU WEST

TRU is the most complex infrastructure project in the UK: a transformative, multi-billion-pound railway programme aimed at enhancing connectivity across the North of England. Spanning approximately 76 miles between Manchester and York via Huddersfield and Leeds, TRU seeks to deliver faster, more reliable, and greener train services. Key improvements include full electrification of the line, digital signalling, station upgrades, and increased capacity for both passenger and freight services. The project is anticipated to reduce journey times significantly, with Manchester to York expected to take around 63 minutes upon completion. Additionally, the upgrade aims to cut carbon emissions by 87,000 tonnes annually, equivalent to removing nearly six million car journeys from the roads.

The western section of the programme, between Manchester and Leeds, is known as TRU West. This project encompasses several critical enhancements. The section between Manchester Victoria and Stalybridge, which is now complete, brought line speed increases and electrification. Stalybridge station underwent significant improvements, including junction remodelling and the installation of new overhead line equipment. One of the most ambitious segments, between Huddersfield and Westtown which is currently in progress, includes quadrupling the number of tracks, station enhancements at Huddersfield, Deighton, and Mirfield, and the construction of a new station at Ravensthorpe. This section also features a

grade-separated junction at Ravensthorpe to eliminate conflicts between different train services.

The TRU West improvements are pivotal in addressing long-standing issues of congestion and delays on this vital corridor. By increasing track capacity and modernising infrastructure, the project aims to double the number of hourly services and boost annual passenger capacity from 50 million to 65 million. These enhancements are not only expected to improve passenger experience but also to support economic growth and environmental sustainability in the region.

Collaboration, and following the ISO44001 framework, has been the foundation of the TRU West Alliance since its inception, shaping not only delivery but also the way the Alliance operates at every level. The **Alliance Charter**, co-developed by all participants, outlines shared values, behaviours, and principles to guide decision-making and issue resolution. The Alliance's operating model is built on **Project 13 principles**, which promote enterprise-level integration and remove barriers between participants, allowing for seamless sharing of knowledge, skills, and innovation.

The **Relationship Management Plan (RMP)** and **governance handbook** demonstrate how collaboration aligned with the principles of ISO 44001, has directly influenced the TRU West structure, from joint recruitment and planning, to integrated delivery teams (IDTs) and shared services. The emphasis on 'best for programme' decision-making, rather than individual interests, has led to unified teams where accountability, leadership, and empowerment are embedded at every level. Mechanisms such as the Alliance Governance Team and Alliance Board are designed not only to oversee but also to support and enable cross-partner collaboration. Furthermore, the Alliance has structured, collaborative approaches to procurement, sustainability, health and safety, and performance management. These coordinated efforts have cultivated a high-performing, integrated culture that continues to drive the alliance forward, ensuring TRU West delivers real value for passengers, stakeholders, and the wider region

Collaboration is at the heart of TRU West's approach to safety. Its **comprehensive 'Health, Safety & Wellbeing (HS&W) Delivery Plan'** was developed jointly with alliance partner organisations, and sets out a shared commitment to ensuring that every individual working on the project is protected, supported, and empowered. This collaborative ethos is more than aspirational. It's operationalised through joint initiatives like **Step Up for Safety** events, integrated assurance planning, and a collaborative approach to leadership and induction.

The Alliance structure underpinned by principles of **structured collaboration** and aligned with ISO 44001 fosters shared responsibility for behavioural safety, with clear accountability at every level **and cross-organisational engagement on key risks**. Leadership teams across the Alliance regularly participate in site visits and engage directly with the workforce, promoting a culture of visible felt leadership. The induction process, which is explained in more detail below, begins to embed the 'Safety First' culture from day one. Additionally, the TRU West HS&W Passport system ensures that competence is consistently managed across all partner organisations.

Jointly coordinated audits and **assurance cycles** further demonstrate how collaboration strengthens safety governance. Duty holders, project teams, and safety leads work together through a structured assurance calendar to review risk and implement improvements. The plan's integration of rail systems, civils, and wellbeing programmes demonstrates how Alliance partners align around shared goals to ensure

risks are addressed proactively, and that health, safety, and wellbeing are championed collectively across the project's footprint.

This integrated approach forms the foundation of TRU West's behavioural safety programme, one that is woven into the culture rather than treated as a standalone initiative. Behavioural safety on TRU West means creating an environment where individuals are empowered to make safe choices not just out of compliance, but because they genuinely care about their colleagues and themselves.

This begins on day one with the TRU West induction programme, a cornerstone of its integrated behavioural safety strategy, designed to embed a culture of collaboration, accountability, and proactive safety awareness. This comprehensive process goes beyond standard compliance measures, to foster a shared mindset that prioritises safety through every stage of the project.

The induction is in three parts. The first stage deals with essential procedures, such as drug and alcohol testing. The second is a dynamic video presentation featuring key executives from across the Alliance. A TRU West senior executive personally opens each session, sharing their commitment to safety and underscoring the importance of collaborative behaviours. During this presentation, attendees are divided into groups to engage in a practical exercise identifying potential close calls, reinforcing the value of teamwork and vigilance in maintaining a safe working environment.

The third stage of the induction takes place at the TRUST Centre in Huddersfield, a purpose-built, £2.7 million facility dedicated to immersive behavioural safety training. Developed by TRU in partnership with Active Training Team (ATT) Limited, the TRUST Centre offers a one-day interactive programme where participants are immersed in realistic scenarios delivered by professional actors. These scenarios, set in environments such as homes, police interviews, and work canteens, are designed to challenge participants' decision-making and highlight the consequences of unsafe practices. The training engages all three sensory learning styles - visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic - through high-quality production and industry-leading technology, enhancing retention and encouraging behavioural change.

This immersive approach ensures that safety principles are not only understood intellectually but are also internalised emotionally, leading to lasting behavioural change. By integrating the TRUST Centre experience into the induction process, TRU West reinforces its commitment to a safety-first culture, ensuring that every team member is equipped with the knowledge, skills, and mindset to contribute to a safe and collaborative working environment.

And it's paying off: TRU West's integrated behavioural safety programme is delivering industry-leading results. When benchmarked against other major infrastructure programmes in the UK, **TRU West consistently outperforms in safety metrics: with one event recorded every 53,315 hours worked, compared to one every 40,000 hours reported by comparable projects.**

The success of TRU West demonstrates that structured collaboration, supported by ISO 44001, is not simply a tool for achieving efficiencies. It is a catalyst for cultural transformation and a foundation for performance. The TRU West Alliance has shown that when collaboration is treated as a strategic discipline, it not only delivers better outcomes, it helps ensure that everyone goes home safe, every day.

For more information about the cutting edge work done by our partners the ICW please follow the link to their main page [here](#). And follow the authors [Frank Lee](#), and [Tara Sinclair](#), on LinkedIn.