

Rail Plant Association Update

RPA Acting-Chairman Darren Matthews reports on the current initiatives of the association for road/rail plant owners.

Welcome to 2021 and well done to the On-Track Plant (OTP) communities for helping their clients and principal contractors safely deliver a busy block of Christmas works. We know how challenging it is to supply resources over the festive period.

Operational challenges

In our two previous articles, we delved into the challenges of working under or near overhead line equipment with OTP and delivery point management. Both of these activities bring significant risk to the OTP suppliers and, in both cases, OTP suppliers need the client's help to mitigate the risks they bring. For this issue's report, we are discussing what some consider to be a controversial topic - the On-Track Plant Operating Scheme.

On-Track Plant Operating Scheme (POS)

The challenges:

- Interpretation of the scheme rules and the Network Rail Standard for POS (P521) in general.
- Customer expectations.
- Understanding the roles and responsibilities of POS staff.
- POS Rep competence.

Okay, I have my hard hat on and it is firmly secured. This is a topic that often results in heated debates. Do not assume we are going to iron out every wrinkle on this subject, but please read on and hear our view.

Background

Before we study today, we should remind ourselves how it was yesterday. I joined the railway in 2003 after an enjoyable 16 years working for the late Richard Budge, mining coal. The way plant was put to work on rail sites was vastly different. In mining, things were simple. Dozens of mobile plant would work 65 hours every week. The site agent was in charge of overall production and safety. A general foreman would oversee a foreman supervising plant operations and another foreman supervising the fitters. It is a crude description, but pretty much how things were. One agent managing the site, two foremen supervising.

The rail 'way', many of you will recall the 'safety case'. For some, it was a mythical/magical document held by a rail company allowing them to use OTP on the infrastructure. I am being flippant because it was likely only brought out for audits.

In the mid-2000s, OTP was removed from the scope of equipment which required a safety case to operate and the Rail Plant Operating Company in Possessions Licence (POL) was introduced, in an attempt to help improve OTP use safety. Things were not so pleasant back then for OTP operators and Machine/Crane Controllers. Many could share camp-fire stories of the horrors they had been asked to do on-site with OTP. It is no secret that OTP was hired with an operator and utilised on-site as the customer saw fit. Planning was poor and bullying operators and controllers was common practice. 'Do it or you will not work on our sites again' was a regular threat.

Minor improvements came with the POL but the real 'shake up' and positive culture change



began with the introduction of the POS. It is known that during the first half of 2014 there were over 130 accident and incidents involving OTP. In response, Network Rail introduced the radical change of POS Rules, which a year later became the standard 'NR/L2/RMVP/0200/Module P521' in December 2015.

How has the POS matured?

Over six years later and the POS culture change has been bumpy. Many contractors hiring in OTP have argued its of no value and just an additional cost to them. Others have embraced the change and seen the benefits. One thing is for certain, POS has had a positive impact on OTP safety. Some challenges:

■ Interpretation of the scheme rules and the Network Rail Standard for POS (P521) in general.

Unlike other Network Rail Standards, which were very prescriptive, P521 was a standard written in a different style. It detailed a set of rules, leaving POS providers and customers hiring OTP some flexibility on how to meet those rules. This 'risk-based' approach was something new and may explain, in part, why POS suppliers deliver their services slightly different to each other, one reason why the standard may be interpreted differently.

■ Customer expectations.

With such a large supply chain, it is reasonable to note some companies managing sites will have better understanding, experience and knowledge of OTP than others. Therefore, the duty of the POS provider is to advise all its customers on the correct type of OTP and correct numbers they will need to do their work safely and efficiently. Not to assume they already know. As the OTP experts, the POS provider has a legal duty and commercial obligation. It would be commercially unsound to advise a customer they need OTP that costs £100p/h when the tasks can be safely undertaken with a cheaper OTP. Likewise, advising the hire of five items of OTP, for a job that can be completed safely and efficiently with fewer, is not exactly meeting the spirit of the standard.

Overall, most POS sites are planned and executed very well. However, it would be fair to say some customers have great expectations from the POS provider. Examples include 'we hired your POS, so you are responsible for making sure the job gets done' or 'your POS Rep was on-site, he/she should have made sure the OTP worked quicker'. And so on....

Yes, the POS provider takes some

responsibility for the OTP operations, but not to the extent of the two examples above. POS providers are clearly responsible for doing their part in the planning of OTP use on-site. This is documented in the OTP Plan. OTP Plans can be simple or complex, depending on the site complexity or tasks to be undertaken with OTP, or even by the numbers of OTP in use. They should also determine if more than one POS Rep is required for the site.

■ Understanding the roles and responsibilities of POS staff.

The POS provider is responsible for providing the OTP, operator, POS Rep and Machine/Crane Controller. The POS Rep is an 'assurance role'. Some of POS Rep's duties are to monitor that operations of OTP follow the OTP Plan, to be the single point of contact between the site management and OTP staff, and to help find solutions, update the OTP Plan in response to change on-site. He/she should not be undertaking any other duty (with one exception, where only one item of OTP is working, the POS Rep can also be the Machine/Crane Controller). The POS Rep must be Primary Sponsored by the POS provider and directly employed, meaning agency provision of POS Reps is not permitted.

The P521 Standard requires POS providers and PCs/Clients to plan OTP works together. To meet this requirement, some POS Providers employ POS Planners (who produce lift plans, OTP Plans, briefings etc. for the sites). Those planners take information from POS Reps, who carry out site visits, white board meetings and so on, and from customers (who will hold details in the Work Package Plan, Safe System of Work Pack).

■ POS Rep competence.

Currently, each POS Provider trains and assesses their own POS Reps in-house. Network Rail's next step is to create a Sentinel-based POS Rep competence. It is likely to be many months away and we will do our best to keep you updated on that.

And finally

Before we bid you farewell, please remember to check out our Good Practice Guides, including the one for POS, at: <https://www.cpa.uk.net/rpa-good-practice-guides/>



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