

Rail Plant Association Update



RPA Acting-Chairman Darren Matthews reports on the current initiatives of the association.

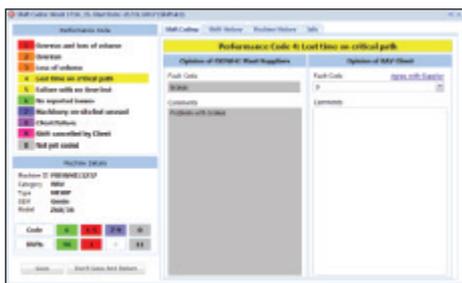
Welcome back everyone and please let me say welcome back springtime. Was it me, or did winter last 18 months? I know it felt like an eternity. On the bright side, Covid-19 protection jabs are entering arms and, as we slowly drift back to some normality, passengers are entering our trains once again.

Operational challenges

As you know, we normally use this part in the article to discuss the On-Track Plant (OTP) owners'/providers' operational challenges. This time, however, we have chosen to talk about the radical process implemented by Network Rail to drive better plant and supplier reliability. We are, of course, talking about the Rail Plant Performance System (Rail PPS). And it has been a real 'gamechanger' for the OTP community.

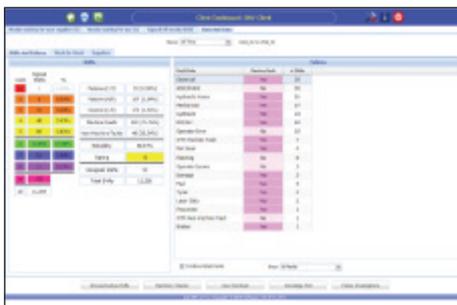
For those not familiar with Rail PPS, it is a Network Rail designed online tool used to measure OTP providers' 'reliability' score (that is, 'supplier reliability' and their 'machine reliability'); OR non-machine faults and machine faults), and it is used by Network Rail, Principal Contractors, OTP Suppliers and OTP manufacturers (plus their RCI manufacturers). But, in reality, it is much more than a reliability tool, it is a very good supplier Safety Performance Indicator (SPI).

The scoring is based on shifts delivered that have been signed off. It uses a set of performance codes (0 to 9) to determine calculations. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 represent failure codes. In the paragraph above, we mention non-machine faults. These are split into four categories; attachments, planning, operator issues and operator errors. The main point is a code is agreed between the machine provider and their customer then, at the end of each week, agreed codes are locked and show in Rail PPS' analysis.



An example of the coding page.

To complete the picture, there is a second element of Rail PPS called 'governance'. This is a check by Rail PPS on the accuracy of our coding. It shows as a percentage on the online portal and, the closer to 100% you are, the better. This is actually a measure focused on the accurate capture and declaration of a failure in Rail PPS. To pass the governance test, the supplier does NOT need to judge exactly the impact of the failure (say code 1-5); that comes through discussing with the client and agreeing mutually. All the supplier needs to have done is declare a failure occurred (i.e. not a code 6), note that all failures are to be recorded, regardless of the impact to the shift; Rail PPS measures plant performance, not shift performance, a key point to remember.



The shifts and failures summary page.

This might all sound a bit confusing, but in reality it is straightforward. And there is a real driver behind it all which is to earn 'Gold' status. That is a journey with no short cuts and requires each OTP supplier to develop and improve so they can achieve Bronze then Silver status before they can hold their head high boasting they have made it to Gold.

As you would expect, the more prestigious the award, the higher your score will need to be. Like all things worth achieving, it requires significant effort to deliver a better service as OTP suppliers, to make sure our machines fail less often, and to build better relationships with our customers. Moreover, the evaluation periods are measured over a rolling 26-week period, meaning you have to retain the relevant score for 26 weeks to demonstrate you are worthy.



The 'Route to Gold' page.

The reliability score needed to reach and stay in Gold is 99% and above. That takes some doing and requires a lot of focus from the OTP supplier.

So, that is all there is to it then? Err, no. Sorry, there is a bit more.

In order to climb that golden mountain, each OTP supplier has to engage in the 'Share with Pride/Pain' initiative, create annual Joint Performance Improvement Plans (JPIP) with the Rail PPS team, and monitor Failure Reporting, Analysis and Corrective Action System (FRACAS) data.

The spirit of Share with Pride/Pain is to share innovative ideas that you have carried out with other OTP owners so we can all consider the improvements made to help prevent similar failures elsewhere. It is actually very good and interesting to see what problems your peers are having and how they remedy those issues.

The JPIP is basically an action plan. You look at FRACAS and your failures and create a plan to improve those areas. This is a worthy exercise and, as a supplier, it does encourage a desire to improve.

Some may say, why bother? Well, that becomes a commercial subject. Customers

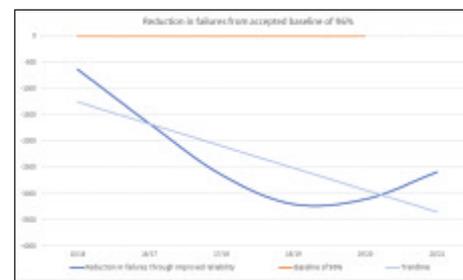
pay a lot of money hiring OTP to help them deliver their scheme of works. Margins are not great, so they can ill afford to have machinery on hire that breaks down. Therefore, they will be interested in sourcing from a supplier with a good reputation and Rail PPS score. Rail PPS allows buyers to view their OTP supplier performance with ease.



The individual supplier versus national average benchmarking tool.

What we have done here is offer a really short summary of Rail PPS. The system offers members a clear and colourful dashboard to work from. There are actually nine short manuals to offer guidance to the users and a few extra areas we have not mentioned such as the knowledge hub and failure investigations.

Without doubt, the introduction of Rail PPS has driven improvements. No question. If you own OTP, you have no option but to do all you can to ensure your machinery is reliable, that you as a supplier are reliable and that you dedicate blood, sweat and tears to keeping your score high. Failing to do so could be your demise.



A powerful distillation of the benefits delivered from Rail PPS, this graph shows the benefit from years of truly incremental improvements. Improvements of 0.2% here and there, for example, may not sound much to someone in finance or even in the client base, but this figure and graph, highlighting the delta between no change and continuous improvement, is a very strong argument and one RPA members are proud of.

To conclude, the graph above says it all. As of April 2021, the data shows 13,809 failures have been avoided over the last six years based on a starting baseline point of 96% reliability.

The RPA would like to offer thanks to the Rail PPS team within Network Rail for their help and accuracy review of this article. As your narrator, I cannot claim to be an expert in this subject, but I did enjoy the research into it.