

Rail Plant Association Update

RPA Management Committee Chairman Paul Helks reports on the current initiatives of the association.

RPA Leadership Meeting

The latest RPA Leadership Meeting was held at Hockley Heath on 4th July. With a full room of RPA owners and members from across the UK, a busy agenda line-up started off with an update from Jordan Skey, Technical Head of Plant, Network Rail. He presented recent safety alerts, an overview of plant standards and the much-anticipated Product Acceptance update. Jordan explained that a plan was being devised to deal with the issue in the medium to long-term and a process is planned for publication by the end of this year. The likely course of action is to include a process for 'Product Acceptance Lite' and that machines will require full Product Acceptance at the next ECC recertification. This will also address some of the issues, such as prioritisation, filling the response gap, CE marking for HPVs and lack of OEM design risk assessment.

Phil Bennett, Network Rail, gave an overview of the outlook for Control Period 7. Tom Male, Network Rail, presented a summary of the scheduled workbank for the Christmas and New Year period, which is shaping up to be a busy festive period for the sector. Leigh Goble, Network Rail, shared the latest Rail PPS data. A valued comment from the audience suggested that some of this



Collective Mark

data would be valuable in the retrospective Product Acceptance application process.

A full review of RPA conditions has been conducted by Steve Featherstone and the legal team at CPA. These have been circulated for members' comments and it is hoped to publish the final document in September or October. These revised terms and conditions are crucial for the RPA community, as well as the clients.

The RPA Board of Directors held a meeting, prior to the RPA Leadership Meeting, and agreed to extend Steve Featherstone's contract as RPA Consultant to enable him to continue his work for a further 12 months. May I take this opportunity to thank Steve for all his endeavours and look forward to working alongside him to achieve the all-important wins for the RPA membership, as set out by the owners and directors.

A review of Rail Plant Fitter Guidance

change things in the future.

At the recent Rail Live exhibition, I had lots of conversations about new initiatives to improve safety, productivity and efficiency. Our supply chain is certainly not lacking in entrepreneurs and innovators, which was great to see. There was one reoccurring theme, however, which is how hard it is to get things through Product Acceptance and how long it takes. Network Rail has looked at streamlining Product Acceptance at various times over the last 20 years, but each review only seems to make the situation worse. Product Acceptance now appears to be more about overwhelming process adherence than common sense, competent engineers making decisions to place innovative solutions into production in a safe and timely way. Network Rail has started another review of Product Acceptance and I have agreed to represent the supply chain as part of this review.

There were two key pieces of news over the two days of Rail Live and neither had anything to do with the plant show. On day one, the latest inflation figures were published and, on day two, the Bank of England raised interest rates. Both of these moves have significant implications for the plant supply chain. Inflation puts pressure onto all of the input costs of the supply chain such as labour, plant, materials, haulage, travel, subsistence, etc. The increasing interest rates impact on the debt financing of the business and the cost of cash flow between paying their own costs and being paid by their clients. I am concerned that, as inflation pressures continue, and interest rates continue to rise in response, some of the plant

documents and assessment material is in its final stages of revamp. A team of dedicated RPA members have been working tirelessly and the first draft should be ready for consultation in the coming weeks. The layout of the guidance material will provide a valuable reference suite to all fitters, mature and new to the industry. Covering a number of subjects including safety systems, maintenance, inspection and testing. A special thank you to Ian Morgan for leading on this work.

Rail Live 2023

Another well-attended and productive Rail Live show was held at Long Marston on 21st and 22nd June. Hopefully, all the RPA members and wider exhibitors had a beneficial few days on-site with the weather outstanding, as usual. Although logistics were a tad challenging at times, it was great to see a busy event after the darker days of Covid-19 restrictions.

Plant haulage

Amongst a wide array of visitors to the RPA stand at Rail Live were a Highway's Agency representative along with a police officer from the Central Motorway Police Group. They came to chat about the transportation of rail plant, the importance of embargos

Steve Featherstone update

A recent edition of the *New Civil Engineer* focused on the productivity challenge in the construction industry. This is based on data from the Office of National Statistics, which shows that construction productivity, in terms of output per hour worked, has not changed much in the last 50 years and has, in fact, fallen by 7% since 1997.

Since around 25% of publicly funded construction takes place in the railway industry, it is worth examining the contribution which railway plant has made, and could make, to improving productivity.

I joined the railway industry in 2007 so I have seen at first hand the changes over the last 16 years. I am struggling to think of any game-changing improvements that have created a step change in productivity. The plant and machinery used today is fundamentally the same as that used 16 years ago in modern equivalent form. The amount of people on-site for different activities is at least the same if not greater than it was in 2007. I accept that we have seen changes such as the widespread introduction of battery-operated tools and equipment but, whilst this has changed technology and reduced carbon, it has not really changed output costs or delivery efficiency. It is a sad state of affairs that some of the most game-changing machines introduced over the last few years are TRMs, which are nearly 50 years old and have been brought out of retirement.

I can recall many conversations in the past about possible game-changing plant and machinery, but very little of this has ever eventually made it into the supply chain. It is important that we understand why this is the case if we are going to

supply chain may be unable to survive. In the current economic environment, it is important that suppliers consider any inflation clauses in their contracts. Continued inflationary pressures could put increasing strain on the ongoing financial viability of plant suppliers.

On 4th July, we held the latest RPA Leadership Meeting. It was great to see such a good attendance. One of the key topics of discussion was the new draft Model Terms and Conditions for Railway Plant Hire. Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the production of the new version, especially David Smith and Adam Godwin of the CPA/RPA. Once we have taken into account the comments received, we will progress to the final version, which will hopefully be published in September or October.



Steve Featherstone, RPA Consultant.



**Paul Helks, Management Committee
Chairman, RPA.**

and the requirement of no movement of loads on certain public holidays. I explained that public holidays were key days within our industry for key deliveries.

A wider discussion will need to be arranged with Network Rail and the Principal Contractors on this subject to establish the full facts and explore possible dispensation in the event of emergency requirements. I have

raised the matter at the RPA Management Committee and the Infrastructure Safety Leadership Group on 11th July. It is imperative that, whilst compliance and legal requirements are met, plant deliveries and collections are key to work delivery. Any delay could have serious ramifications.

RPA Standards Review

The RPA Standards Review team, led by Bill Phenix and supported by Zak Allan and Florin Stanciu, have completed the 23rd June review. A big thanks to these chaps for their collaborative efforts on behalf of the members. Standards, regulations and legislation, as detailed in the RPA Standards and Legislation Register, are checked for any new issues, withdrawals, derogations, etc. They can be found electronically at www.rssb.co.uk and business standards at www.ihs.co.uk - the new or changed standard is reviewed to determine its effect on RPA members. The summary notes are used for this purpose before reading the complete standard to see if it is applicable to RPA members.

Below is a list of the changes to various standards, legislation/HS, Code of Practice, Rule Books and posters that are new or the Issues have been amended since the last update or require compliance before the next

Standards Review. A link to the full review will be sent to members in due course.

■ Changes in line with Standards Review - 23rd June. Review date - 6th June.

- NR-CAT-STP-001 - Catalogue of Network Rail Standards 3rd June - 1st September 2023 - Issue 12.
- NR-L2-OHS-021 - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) - Issue 5.
- NR-L3-MTC-RCS0216 - Risk Control Manual - Issue 26:
 - NR-L3-MTC-RCS0216-MP03 - Risk Control Manual - on/off/cross-tracking self-propelled OTP, RMMM, trailers and attachments - Issue 2.
 - NR-L3-MTC-RCS0216-MP14 - Risk Control Manual - use of OTP lorry - Issue 2.
- COP 0038 - Code of Practice for defective OTP safety critical equipment - Issue 3.

Get in touch

The RPA Management Committee is always open to discussion with members and non-members. Please have a look at the RPA website, which can be found via the CPA website, for updates as well as having our good practice guides available to download: <https://www.cpa.uk.net/special-interest-groups/rail-plant-association-rpa>