

Rail Plant Association Update

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

RRV operator competency

In this diverse railway industry, the primary focus sits firmly with the train passenger. The basic process of commuting and travel on the network needs the support of many factors. The trains and train operating companies, plus the infrastructure and those people, like our RPA members, who help build and maintain that infrastructure. But for decades now, the RRV/OTP operators have not been able to reach the competency levels needed to operate RRVs without the pre-requisite qualification found in the construction industry such as the Construction Plant Competency Scheme (CPCS) or National Plant Operators Registration Scheme (NPOR). Neither of these, nor indeed any other nationally recognised competency schemes for plant operators, include railway elements.

Historically, plant operators working in the construction sector were keen to get into the railway because the unsociable hours associated with RRV working meant an inflated hourly pay rate, and a requirement to work on Saturday and Sunday, an attractive combination. Many of the RPA members became reliant on this resource. But times have changed. The construction sector is thriving and, without the need to work weekend nightshifts, it can pay plant operators handsomely, making it very hard for the RRV community to attract new operators. The attractive combination that was once there for civils operators is no longer.

With an ageing workforce in rail plant



Collective Mark

operations, and the difficult process to progress new staff into the industry, more needs to be done collectively to change the development landscape. If we can challenge the standards of old and build a new pathway process to encourage new talent to the OTP arena, the future will be orange. A proposal to Network Rail's Plant CDG is to allow RRV companies to train operators from scratch, removing the need to 'poach' them from another industry. Also, expanding the Sentinel training courses and assessments to include the RRV 'base machine' elements would remove the pre-requisite for a nationally recognised 'construction scheme' competence for plant excavators and bulldozers.

Plant haulage

In the last issue, I discussed the the Highways Agency and the Central Motorway Police Group. Rail plant haulage will continue to attract interest on a national basis. In the run-up to Christmas, it is crucial now that a discussion is held with Network Rail seniors and the agencies, to be able to co-ordinate essential plant movements in respect to public holidays. We will make the necessary arrangements to establish talks.



Paul Helks, Management Committee Chairman, RPA.

Load secure

A working group is now underway to review the RPA Good Practice Guide RPA0009 - Security of OTP and attachments for haulage and on completion it will be available to view.

OTP core now online

Please ensure you have all the necessary information now this subject is online. There has been confusion around the requirements. For further clarification of what is required, contact your approved training provider. We will keep you updated on progress.

Steve Featherstone update

There is a management saying which I have used many times over the years which goes, 'What gets measured gets managed and what gets paid for gets managed first.' In 2014, Network Rail introduced the Rail Plant Performance Scheme (PPS). This was because plant failure was the single most common reason for engineering overruns. I challenged my engineering team to measure the reliability of every piece of significant plant and then instructed my commercial team to preferentially order the most reliable plant. We backed this up with league tables, bronze, silver and gold certificates and the annual plant awards. The step change in plant reliability was incredible.

Prior to the introduction of Rail PPS, the average plant reliability was 96%. Or put another way, there was a 4% chance of a piece of plant failing on any shift which it worked. Within a couple of years, average plant reliability was over 99% and it has remained there since under the ever-watchful eye of the Rail PPS team. We know how many plant shifts are worked each week and we can estimate how many plant failures have been avoided as a result of the improved plant reliability. At the recent Rail Plant Association Leadership meeting, we celebrated the milestone of over 20,000 plant failures avoided. Or put another way, over 20,000 potential engineering overruns avoided. What a brilliant collective achievement by the whole plant supply chain.

There is a common theme in many

management courses and text books about the importance of planning. This is often captured in catchphrases such as, 'Poor planning produces poor performance' or 'Fail to plan, plan to fail'. In various engineering overrun incidents over the years, failure of planning and failure to follow the plan are consistently amongst the root causes. It was because of this that Network Rail introduced the Delivering Work Within Possessions (DWWP) process so that critical works at bank holidays, particularly at Christmas, could be thoroughly checked before they went ahead. This has made a huge difference to the stability of the plan and to successful delivery of the plan at bank holidays.

From a plant supplier's perspective, bank holidays provide a stable plan around which they can roster plant, operators and other resources. So that provides six points of stability during a 52-week year. Feedback from the suppliers is that the other 46 weeks are as badly planned as ever. It is not uncommon to hear of over 50% of plant orders being cancelled at short notice. This is understandable in extreme circumstances, for example where access is lost due to weather conditions, but I hear stories from just about every supplier, just about every week. As we look to the efficiency challenge which CP7 presents, improving the basic ability to formulate a good delivery plan and then to actually deliver that plan offers huge potential to remove waste, rework and cost from the industry which will ultimately benefit both

taxpayers and passengers.

In September, the new Model Terms and Conditions for Railway Plant Hire went live. The new Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) will be made available to the RPA Membership in the coming weeks and I would encourage everyone to utilise these when new contracts are put into place. When we were redrafting the T&Cs we looked closely at supply chain risks and who is best placed for competence of resources is best controlled by the service provider as they are responsible for their training. In another example, the insurance of plant, once delivered, is best covered by the customer as they are responsible for the compound, the site and the security. Relating to my observations about poor planning, the risk of cancellation is best covered by the customer as they are responsible for the plan and its stability.

Returning to, 'What gets measured gets managed and what gets paid for gets managed first'; by putting the risk of cancellation onto the customer, it will achieve both of these things in that it will certainly get measured and the costs of cancellation will become very visible, very quickly. In the short-term, this may be painful for customers, especially those who plan on a wing and a prayer, but in the medium-term it will provide a stimulus for significantly improved planning which will benefit both taxpayers and passengers. We can hopefully all agree that good planning is not just for Christmas, it is for every day of the year.