

# It's all about better communications



MARK KENNEDY

**O**ne of Network Rail's main goals in contracting for work in Control Period 5 (CPS: 1 April 2014 - 31 March 2019) is yet another efficiency saving, this time in the region of 18%.

To help to achieve this, the concept of ALO (Adjacent Line Open) working is being promoted heavily. With this method, one line can be closed while the other remains open to traffic, in some cases bi-directionally.

This has enabled the planning and delivery of longer working hours outside standard possession constraints which, in a nutshell, can speed up maintenance, new build and upgrade projects and still keep the train operators happy.

However, as the industry looks at adopting this technique to enable the railway to stay open while still completing the required work, keeping the workforce and public safe is a priority for both plant hire companies and contractors.

ALO should be considered alongside working within a possession which, as a viable safe option, requires the plant hire company's rail team to be in very close contact with the contractor at all stages of planning the job. This will make sure both parties understand their roles within the project and not only have the correct plant for the operation to be carried out safely but also a fully-competent rail-certificated operator and, if need be, a standby PTS plant fitter.

## Plant reliability

When using construction plant on rail infrastructure, the biggest question is its reliability as well as the competence of the operator to carry out the task. Plant reliability is down to three main factors. Firstly, maintenance - not only before deployment so the equipment starts the job in the best condition, but also on-site maintenance by the engineering team and the trained operator.

The age of plant also has a bearing, not only on outright reliability due to age, but also on the time taken to

maintain it. With modern telemetry, a full diagnostic can be run to monitor the machine to ensure it is working efficiently as well as identifying any fault which may occur. This can speed up the downtime as the engineer, when attending, can come prepared to fix the problem in the shortest time.

And finally there is reliability in terms of fitness for purpose. Working with the contractor to plan the correct plant to carry out the task is key to making sure the project is, and remains, on schedule. If the planners or project teams order either the wrong machine or one that does not have the correct attachments, this can have a detrimental effect on the whole job.





### Early engagement

Therefore it is very important that the contractor calls the plant operators' expert advisor in at the planning stage to make sure the best and most suitable plant is chosen for the task. Use of an external plant resource is the way forward for many contractors. This involves developing a working partnership whereby key elements of the job are agreed, including delivery times, access points, operator briefings, whether the plant needs full spotlights, safety equipment to be fitted, spill kits, attachments, warning systems required and start and finish times.

Communication between operator and plant hire company is the key to a safer and more reliable working partnership. At the Rail Live exhibition earlier this year, attended by over 300 exhibitors and thousands of industry professionals, one of the major concerns was not having a reliable supplier for the changing times ahead and the vast investment planned for rail infrastructure in the UK.

Health and safety representatives from the contractors also expressed their concern about the lack of training and knowledge of both operators and delivery drivers. This needs to be addressed and can be achieved by better training for the operators when working on or near the line, by briefing the driver delivering the plant with regard to timings and delivery access, and by properly instructing the operator on working times, location, reporting channels and the nature of the job to be carried out.

These points, which are simply a matter of better communication, will not only help the contractor and the plant hire company but, in reality, will assist the whole working partnership to run much more smoothly.

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Mark Kennedy is Operations Director at L Lynch (plant and haulage) Ltd. With over 1,500 items of plant available to rail contractors from six major sites, L Lynch has over 30 years of experience to draw on to make sure that communications with contractors start early and continue throughout the span of any project.

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