

# New ways of working in Wales and Western

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Infrastructure consultancy AECOM delivers critical projects to clients across the globe, providing specialised support with design, build, financing, and operation. In the UK, five regional teams play a key role in some of rail's most transformative infrastructure programmes.

Regional Director Karl Hatala oversees the rail sector in Wales and Western, where new ways of working are delivering efficiencies and cost savings for their clients. Speaking to Rail Business Daily, Karl discussed Network Rail's approach to SPEED, reflected on the current control period, and explained how innovation could help the industry to address key future challenges.

## **Can you give some examples of what's worked well in your region in the current Control Period?**

AECOM has integrated well with Network Rail during this control period. We are one of its trusted suppliers, and on several frameworks, meaning we can mobilise quickly when required. A case in point is the recent Dartmoor Line.

For the first time in nearly 50 years, in November 2021 regular passenger services started on the Dartmoor Railway Line, connecting Okehampton to Exeter. This project was the first railway reopening under the UK government's 'Restoring Your Railway' initiative, aimed at restoring railway lines closed by the Beeching railway reforms of the 1960's, reconnecting communities to economic opportunity.

Design work started in April 2021. Collaboration and teamwork played a key part as we applied SPEED principles to move the project through feasibility, detailed design and into construction in just 8 months.

We've been realising efficiencies in the South Rail Systems Alliance (SRSA) too, by merging the Contractor's Responsible Engineer and discipline Project Engineer roles to reduce duplication of effort, streamline teams and accelerate decision making, with Network Rail benefitting from the resulting efficient delivery and cost savings.

We've realised further efficiencies by challenging scopes, collaborating closely with framework partners, and deploying specialist dedicated teams to maximise continuous improvement by applying lessons learned on one project immediately onto the next.

### **Are there any lessons learnt from the current Control Period to take forward into CP7?**

Yes, AECOM has been able to build its design teams to be sustainable by being on long term frameworks and alliances. Being able to understand future work volumes enables us to recruit, develop and train resources providing mutual benefit to both us and our clients. We would encourage Network Rail to continue to share its pipeline and progress with its plans for deeper and more strategic partnerships with their suppliers. This will promote improved efficiency and the sustainability of our industry.

### **How will you build on the efficiencies realised during CP6?**

The principles of SPEED, PACE and MVP are aligned to AECOM's values and are already beginning to deliver the intended results for the rail industry, however, to build on these gains a 'one team' approach is key.

In CP7, we'll look to build on collaborative working with framework and alliance partners to ensure the best team for the job is put forward to maximise successful outcomes for projects. Internally, AECOM will continue to embrace a systems-based approach to design, to provide our clients with access to the best people within our global business to deliver their requirements.

On the SRSA, we'll continue to embed PACE and self-assurance to achieve true concept to hand-back delivery of the track and systems renewals and enhancements portfolio.

**What are the priorities and key objectives in your region and how can the industry achieve them?**

We're focused on supporting Network Rail's adoption of the 'intelligent client' model which amongst other things requires designers to work directly with contractors. This is a change from the current relationship of Network Rail being the client, as each contractor will have different requirements and ways of working that will need to be understood.

We're also remaining committed to demonstrating to both stakeholders and funders how we can provide 'best value' solutions while continuing to provide good service – because ultimately, it's taxpayers' money.

**What new ways of working are you looking forward to implementing over the next few years?**

We'll continue to evolve the best practices established through CP6. We'll extend positive working relationships within project teams, stakeholders, and contractors by using the principles of good alliancing developed over the course of our long-term SRSA contract.

Maintaining quality of our deliverables is critical so we'll embrace modern technologies and processes to improve our efficiency at managing information, risk, and hazard management.

**CP6 was an extraordinary period, particularly in terms of the pandemic's impact. Has this changed your view of the benefits of rail?**

Although passenger numbers were down during the pandemic, rail remained essential during this period for the continued movement of freight (including food, medicines, and equipment) and to facilitate the commute of essential workers. Our rail teams became essential workers as our survey, design, renewal, and maintenance activities continued during this time to keep the railway open.

With so many stunning landmarks and vistas, Wales and Western may have been one of the busiest networks during the pandemic, due to the rise of the 'staycation' and more people opting to explore the area by train.

There's also the levelling up agenda, reconnecting communities to economic opportunities as demonstrated in Dartmoor and as we're continuing to do

through our recent appointment on the Cornwall Mid Metro project.

Finally, utilising rail freight rather than road freight is assisting with the reduction in carbon and getting us to net zero, we saw more freight terminals being developed during CP6, and there's exciting growth in this area.

In short, the last control period demonstrated that having a robust rail network is more important than ever for our region.