

“The industry needs a systemised approach to competency management that accurately matches supply and demand.”

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*Tim Wood recently talked exclusively to railbusinessdaily about the need for a well-trained, competent supply chain with the capacity needed to deliver the scale of works envisaged by the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) programme.*

NPR is a major strategic rail programme, specifically designed to support the transformation of the North's economy by providing effective and efficient rail connectivity between the North's main centres, offering a faster and more frequent service across the entire region.

Featuring new and significantly upgraded railway, it will be the region's single biggest transport investment since the Industrial Revolution, providing improved journey time and more trains per hour. It is an investment in infrastructure that will deliver benefits to the economy, quality of life, education and the environment.

In total, this programme will:

- Bring 10 million people within 90 minutes of multiple economic centres in the North
- Treble the number of businesses able to access four or more cities or Manchester Airport in 90 minutes
- Take up to 64,000 daily car trips off the roads – equivalent to 800 million km per year

A programme of this size requires significant capacity levels in order to deliver the infrastructure required. As such, the need for a highly skilled workforce is huge and the NPR team will soon turn its focus to finding the right suppliers from Tier One contractors through to SMEs.

Tim said: “As we close out 2020 and move into the early part of next year, we will make important decisions about phasing and the preferred network. This will enable us to progress towards our Strategic Outline Case demonstrating affordability and deliverability of the whole network. Then we turn our attention to building a supply chain with our Delivery Partners capable of delivering this significant piece of infrastructure.

“This is my worry – and therefore my challenge to the rail supply industry; how do you demonstrate that you have the core capabilities and competencies in place to satisfy our requirements?

“We also want to understand how you can demonstrate this against the requirements of other significant rail works being delivered by Network Rail and HS2 Ltd.

“For NPR, it will be vital to understand and maintain visibility of workforce competency, and also, the analytics to forecast, manage and budget for workforce competency needs. We have made great strides in this area, thanks to organisations such as NSAR, but I have yet to see a systemised approach to competency management that accurately matches supply and demand.

“As our Chairman, John Cridland, says ‘The plans and the potential are in place, now we need to make it happen.’ It can only happen with NPR and the supply chain working in partnership.

“So, who and how will the industry rise to this challenge?”