

WINNER'S

CASE STUDY

CATEGORY

PROJECT PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

WINNER

SPENCER HOBBS – NETWORK RAIL

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Overview

Network Rail (NR) has embarked on a number of multi-million-pound signalling-renewal projects along the Great Western Main Line from London to Bristol. This supports its ongoing electrification projects, which will power new electric trains along the route in the coming years.

As the project manager for an element of this transformation, the Swindon Area Signalling Renewal (SASR), Spencer Hobbs employed multifaceted project management skills to motivate his team (after SASR missed its original commissioning milestone) to deliver the project so it successfully met the revised commissioning dates and the demanding timescales of the subsequent electrification programme.

Stakeholder and team management

The project team consisted of multiple stakeholders, including NR and principal and supply chain contractors, who, combined, provided more than 430 site operatives during the construction works.

Due to missing the project's original commissioning milestone, the team had low morale and a silo-working mentality was straining relationships between the client and contractors.

So Spencer initiated a project charter to motivate and coordinate project members against an agreed vision, objectives and collaborative working behaviours. To increase coordination between the project team, Spencer improved the project team's information management by introducing a more user-friendly and easier-to-access online Microsoft SharePoint site to archive and retrieve project documentation, which consolidated previously disparate project documents, data and so on into one source accessible by all project members. This ultimately helped information and document sharing.

He also co-located the project team (client and contractors) in the same office to overcome silo working, integrate design and construction, and expedite resolution of commercial issues.

Other initiatives included team-building events, behavioural safety workshops and the use of the PRISM



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tool for constructive monthly feedback between NR and its SASR contractors.

Delivery and communication

By adopting lean and agile principles to deliver SASR, Spencer focused on embedding a continuous improvement mindset within the team through regular 'lessons learned' sessions and reviews throughout the project's lifecycle. This helped the team identify where improvements in processes and outputs could be implemented for SASR as the project progressed.

Risk and issue management was also a priority and Spencer introduced joint risk and issue reviews and a shared register with contractors, while placing a greater emphasis on the identification of opportunities.

The project's communication and stakeholder management was improved by issuing a monthly 'project on a page' summary to inform all key stakeholders of project information. Also, public consultations and drop-in sessions were organised to liaise with local residents affected by the works.

Challenges

Aside from turning around a project with a demotivated team so that it successfully met its demanding revised commissioning dates, the project also faced a significant challenge with the issuing of an improvement notice (and threat of a prohibition notice) by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) for the manual installation of concrete lineside cable trough routes, which was deemed a safety risk to installers.

Spencer led the team to develop a solution that used risk assessments,



lifting aids and innovative, lightweight, plastic, manually installed troughing, satisfying the ORR's requirements and avoiding critical construction delays.

Spencer also overcame the challenge of ensuring the project undertook the works in an environmentally sustainable way, preserving the many protected species along the route.

Innovation

A key innovation was the 'temporary signalling fringe' commissioning methodology developed by NR in conjunction with the project's contractors, which separated the original consecutive week-long revised commissioning (proposed for December 2016) into three smaller (52-hour) stages completed over three weekends between November 2015 and February 2016. This allowed the

signals up to each temporary fringe to be commissioned and controlled from the new computer-based system while temporarily interfacing with the signals still controlled from conventional mechanical signal boxes along the route. Then, once each of the three separate commissioning stages was completed, the whole stretch of line was operating under the new system.

This resulted in the revised commissioning for the whole route being 10 months earlier than anticipated. Customers and key stakeholders also suffered less disruption, as the line was closed for three separate weekends rather than a whole consecutive week in December 2016, as proposed in the original revised commissioning strategy.

Project successes

The SASR project met its key objectives of renewing the signalling system with a new computer-based system and doing so in time to enable the subsequent NR project works to electrify the line to progress, while completing the works with no major safety or environmental incidents.

Other successes included environmental sustainability gains for key stakeholders through cutting the project's carbon footprint via reduced use of plant/machinery and concrete during construction works; overcoming local opposition to the upgrading of a level crossing through effective stakeholder management and negotiation; providing several measures to improve passenger and public safety; and a more reliable signalling system.



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