

Environmental sustainability committee report



I am pleased to present the committee's report into the key activities undertaken during 2024/25, alongside its anticipated activities for 2025/26.

This year has marked a period of transition as Network Rail undertook a review of its environmental sustainability strategy aiming to put sustainability at the core of how it does business. Under the newly established 'Greener Railway Strategy 2025-2050' (launched after the financial year, in May 2025), Network Rail has defined three strategic ambitions supported by eight priority areas, each with their own objectives and targets, all underpinned by the ambition to build a culture of sustainability. The delivery plan, that sets out the pathway to achieve the targets for each of the previous four priorities will be updated annually to incorporate the updated eight priority areas. The committee assists the Board in reviewing the policies, practices, targets, and performance of Network Rail against this ambitious plan. Much progress has been made in all strategy areas and there has been public recognition of this with several awards won for partnership working, including the Environmental and Sustainability award won jointly with the Tree Council at the Rail Business Awards and high commendation at the UK Green Business Awards.

David Noyes

Chair, environmental sustainability committee
18 July 2025

Committee attendees

As well as attendance by the committee members, the committee meetings were also participated in by both internal and external attendees.

Internal: chief executive, acting chair of the Board, chief of staff, group safety and engineering director – Technical Authority, chief environment and sustainability officer, principal planning and integration manager, head of communications and group commercial and procurement director. Other

members of the Board, and/or other senior executives may also attend meetings by invitation by the chair.

External: Representatives of the Department for Transport have a standing invitation to attend. Representatives of other bodies such as the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) are invited as appropriate.

Role and responsibilities of the committee

The committee oversees, reviews, supports and where appropriate, provides guidance to the executive in the implementation of the strategy, ensuring that Network Rail is keeping abreast of wider environmental issues as well as co-ordinating its programmes with wider industry environmental initiatives.

Principal activities and challenges during the year

In 2024/25, the committee met every quarter to review progress and explored a wide range of themes including:

- **Strategic planning and performance:** Reviewed performance at the end of Control Period 6 (CP6) and outlined key targets and focus areas for Control Period 7 (2024–2029), including a refreshed greener railway strategy aligned with the vision of a simpler, better, greener railway.
- **Environmental and sustainability initiatives:** Advanced strategic ambitions through eight priority areas, focusing on biodiversity, decarbonisation, climate change adaptation, fleet transition (e.g., electric vehicles), circular economy practices, air quality improvements at priority stations, and on delivering social value.
- **Stakeholder engagement and monitoring:** Engaged with key stakeholders (e.g. DfT, RSSB) across all environmental and sustainability areas, including the relaunch of the rail social value tool, the monitoring of air quality and development of air quality improvement plans and monitored regional progress to ensure alignment and support for strategy delivery.

Across the year, to consider topics in depth, the committee received deep dives into biodiversity, decarbonisation, circular economy, and adapting to a changing climate.

From September 2024 the committee monitored progress against the three new strategic ambitions of the greener railway strategy, as well as for the supporting ambition to build a culture of sustainability:

A Railway fit for the future

The committee reviewed:

- **Carbon emissions and energy goals:**
 - Carbon emissions reduction targets for the reporting period, with performance surpassing the original goal. The committee also discussed ongoing regulatory oversight related to carbon reporting practices. Progress toward long-term net zero objectives remains on track with notable reductions in direct emissions. However, the CP6 energy consumption targets were not fully achieved, with results falling short of expectations.
- **Circular economy:**
 - Circular economy outcomes were positive. Reuse and recycling remained high and the landfill diversion rate was met.
 - The committee also recognised an updated definition in material reuse and emphasised the importance of translating data into tangible actions for staff to drive improvements in this area.
- **Adapting to a changing climate:**
 - Network Rail is continually enhancing its understanding of climate change risks and their potential impact across the rail network. This work is supported by cross-industry collaboration and engagement with other agencies to define resilience standards and service expectations.
 - In the coming years, initiatives will include incorporating climate change considerations into asset degradation modelling to better inform long-term planning and expenditure decisions.

A railway that cares for the environment

The committee reviewed the quarterly environmental performance report, with particular attention to incident trends, air quality and biodiversity indicators. Key observations included:

- **Incident trends:** Environmental incidents have decreased over time, showing a positive trend. No major incidents were reported, and serious cases remained low.
- **Air quality:** Plans to improve air quality for our priority stations have been developed. The committee welcomed the progress and encouraged continued efforts.
- **Biodiversity:** The continued work to improve biodiversity across the network was noted, with

case studies published in the annual State of Nature report.

A railway that helps communities thrive

The committee considered the following topics:

- **Volunteering participation:** staff engagement in volunteering has been growing steadily, though numbers are still slightly below the target.
- **Social value:** a large number of projects have reported significant social benefits since the introduction of a dedicated measurement tool.

These strategic ambitions were supported by a commitment to fostering a culture of sustainability.

This was reflected in the 2024 Your Voice survey which showed improved colleague perceptions of the organisation's environmental and social responsibility compared to 2021. Work began on two large projects aimed at better integrating sustainability into the business and the committee considered ongoing efforts to define and enhance sustainability metrics, with further updates anticipated in future reports. Looking ahead, several initiatives are planned, including the introduction of new survey questions, development of a data solution for sustainability data, and a pilot of ORR's risk management maturity model (RM3) for sustainability in the next financial year.

Planned activities for 2025/26

In the next year, the committee will continue to monitor the delivery of the new strategy, including all the strategic ambitions listed above and the key programmes relating to them. Some of the planned activities include:

- Following the launch of the greener railway strategy, the committee will continue to ensure there is momentum in implementation of the strategy and will monitor the development of the delivery plan.
- The committee's terms of reference will be revised in line with the new strategy and the Corporate Governance Code 2024.
- The adaptation strategy for weather resilience and climate change will be examined. Long-term regional adaptation plans will continue to be developed, and work will continue to update asset design, operations, and maintenance standards to reflect future climate conditions.
- Work to decarbonise the railway will continue including the adoption of zero emission vehicles (ZEVs) and the measurement and reporting of whole life carbon in infrastructure.
- Analysis will be conducted on the rail social value tool and social value improvements.
- Review progress against circular economy initiatives and their impact on our new reuse metric.
- Work will continue on developing clear sustainability metrics and a supporting data system to support future planning and reporting.