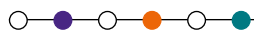


Environment and sustainability committee report



David Noyes



Chair, environment and sustainability committee
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I am pleased to present the committee's report on the key activities undertaken during 2025/26, alongside its anticipated priorities for 2026/27.

This year marked a period of transition as Network Rail strengthened its environmental sustainability approach, embedding sustainability at the core of how it plans, delivers and operates. This culminated in the launch of the Greener Railway Strategy 2025–2050 in May 2025. The strategy sets out three strategic ambitions, supported by eight priority areas, each with defined objectives and targets, all underpinned by the ambition to build a strong culture of sustainability. A delivery plan sits alongside the strategy and is updated annually to reflect progress and evolving priorities.

The committee assisted the Board by reviewing Network Rail's policies, practices, targets and performance against this ambitious framework as it moved from development into delivery.

Good progress has been made, with increasing evidence of delivery outcomes across decarbonisation, biodiversity and social value. This work has received external recognition, including the Sustainability and Environmental Excellence Award, won jointly with The Tree Council at the Rail Business Awards, a Highly Commended recognition at the UK Green Business Awards, and further recognition at the National Rail Awards for environmental innovation and low carbon delivery.



Committee attendees

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

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 of 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 coordinating its programmes with wider industry environmental initiatives.

Principal activities and challenges during the year

During 2025/26, the committee met quarterly to oversee delivery of the first year of the Greener Railway Strategy, supported by regular performance and delivery reporting and targeted deep dives aligned to each strategic ambition.

Key areas of focus included maintaining momentum following the launch of the strategy; monitoring development of the delivery plan; and supporting the transition from Control Period 6 (CP6) into Control Period 7 (CP7), ensuring sustainability priorities were embedded into longer term planning.

Over the year, the committee explored a wide range of themes, including biodiversity, decarbonisation, climate change adaptation, zero-emission fleet transition, circular economy, air quality and social value. Engagement with key external stakeholders, including the DfT and the Rail Safety and Standards Board, supported alignment with wider industry frameworks and best practice.

Recurring challenges identified during the year included improving maturity and assurance of sustainability data. A structured programme is in place to improve data quality, consistency and auditability, ensuring sustainability is embedded early in asset and project design while achieving consistent regional delivery; and strengthening leadership ownership and capability. The committee emphasised proportionality, transparency and maintaining focus on real world outcomes as the strategy moves into delivery.

From September 2025, the committee monitored progress against the three strategic ambitions of

the Greener Railway Strategy and the supporting ambition to build a culture of sustainability.

In addition, the committee reviewed and updated its terms of reference to reflect the refreshed strategy and the requirements of the UK Corporate Governance Code 2024.

A railway fit for the future

The committee reviewed progress on decarbonisation, circular economy and long-term resilience, noting the following in particular:

- carbon emissions reduction targets were exceeded for the reporting period, with Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions remaining on track against long-term net zero trajectories
- circular economy outcomes remained strong, with high levels of material reuse and recycling, supported by innovation in low carbon materials, including reduced carbon concrete. The committee emphasised that the greatest opportunity to reduce carbon and waste lies at the design stage and encouraged earlier integration of sustainability into planning and decision-making. The committee also reviewed plans to procure green steel from UK suppliers where Network Rail is working with experts from across the supply chain to develop realistic and practical options. This green steel strategy will include a higher proportion of recycled rail fed into electric arc furnaces, which will achieve the steel quality that's needed, improving the circular economy for steel rail in the UK.

Progress continued on climate resilience, supported by improved understanding of climate risk and enhanced coordination of extreme weather forecasting through the Rail Operations Weather Service, using MetDesk as a single trusted forecast source.

A railway that cares for the environment

The committee reviewed environmental performance with particular focus on incident trends, air quality, biodiversity and land management:

- environmental incidents continued to show a positive trend, with no major incidents reported and serious incidents remaining low

- progress was reported against the development and delivery of air quality improvement plans for priority stations, with further work underway to standardise methodologies and measures of improvement
- biodiversity performance remained strong, with Network Rail maintaining a position of no net loss and increasing confidence in supporting data, alongside publication of case studies in the annual State of Nature report
- the community tree planting programme continued to perform well, contributing to biodiversity, community engagement and environmental outcomes
- challenges remained in defining, measuring and consistently recording habitat management plans and nature-based solutions, and the committee continued to monitor progress in this area.

Increased public and regulatory focus on vegetation management was noted, and the committee supported a second independent review, alongside improved communication to explain the environmental, safety and performance benefits of vegetation activity.

A railway that helps communities thrive

The committee considered progress on activities supporting communities and social value, including:

- volunteering participation, which continued to increase over the year, although participation remained slightly below the year-end target. The committee encouraged leadership-led and team-

based approaches to sustain momentum

- social value delivery, with a growing number of projects reporting positive social outcomes reflecting increasing maturity in measurement and integration into project delivery through the Rail Social Value Tool. The committee supported greater consistency and quality assurance in reporting, while emphasising the importance of maintaining focus on meaningful local outcomes rather than measurement alone.

The committee continued to encourage engagement with partners and suppliers to maximise community benefits through projects, procurement and delivery.

Culture of sustainability

Delivery of the strategy was underpinned by a continued focus on fostering a culture of sustainability across Network Rail.

The committee welcomed improved colleague perceptions of the organisation's environmental and social responsibility, as reflected in the Your Voice survey, alongside early evidence of greater integration into leadership decision-making and core business processes. This included work to strengthen sustainability data, metrics and assurance; continued rollout of sustainability training; and progress in embedding sustainability considerations into leadership behaviours and decision making. The committee emphasised the importance of proportional metrics and systems that support practical delivery rather than compliance-driven activity.

Planned activities for 2026/27

In the coming year, the committee will continue to monitor delivery of the Greener Railway Strategy, with particular focus on:

- maintaining momentum in strategy implementation and oversight of the delivery plan
- oversight of climate adaptation and weather resilience, including development of long-term regional adaptation plans and updates to asset, operational and maintenance standards
- continued progress on decarbonisation, including whole life carbon measurement, Scope 3 emissions, and adoption of zero-emission vehicles
- monitoring delivery of circular economy initiatives, including progress against the organisation's reuse metric
- review of social value outcomes and volunteer activity
- review the second vegetation management report, including recommendations and the organisation's action plan to deliver these
- development and implementation of clear sustainability metrics and supporting data systems, to underpin future planning, reporting and assurance.