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Front Cover:

To celebrate the creation of the Indian Section of the IRSE, we have a montage of the Operations Control Centre, Delhi Metro together with the old Signal Box panel, Howrah, Kolkata.

Both pictures were taken during the Inauguration Visit - see report on page 25.

Photos: Colin Porter

Have we forgotten the Maintainer?

Signalling and infrastructure projects feature regularly in Institution papers and within IRSE NEWS, yet in timescale terms the construction phase lasts only a fraction of the "in service" time. Where lessons learnt are discussed these usually only relate to the planning and construction phases. Why is this?

When a scheme is being developed it is often stated that the contract will be let on the basis of the "whole life costs" rather than just the initial costs that is until the tenders are received. Once the actual cost of the scheme becomes apparent, particularly where the tender cost exceeds the budget then the "value engineering" starts. Almost inevitably the items in the Specification which will assist in reliability and maintainability are the first to be targeted and removed.

The insertion of a "value engineering" phase into the tender review process often also means that the construction period is reduced. This reduced construction time can also affect the quality of the installation. The maintainer is now squeezed on both sides as some of the features of the scheme have been removed and some of the maintenance time and budget will have to be spent on work to improve the installation quality.

The application of new technology to a railway or even a maintenance area requires the maintenance and faulting staff to be trained and increases the number of equipment types they have to have competency in. Is this considered when new equipment is introduced? New equipment should, when it has bedded in, be more reliable than the equipment it replaces, but when it does fail this can result in the time to repair the failures being increased as the staff are less familiar with the kit. How much effort during project implementation is directed towards better maintenance tools?

The implementation of ERTMS is creating a new challenge for maintainers as a large part of the signalling equipment is no longer infrastructure but is now fitted on the trains and therefore mobile. ERTMS gives a global opportunity to share maintenance lessons especially from the pioneers where the IRSE with its international and growing membership is uniquely placed to keep projects focussed on the maintenance issues.

Probably 50% of the potential constituency of the IRSE are maintainers yet very few papers are directed at this aspect of keeping trains running safely and reliably. Why is this when there is much to share? We can all learn from innovations which have been introduced to make life easier for those at the front line. Is the lack of focus caused by the routine nature of maintenance, by modesty, by the feeling that others will criticise, or is it because many of them are not part of the mainstream company initiatives?

*Melvyn Nash
Chairman
Midlands & North Western Section*