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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH **RAIL**

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TEN YEARS: OLYMPIC STANDARD



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- **How '395s' transformed Kent**
- **Karen Boswell exclusive**
- **Training tomorrow's rail staff**

HITACHI


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FOR YOU

At Hitachi, high speed trains are in our DNA. From our extensive delivery record in Japan to our Class 395 Javelin™ fleet operating across HS1, we understand how important it is to connect cities and people using innovative solutions that work out-of-the-box. We are delivering new trains across the UK network, find out more here:

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WELCOME

The time has really flown by since we completed the build of the Ashford Train Maintenance Centre (TMC) ten years ago, and the very next day opened the doors to the first ever Japanese train to run on UK tracks.

Back in 2005 we set about taking the old railway sidings in Ashford and building a truly world-class facility, using experience from the UK but also from 'Bullet Train' maintenance facilities in Japan.

Looking back now, I believe that from nothing we really set a new standard for TMC design and operation that created a great place to work. And importantly, we put Hitachi on the map, with the big Hitachi sign becoming an iconic landmark visible from HS1!

It is extremely satisfying to have created more than 100 long-term jobs and picked the right team. We selected a good mix of experienced railway people alongside people from other industries, as well as the military. And very importantly, we had apprentices on site from day one. Some have progressed through the ranks and today are working in other areas of Hitachi Rail.

I'm pleased to say that we have a very loyal and highly skilled team. It is good to know that people enjoy their work and stay with us because Hitachi is a great employer and the Ashford centre is a clean, pleasant environment to work in.

Over the years we have injected £3 million

into the surrounding economy by using local suppliers such as Kent Metals, which has been with us since the beginning. And overall, 60% of our supply chain is sourced from the UK.

The local community benefit is mirrored by the impact of the high-speed trains on the Kent area.

For many commuters, it was hard to imagine that their 80-minute journey into London was to be replaced by a quick 38-minute train ride. Or equally, that a short journey would connect them to the Eurostar service taking them through the Channel Tunnel. The smooth high-speed train service, powered by our Ashford TMC, has proven to be highly beneficial for the economics of the wider region.

Finally, let me say that as Hitachi Rail's impact grows in the UK, with our bi-mode trains running between Wales and Paddington, the Azumas set to travel along the East Coast Main Line, and our electric commuter trains soon to be criss-crossing Scotland, our Ashford TMC has set the standard to which the rapidly expanding list of Hitachi TMCs should aspire.

I hope that when we look back in another ten years, we will be as proud of our other facilities as we are of Ashford today.

ALISTAIR DORMER
Senior Vice President,
Hitachi Rail Europe

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GOLD STANDARD



The Javelin fleet is enjoying great success and has had a regenerative effect across Kent, writes RICHARD CLINNICK

The domestic services on High Speed 1 have had a transformational impact on the region it serves.

They have also changed passenger expectations, with the usual complaints of reliability and punctuality considerably diminished, such is the performance of the Hitachi-built (and Hitachi-maintained) Class 395s.

The services were formally launched by then-Prime Minister Gordon Brown in December 2009, having operated for six months prior as a 'shadow service'. They were the headline act in terms of transport for the 2012 Olympic Games, moving millions of passengers over the six-week period with formidable efficiency.

But much more important is the improvement in service quality for those who use them on a day-to-day basis. Southeastern operates the HS1 domestic trains. Its Managing Director David Statham explains: "The High Speed 1 National Rail Passenger Survey satisfaction is 93%. That is by far the

best in the UK. By itself it would be the best performing franchise."

He says that the biggest challenge the railway faces is its own success. "The challenge is meeting the expectation," he warns. When the service was launched, the service carried 7.2 million passengers. Today there are 15.3 million passengers, a 112.5% increase. Ashford to London journey times

“ We have seen an increase in people from London moving to Kent. That is a boost to the economy, and it brings London salaries to Kent. ”

Stephen Gasche, Principal Transport Planner - Rail, Kent County Council

have gone from 83 minutes to 37 minutes for those using HS1. Visit Kent tourism accounted for 100,000 passengers in 2010 - now it's 890,000.

This also brings its own demands, but these are good pressures for Statham. "We have a limited number of trains that are working hard. We have 26 out of 29 in use every day, and they are delivering industry-leading miles per technical incident (MTIN) performance."

Looking at the market, it is obvious that the commuters dominate the user figures, but Statham is keen to highlight the rise in leisure travel. A report published by Visit Kent highlights that leisure users are now 30% of the overall total, and this is being analysed.

Statham says they are trying to grow that market. "I see the economics increasing for tourism. There are 890,000 tourists in the area. That's fantastic and helps regeneration. Margate and Folkestone, and Medway towns, are all growing." HS1 is the driver of this growth, he says. But other areas are growing off the back of HS1 too.

Two pairs of Class 395 Javelins at St Pancras International. They are operating the only domestic high-speed services in the UK, with the trains first introduced in June 2009. ANDY COWARD/RAIL.

He says: "There are two big indicators of its success. One is the hard evidence from NRPS, which can pick out the HS1 route. The levels of satisfaction have been over 90% since it opened.

"The second thing is people are commuting, and they can be difficult customers to please."

For Smith, punctuality is key to the success of the railway: "HS1 delivers that," he says. That is what passengers want most. "When you boil down the figures you see why people are happy," he says, talking of the 93% satisfaction.

"The passenger survey figures tell us that punctuality and reliability are no longer the main things passengers want to see improved. Now it's about station environment improvements."

Smith suggests that the standards set by HS1 are what the railway wants to maintain. "There's the frequency and the slightly ordinary beauty of the trains. It is very high quality. To put it simply. It does the job."

The introduction of the service, he explains, has really helped towns and stations on the route. "It is a psychological nature of connectivity," he explains of the high-speed services that continue into Kent from beyond Ashford. He highlights that Blackpool and its decline in service is what can happen if there is no through-service. "It shows you can get there [London] quickly. It is a sign of faith. It helps the coast."

The time savings achieved by the Javelin service, albeit using the premium price, means that the time savings are huge. "You can commute now," he says. And Smith knows the area well: "I was born in Kent. The economy in places along its coast was in a vicious cycle of decline. That has now been arrested and new

possibilities are opening up."

But there will always be new challenges to face: "You have to increase capacity. The only declining survey statistic in passenger satisfaction is the desire for space to sit and stand. You could get a seat before, so it is a victim of its success. Higher frequency and longer trains are needed.

"Southeastern also needs to continue to grow the off-peak market. Taking the family to the coast costs £50. That's roughly the cost of a tank of petrol. The promotion has got to find the optimum level."

Stephen Gasche is the Principal Transport Planner - Rail, for Kent County Council. He's played a key role in the development of services on the route, and the campaign to bring the high-speed services beyond the likes of Ashford, Dover and Folkestone.

He says of the Javelin service: "High speed to Kent was a step change in quality." The campaign has been vindicated in the passenger figures, he says. The financial crash at around the time the services were launched meant that initial development plans around Ebbsfleet did not happen, but there is now to be a Garden Town there, as well as a theme park. Government plans for housing mean thousands of families will be able to move to the area, and HS1 will serve those who commute into London and, increasingly, to Kent.

Gasche says of the Javelin service: "It is transformative. There is access to London but there is also value added for the Kent region.

"We have seen an increase in people from London moving to Kent. That is a boost to the economy, and it brings London salaries to Kent."

As well as the commuters, Gasche highlights the off-peak tourist market and says that Margate, Folkestone and Dover are proving really popular rail destinations.

KCC has been a keen campaigner in the almost eight years of HS operation in the county. "We campaigned for trains to

"Stratford is almost as big as St Pancras for numbers. It is regenerating and growing, and I think HS1 has helped that. It supports some of the best sporting events in the world. We took 8,000 people in 40 minutes away from the world athletics in August."

The franchise is due to be re-let next year, yet Statham remains focused on what can be done to improve. "How do you meet the demand? Kent County Council has said we need to keep growing the network." He warns though that not much more can be done to squeeze more from the '395' fleet.

But what do the passengers think? Transport Focus Chief Executive Anthony Smith is enthused by the railway, and talks of its success.

"When you look at the overall NRPS [National Rail Passenger Survey] figure for how satisfied passengers are with the trains themselves, it's 94%. That is one of the highest figures for a TOC. They are also notably clean - the figure for satisfaction on cleaning and upkeep is 95%."



Packed six-car trains led Southeastern to run 12-car high-speed trains to Sandwich for the Open Golf in 2011. Passengers leave the '395s' at Sandwich. The introduction of the HS trains has led to a massive boost in passenger numbers in the region, with tourist numbers rocketing from 100,000 to 890,000 and overall passenger figures on HS rising 129%. DAVID JENKINS.



A Class 395 Javelin stands at St Pancras International. Capacity at the station is at its limit, with stakeholders examining how capacity can be boosted. JACK BOSKETT/RAIL.



Southeastern 395024 races across Medway Viaduct. The six-car trains running off-peak need to be doubled according to stakeholders. Hitachi currently delivers 26 of the 29 trains per day for service, a figure likely to be increased. DAVID ANDREWS.

Deal, which had requested a high-speed link to London. We committed revenue funding for this and agreed on a 2011 start for an 18-month trial. We'd expected peak service to be busy."

At the start of the trial, he says, there were 12 season tickets in Deal sold for travel to London. "Now there are more than 100 on HS," he says. Journey time has been a key driver of that, but also the sense that Deal is directly connected to the capital. It means people have greater choice about where to live and have a better quality of life, says Gasche.

Trains to the coast have been such a success, Gasche explains, that Southeastern extended the operations so that the '395s' run around Kent all day. "That's a real example of investment in the region. People would not have been able to move here otherwise."

For Gasche, there are several positives to the Javelin service: "I always say it is not just fast; it is reliable, pleasant and comfortable. The staff's attitude is excellent, as is the service itself.

"It succeeded because it worked 'out of the box'. The key thing is that it provides a service

that people feel they can rely on."

KCC is contributing to the bids for the new Southeastern franchise and is talking to the Department for Transport about its vision. Says Gasche: "We have made a big, bold bid saying about a big uplift. That needs a larger fleet. The service needs to be 12-car at peak-time."

"Off-peak trains to Ashford, Kent, Dover and Folkestone need to be doubled. We also want high-speed services to Hastings, but we know that would depend on funding."

He talks of the pressures faced by the

“It succeeded because it worked ‘out of the box’. The key thing is that it provides a service that people feel they can rely on.”

Stephen Gasche, Principal Transport Planner - Rail, Kent County Council

operation: "I think HS1's Javelin service was underestimated. Economic models predicted figures based on data at the time, and it copes as well as expected, but there are now higher numbers of people standing."

However, he is positive: "Overall it has been a benefit to Kent and East Kent in particular."

Dyan Crowther is the Chief Executive of HS1 Ltd. The service operates on the railway she controls. More trains running on HS1 means more money for HS1 Ltd, which can then be reinvested. The railway, she says, has brought about significant regeneration and investment in areas that had been suffering from decline.

"Look at Stratford - it's gained a minimum of £3.8 billion in social regeneration benefits. The mixed-use development there is worth £10bn, and the area immediately around the station has gained £1.6bn in value."

She says the plans for Ebbsfleet Garden City would not have happened without HS1, and highlights what is possible for commuters relocating to use HS1's services. "From Central London, the journey takes 19 minutes. What



Southeastern's 1253 to St Pancras waits to leave Margate, formed of 395015. The introduction of direct trains to London via High Speed 1 has helped boost Kent's coastal towns such as Margate, with commuters moving to the region, while tourist numbers are also increasing. DAVID ANDREWS.

can beat that? OK, there's Richmond, but look at house prices there. Kent offers a similar quality of life - but far cheaper."

She says that Dartford, served by HS services via the Classic Network, has the fastest average house sales in the country, at an average of a fortnight from being put on the market to being sold. That, says Crowther, is down to the introduction of the high-speed services.

Reliability of the railway, and the trains, she says, is another reason for the growth. "My railway is 65 miles with four stations. We are small but perfectly formed. Do you know what the average delay on the railway is? Three seconds."

Collaboration is very much the driver for the operational success. HS1 Ltd works with Network Rail HS, Hitachi and Southeastern to ensure standards are maintained. DB Cargo UK and GB Railfreight operate freight on the route, and Eurostar also runs along HS1, of course, and together they ensure the operations on the line. "It is our approach to be very collaborative. It is vitally important that we all play a part in challenging capacity and providing solutions."

"HS1 has a very, very rosy future. There is a proven track record and it operates safely; it has a really solid foundation."

There are clear opportunities for the growth that Gasche calls for: "We operate at 50% capacity still. HS1 could be a release valve for the rest of the network. Our response to the franchise consultation is about finding more stock. The '395s' are reliable, but passengers also like to get a seat."

"Southeastern has started to experience a downward trend in experience because of seating. Longer trains would offer more capacity."

She warns of capacity demand: "In ten years' time Ebbsfleet will be surrounded by a town. That's the projection. Ebbsfleet will have a theme park. We have to think very carefully about the longer term and plan the capacity now."



On September 8 2016, a Class 395 Javelin leaves East Wear Bay, Folkestone. Towns such as Folkestone have recorded increased leisure and commuter travellers to and from London since the introduction of these direct trains via HS1. PHIL METCALFE.



Passengers leave a Class 395 at Stratford International. The number of users here is similar now to St Pancras, with the east London station's surrounding area benefitting from the introduction of the trains. The railway has brought billions of pounds in local revenue, and helped shift thousands of passengers during the 2012 Olympic Games. JACK BOSKETT/RAIL.



A Southeastern Class 395 arrives at Stratford International. JACK BOSKETT/RAIL.

Speaking about HS1 in general, Crowther says: "We have probably the most modern railway in Europe. We want to be pioneers for the next ten years. We want to innovate with Hitachi and the next franchise holder. The '395s' have no asset recording facility, for example. We've got a huge appetite for train data analysis - it's the pioneering spirit."

The introduction of the Javelin service has clearly had a dramatic effect on the region. The commuters flocking to live in Kent, a 112.5% increase in usage in less than a decade, and reports of house sales taking a fortnight tell the whole story.

But if it's celebrity endorsement you're after, how about this. American basketball player Kobe Bryant was spotted on a Javelin during the 2012 Olympics. When quizzed about why a multi-millionaire superstar sportsman would be using public transport, he said "If the public transport is this good, why use something else?"

Why indeed. ■

ENGINEERING THE FUTURE

Winning contracts and building innovative train fleets for the UK may be vital for Hitachi Rail Europe, but leaving a lasting skills and engineering legacy here is perhaps even more important for its leaders.

HRE had a humble beginning, a little over a decade ago, and only a handful of staff. Today it has more than 2,400 and that will increase again over the next couple of years.

The company will have 281 trains in passenger service by the end of 2020 and it is bidding for both the HS2 classic-compatible and Deep Tube Upgrade fleets. Both the latter contracts are massive, and both will likely require more innovation and more staff.

It is estimated that over the next five years, some 182,000 new engineers will be required by British businesses. But at the current rate of engineers entering the industry, the projected number falls woefully short. In the rail



“Our investment in the future knows no bounds. If we have customers who feel the same way, then all the better.”

Karen Boswell,
Managing Director, HRE

Hitachi's presence in the UK is about far more than building trains, says HRE Managing Director KAREN BOSWELL

industry, one in five engineers are over 55.

It is believed that HS2 alone will create 25,000 new jobs, including 2,000 apprenticeships.

Hitachi is leading the way when it comes to countering this problem, and it is an issue HRE Managing Director Karen Boswell is keen to address. She says: “While we were setting up the business we were also working with schools and university technical colleges [UTCs] teaching people about the future.

“We now have over 100 trainees. There are 58 apprenticeships at Newton Aycliffe and 14 graduates.

“I am passionate about working with the UTCs. There are 600 students in Durham UTC and we are setting up visits to our site for them. We also want to do that in Doncaster, Bristol, Swansea and London. You have to go back in history quite a way to find a similar level of encouragement for young staff.”

She says that the original Hitachi Train Maintenance Centre (TMC) in the UK, at Ashford, is not left out in this. “Ashford does some amazing stuff with the local schools and work placements, in which pupils can go to the depot for a week and learn valuable skills.

“I want to see us build more and more deep-rooted relationships like that.”

Boswell explains that there is a clear plan off the back of the current contract wins, as well as those it is bidding for. “The 27½-year maintenance deal we have enables us to do great things around innovations and creating a legacy. It gives us time and opportunities to develop.”

She points out that the company's legacy will be the performance of the trains it is building and maintaining, while regions in which the TMCs are located will also benefit.

By the end of the decade, HRE will have trains running to Inverness and Penzance (and all locations inbetween), with trains operated by Great Western Railway, Hull Trains, TransPennine Express and ScotRail. There will be TMCs at North Pole, Stoke Gifford, Swansea Maliphant, Bounds Green, Doncaster and Craigentenny, as well as the Newton Aycliffe site. “All the regions we interface with will benefit,” she says.

Boswell believes there is now an opportunity for substantial development of the railway workforce.

“The length of these deals means we can afford people opportunities to develop and learn, and to be able to take those skills elsewhere in the world. We have a diverse staff, and that brings us new and different ways of thinking. That inevitably leads to new ideas.”

She embraces the family atmosphere created at Ashford and hopes it will spread to the other TMCs within the UK, as the company grows.

“We have a fantastic philosophy at Hitachi. It's based on values set in 1910 about embracing and joining part of the family. If you engage with your people and empower your workforce then it will work well for you.”

But the company is not about to rest on its laurels. It's not just in technology that Hitachi seeks to innovate and grow ideas. Recruitment and training is vital, but so is offering opportunities to people who might otherwise be overlooked.

“We are socially innovating. We have a role to play, to develop the society. Hitachi is doing a lot with career transitions for ex-Forces people, injured servicemen and women and mental health groups.

“We are embracing a broad church, because that represents the diverse society we have today. How can you possibly know the answers to what people want if they are not represented?”

“Underpinning and inspiring the next generation is key to what we are doing,” she says.

For Hitachi, this is not rocket science. Boswell says there is so much evidence to support the belief that if you look after staff through training and engagement then the pride they feel for working for the company will have a positive effect. “You get a better business outcome through engaging with staff.

“Thinking about people's work/life balance, and how they impact each other, is important. We have a unique environment here.” Indeed, shift patterns have been changed at both



Karen Boswell with Stoke Gifford depot manager Gary Martin. HITACHI

Ashford and Newton Aycliffe, and staff have shown appreciation for this, while senior managers have also noticed positive results.

Lessons have been transferred from Ashford since it opened in September 2007. Both the positive and negative experiences have helped to develop what is carried out across the UK at the new TMCs. Says Boswell: “When the TMCs are established they will be staffed by excellent teams sharing in the benefits of that experience.”

Hitachi intends to innovate in technology by drawing on the expertise and capability within the global firm.

“Our investment in the future knows no bounds. If we have customers who feel the same way, then all the better,” she says.

Boswell cites recent discussions with HS1 Chief Executive Dyan Crowther, who wants to work with the firm to introduce what she believes is much-needed innovation on Britain's only high-speed line, HS1, where the UK's only domestic High Speed Train fleet, Hitachi's Class 395 Javelins, operate.

“My customers have that drive and determination. We need to help the businesses to innovate,” adds Boswell.

“We can draw on many different Hitachi companies, as we have done on maintenance optimisation.”

She discusses the possibilities surrounding smart technology and data, and says that there are real opportunities in this field. “One thing the rail industry is not short of is data, but how you use it is what counts. How do you use that information to pull ideas together?”

“Our technological optimisation is driving costs down. There's evidence of that at Stoke Gifford and Doncaster, where you can see the technology on the depots and the trains. The number of sensors on trains is staggering, as is the number of sensors on the depots.”

She says that the maintenance techniques developed at Ashford show what is possible. “Javelin performance figures are proof of what we can do.”

The performance of the '395s' is such that Crowther says HS1's delays are measured

in seconds, while Transport Focus' National Rail Passenger Survey shows passengers now take punctuality and reliability as a given and have shifted their focus to other aspects of the service, such as station facilities.

“Our vision is to bring the benefits of experience from Ashford to all the TMCs. At every depot, we are working with the teams there and improving them,” she says.

Nationally, Boswell explains, Hitachi has a dedicated team for maintenance. That is the culture and the philosophy of the company, she says. “We will have a team of over 1,000 by 2020.”

This is needed as Boswell believes there are plenty of opportunities out there. “There is a healthy pipeline [of contracts] in the UK and it is great to be a part of that. We will have trains running from the south west of England to the north of Scotland in the here and now. And there is plenty more to come.

“We want to bring the technology developed in Japan to this country. Exciting things are afoot.” ■

THE FUTURE THAT HITACHI BUILT

Hitachi Rail Europe's £82 million Newton Aycliffe train assembly facility in County Durham is clear evidence of the company's determination to grow in the UK.

Taking 665 days from the start of construction to opening, it is located on an industrial estate near Darlington. It is home to more than 1,100 staff, selected from around 36,000 applications, and is currently engaged in assembling trains for five different operators. It could yet be the home for the construction of 60-plus trains for HS2, and also helping with the UK's skills shortage by training engineers and manufacturing teams, as well as promoting apprenticeships and sponsoring a University Technical College (UTC) across the road.

When first opened in September 2015 by then-Prime Minister David Cameron, the plan was for 700 people. Hitachi Rail has since won further deals, and so has recruited more staff.

The focus on recruiting from the local area has provided a much-needed boost for a region where employment figures were in decline. The Japanese firm was attracted by the history of the area, and recognised its potential. People working at the site come from a variety of different backgrounds, such as the steel industry, or the military, and 99% are from the local area. The longest commute for an employee is about an hour, she suggests.

The company currently has three third year

RAIL reports on Hitachi's facilities, where local skills both old and new are helping to revive the area's prospects

apprentices who have just completed their studies and started working full time in the factory, 47 manufacturing apprentices and four second year apprentices; it is very much invested in the future. Four new apprentices started in September. HRE is also keen to promote diversity in its workforce. Harding explains there was a deliberate plan to recruit more women - one event attracted 120 women who wanted to find out more about the work available. Of those 120, 118 applied for positions and 15 were employed.

Out in the factory floor, vehicles include Class 800s for Great Western Railway and Class 385s for ScotRail in various stages of construction. Staff are allocated to specific tasks at specific stages. Some move with each vehicle as it passes through the various construction stages, but most stay with their specific tasks.

Andy Crowe used to build motorhomes, but has been with HRE since August 3 2015, before Newton Aycliffe officially opened. He says the future prospects for the company encouraged him to apply for the role. He's busy inside a Class 800/3 where a kitchen is being fitted, using skills learned

in his previous job. Crowe says his team has improved productivity already, with five-car Intercity Express Programme (IEP) sets completed in six days rather than ten. His son also works at the site as an apprentice in Section 2, where wiring work is carried out.

On board what will become 385114, Chris Daniels is busy working on the interior fittings. He says: "It was a new thing and I'd heard good reports from people who worked here. Hitachi wanted specific skills - they told me to leave the toolbox at home and come and learn something new. I've had similar roles before, but with Hitachi I've learned to do a lot of things I'd never done before. Building trains requires a unique set of skills."

Alongside Daniels is Chris Perkins. He worked at Nissan in Sunderland for 14 years, but says he's enjoyed working for HRE much more. "It doesn't feel like work, and that makes it easy to get out of bed in the morning." He says he travels 26 miles to get to work and car shares (a practice encouraged by HRE).

Elsewhere on the floor, inside another '385' vehicle, three women are busy working. "We do the harnessing and wires," says Team



Class 385s and Class 800s inside Newton Aycliffe on July 28. RICHARD CLINNICK.



Hitachi Rail Europe 800013 and 800005 move into Stoke Gifford depot on June 5. The £80 million facility near Bristol will employ four apprentices per year when it is fully operational. JOHN STRETTON.

→ Member Vicky Grainger. “We don’t move with the vehicle, and have always worked on the ScotRail trains.” Grainger joined HRE because it was a challenge. She’s working alongside 17-year-old Bryony Stonehouse, a first-year apprentice from Middlesbrough College. She’s learning manufacturing and operations. “I chose to come here,” she says enthusiastically. “It was a big company and the trains seemed good. I’ll be applying for a job here in July 2018.”

Section Leader Tommy Griffiths and Specialist Phil Lloyd work in the ScotRail production area. They have seen how Hitachi has set up its Pistoia plant in Italy (RAIL 828) and have now set about designing a production line for the County Durham facility. Griffiths works on the ‘385’ intermediate vehicles, while Lloyd works

The construction of a Class 385 continues at Newton Aycliffe on July 28. On the right is 17-year-old Bryony Stonehouse, a first-year manufacturing apprentice from Middlesbrough College. RICHARD CLINNICK.

“The local area has a strong legacy of technical and engineering jobs and our depot investment looks set to cement this reputation.”

Karen Boswell, Managing Director, Hitachi Rail Europe

across all coaches. Before HRE he worked in a steelworks in Teesside. He spent 12 years there, and six in the Royal Navy. He joined HRE in February 2016. “Working for HRE is a good opportunity,” he says. “It involves a lot of engineering, but there are plenty of skills learned in other professions that can be transferred to jobs here.”

In the test house, Paul Carr is one of the

team that ensures the trains built in Newton Aycliffe are fit to operate. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1999 and left in 2011. He says that “trains and planes are not that different” when it comes to his work. His job is to test the engineering and he calls it “massively hectic” but he loves it. One coach per day is tested, regardless of the type of train. He says a nine-car IEP takes two months, and that people from MTU, the firm that manufactures the engines, also work on site with him, supporting the testing of the generator units.

The trains enter the test house where they are weighed. Such is the ferocious nature of the delivery schedule there are 88 staff employed in the test facility alone. Carr is clear about the objective. “Our goal is to ensure the trains meet the right quality standards in terms of static and dynamic testing before they travel on to the maintenance centres.” During RAIL’s visit, five IEPs were undergoing testing inside with more outside awaiting their turn in the test house.

Carr explains that while most checks are



Above: Staff work on the fitting of a Class 800/3 kitchen at Newton Aycliffe. RICHARD CLINNICK.



Right: An engineer at Newton Aycliffe works on a Class 385 driving vehicle. RICHARD CLINNICK.

done before the vehicles leave the facility, the final part of the test is when they are released for delivery - the first time they’ll travel at 100mph.

Back in the facility, Paul Johnston explains how he recently brought his father to the site. Harking back to the legacy of the region, Johnston Sr worked in Darlington North Road before its closure.

“He loved it here. It was steam in his days, but he was amazed by how clean it was here. He wanted to stay!”

Johnston has been with HRE since March 2016 in his role as Team Member. He joined the company from Fujitsu. He admits it was a gamble, but he was attracted by the growth opportunities. He works on the ScotRail assembly lines.

While Newton Aycliffe may be hogging the headlines for HRE, it has depots across the UK, and will, by the end of the decade, employ some 2,000 staff.

Such facilities include Doncaster, which is currently being used to commission IEPs for Great Western Railway and, shortly, Virgin Trains East Coast. It will be the home for the VTEC fleet. Built on the site of the former steam shed (and, latterly, DB facility), the depot will employ 250 people. This is another

facility where Hitachi has invested some serious money (£80m). By the middle of the year, 60 people had started work there, and that is set to increase when the next wave of recruitment gets under way.

HRE’s aim is to focus on recruiting local engineers with experience in mechanical and/or electrical work. Apprenticeships began in September. The company also wants to recruit from groups often underrepresented in rail, including women and young people. It’s something in which HRE Managing Director Karen Boswell is a passionate believer, and she’s been vocal in encouraging the industry’s determination to recruit a workforce that more closely reflects the general population. One way this is being achieved is through forging links with schools and local community groups.

Regarding Doncaster’s depot, General Manager for East Coast Maintenance Geoff Elliott says: “Our newly built depot is a clean and modern environment which breaks all the stereotypes. We are offering people the opportunity to work on 21st century trains using industry leading technology and tailored training.”

“Doncaster is the perfect location for bringing new talent and skills into the rail

industry. The local area has a strong legacy of technical and engineering jobs and our depot investment looks set to cement this reputation.”

Another new facility is HRE’s depot at Stoke Gifford, which plays a key role in the IEPs entering traffic with GWR. More than 150 staff have been recruited for the depot in a wide range of roles. HRE is keen to build upon the region’s engineering legacy, which it says includes transport achievements such as Concorde. Like Doncaster, it cost £80m and the plan is to create a long-term transport hub hosting a wide range of skills. Additionally, four apprentices per year will be recruited once the site is fully operational.

Gary Martin, Stoke Gifford Depot Manager, said: “This facility will soon become a source of great local pride, producing the new trains and servicing them to the highest standard.”

“We are also investing in a new generation of rail workers. We want the widest range of talents and skills.”

Hitachi may, currently, be known for its assembly facility in the North East and the trains entering traffic, but in the longer term its dedication to developing the railway staff of tomorrow could well be its true UK legacy. ■



Employees, Southeastern colleagues and suppliers were all welcomed to the Hitachi Ashford TMC Friends and Family open day on September 16, celebrating ten years of the site. HITACHI.

ASHFORD - HITACHI'S CORE ASSET

Ashford depot is where it all began for Hitachi. Back when it was Hitachi Rail UK, the company's Kent depot was officially opened on October 2 2007 by the then Secretary of State for Transport Ruth Kelly.

At the time, four of the 29 Class 395s had been delivered from Kasado, Japan, and these pre-series trains were being used for testing and training. Ten years on, the trains are still operating from the site, while key members of staff who were there on the first day are still working at the depot, albeit in different roles.

Facilities Manager Dane Blackman says of the Train Maintenance Centre (its new official title): "it feels like my second home. There are a lot of guys here who have grown with the company." He reels off some names of colleagues and what they now do; they seem a close-knit group. "Ashford creates a sense of loyalty," he agrees.

When he joined Hitachi, the depot had yet to open. "I think we were based on the second floor of Ashford International Hotel at the time. I started on September 7 2007, and I was working in depot services initially. One of the first main tasks was the handover of the depot and commissioning."

Before he joined the railway, he worked for a building maintenance company. Quietly spoken, Blackman freely admits: "To be honest, I wasn't aware of the depot until I saw the advert. I don't regret applying for a job here."

Hitachi's success in the UK is built from Ashford. RICHARD CLINNICK talks to some of the people who make it tick

When the depot opened, he says: "I went on to work on testing the equipment - then capacity, with things like the train wash. There were four of those at the time." Hitachi actually took over part of the depot on his first day, and it's certainly grown since: "When I started we had 15 staff. Now we have 180. There are also quite a few contractors." He's learned a lot too: "I now have a better insight into risks to our operations. And that gives you a wider appreciation of things like service delivery."

His most challenging time during a decade of employment was the Olympic Games in 2012: "The pressure was constant. We had to work extra hard to meet the demand."

Changes in his time there include depot modifications and the installation of various pieces of equipment.

"Hitachi winning the Intercity Express Programme (IEP) contract was a big thing." It meant an expansion, and rapid deployment to premises in Holborn.

"The new premises were needed fast, and I was the only facilities manager at the time."

Blackman says his success in managing that was his proudest moment. He has also been involved in specifying Hitachi's IEP depots

across the UK: "I tried to make them all have the same feeling."

For the future, he says: "We need a three to five-year plan for depot maintenance. I intend to be here for that because I want to see it through."

"No two days are the same. As I've progressed here, the team spirit has always been strong, and I know that our culture will spread to the other sites."

When visiting Ashford depot, receptionist/administrator Karel Bailey (aka 'Welly'), is the cheerful face that will likely greet you. "I have been here for ten years. I worked for Grant Rail before, which was on the same site."

Known throughout the UK team, Bailey notes one particular change: "At first we just guided ourselves in our roles. Since the IEP deal we are now part of a much bigger family. The transition was difficult, but it's all change for the good."

One of the perks of the job is meeting various people who visit the site. "My favourite visitor was John Craven - I kept the signing-in page," she giggles. "I like all the celebs!"

She says she has developed with the role, and the fact that she is "nosey" (her own self-appraisal) means she chats with staff at other sites too.

"I have been to other Train Maintenance Centres. They feel similar in a really good way and are developing their 'Hitachi character'. I feel proud of this place and I love being here."

She explains how staff visiting from Japan get a warm welcome from the Ashford team: "The guys from Japan bring things like food, so I bring in things for them. We open our homes to them when they're here as they are away from their own homes for ages. Getting involved and getting stuck in like that is part of working here."

Ashford's TMC Manager Mark Hughes →

“If it wasn't for Ashford, Hitachi in the UK would not be a success.”

Mark Hughes, TMC Manager, Hitachi Rail Europe



Facilities Manager Dane Blackman. PAUL BIGLAND.



TMC Manager Mark Hughes. PAUL BIGLAND.



Class 395s lined up inside Ashford Train Maintenance Centre. PAUL BIGLAND.

→ left the firm for a while before returning, and eventually taking over the management of the site. He says of Ashford: "It was the key to IEP. If it wasn't for Ashford, Hitachi in the UK would not be a success."

The Olympics was a crucial time, according to Hughes. "We had no technical casualty; no failures. Everyone stepped up. It was teamwork, it has always been about that here."

Lessons from the development of Ashford have been shared with other TMCs, he says: "It's in all our interests for us to pass on any experience we can."

"The biggest change has been the exams and structure here. Another big positive thing is the change in shift roster, which was done to improve the work/life balance of staff. It used to be three shifts, but we moved that to days and nights."

Now the daytime shift focuses on maintenance, while night-time staff work on defects. Planned maintenance is done during the day.

He says Ashford has hosted visitors from other depots: "Bounds Green staff have visited here. The staff building and setting up Doncaster have been here. We have hosted visits for Swindon ROC and Kent Integrated Control Centre." They're all keen to learn about how his depot has kept this bespoke fleet running.

"Ashford has been key for vital accreditation. It's a prerequisite for the bidding process. Without that, we couldn't have bid," he adds.

Chris Lawes is a Principal Logistics Operative. Like Blackman, he was working for Hitachi when it was based at Ashford International Hotel, where it had a staff of

about 12 people.

"I worked in procurement for a soft drinks company before I came here. When I joined, my role involved getting the depot up and running."

"Coming here was a massive challenge. I was building the site while Japan secured everything. A lot was still arriving when we moved in. We had to catalogue everything. That was a massive task in itself."

He says his team's responsibility is to get the trains out into traffic by supplying the correct parts. "We run the stores and the day-to-day stuff. It works well. I enjoy it." All this was a learning curve because the company had not done this type of maintenance before, he says.

For the future: "We've got to find more suppliers who can understand our urgent need for parts and work at the pace we need. In this job you don't always know what'll happen so you have to be ready. But I like the challenge, it's so varied."

He says the biggest change in the past decade has been the people. "Staff here can move up into some good roles. Hitachi is really developing its workforce."

He says of the TMC and the way it works now: "I'm really proud of this place. I'm here for as long as I enjoy it."

Lawes was also involved in the open day, held for families on September 15, to mark the depot's tenth anniversary. In his procurement role he was able to acquire items that could be donated for charity raffles. One particular deal, he explains with a perfectly straight face, is sure to save the company quite a bit of cash, and go down well with the team: "I got us 40,000 biscuits for the open day. Why? Because I could!" It's that camaraderie and ingenuity that has served the depot so well. It's the people that make Ashford. ■



Principal Logistics Operative Chris Lawes. PAUL BIGLAND.



Receptionist/Administrator Karel 'Welly' Bailey. PAUL BIGLAND.