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| DATE        | 8 <sup>th</sup> October 2015 |
| Circulation | 22, 000                      |

# Rail Professional

# Amanda White

**A**manda White, head of rail at Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) was recently named the North West's 32nd most influential woman in business in a list compiled by business magazine, *Insider North West*.

This accolade alongside other industry awards and commendations recognises White's significant influence over the future of transport in Greater Manchester, the creation of the Northern Powerhouse and within the industry as a whole. Here, she discusses her career and current work in Greater Manchester.

**Where did your career in the rail industry begin?**

I studied mechanical engineering at the University of Leeds and did a summer work placement at Network Rail. I'd always loved the logic and challenges involved in maths and physics and really enjoyed my degree and the placement. Straight out of university I

joined Network Rail's team as a trainee electrification and plant Engineer, first in York and then in Doncaster.

From there I moved into scheme design, studying for an MSc in railway systems engineering and moving to Network Rail's head office in London to specialise in design; specifying engineering requirements for major enhancements projects. Through the design process you create a legacy – something new which optimises and improves services for rail users.

**What first interested you in the rail industry?**

My start in the industry was a bit of a happy accident – although I was genuinely interested in the summer placement at Network Rail, my decision to apply was definitely based on the fact that the job was close to my parents' home. That said, once I dipped a toe in I quickly realised what an exciting place the rail industry is.

When I first started I was driven by the desire for my work to make an impact

on society and on the lives of individuals. Transport plays a major role in connecting people to friends, family, work and education as well as to services. It's not about stations and track; it's about services and the people who use them.

It is widely recognised that there is a huge resource shortage in rail and a personal commitment of mine is to promote careers in the industry, making young people aware of the diverse and exciting career options available. As part of this I am involved with the Routes into Rail project, which aims to make the industry more accessible. I am also a mentor for mechanical engineering graduates new to the industry and sit on the IMechE railway division board. I am often asked about being a woman in our industry and work closely with both Women in Rail and First Women, but what I think is most important, is to promote careers in rail across the board, supporting young talent and ensuring that the industry grows and retains the skills we need.



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## RAIL PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEW

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### How has your career evolved?

My current role is very much a consolidation of all of my experience to date. From Network Rail's scheme design team, I moved to join HS2 Ltd as a senior route engineer in the North West. This is an exciting time for transport in the UK and especially in the North of England. Large scale interventions such as the Northern Hub Project HS2 and the Northern Powerhouse rail project are set to transform connectivity in the North and I wanted to be a part of that vision. I joined TfGM in 2014 with the same feeling of excitement. My role affords me the opportunity to make a difference every day to passengers in Greater Manchester and ensure that improvements to rail connect with other modes of transport to create an integrated network which makes travel easier around the region.

This vision is shared by my team at TfGM where we work to integrate rail with other modes of transport across the region. We also play a key role in both Rail North and Transport for the North where we work to inform northern transport strategy and drive economic growth across the region. TfGM's mission statement is 'making travel easier' and this really is core to the organisation.

### What is your team responsible for at TfGM?

I head up the rail team, which oversees rail policy in Greater Manchester, working closely with train operators, local authorities and the DfT to improve services. Our work is integral to making travel easier for everyone who lives in, works in or visits our city-region.

We're a growing team, which is down

to the Greater Manchester Agreement, which gives more devolved powers to

the combined authority. This means our organisation is evolving to provide travellers with a unified, multi-modal system and a single point of contact.

Our team works very closely with Toc's to explore performance improvement, report real-time information to passengers, and specify new rail service improvements in the North West. We work in partnership with Network Rail and Toc's to deliver major engineering projects in our region such as the electrification of the Manchester Preston line which involves the reconstruction of the Farnworth Tunnel.

We are also extremely successful in securing funding which supports small improvements that have a big positive impact on local travellers, such as re-painting train stations, installing customer



information screens and fitting CCTV to improve safety for travellers.

On a pan-northern level, we work with Rail North and Transport for the North to maximise the region's potential. Through our team's close work with operators and understanding of the service performance of rail in Greater

Manchester, we are key contributors to the strategic transport planning in the

North of England, supporting in the development of strategies to transform northern connectivity and create a single, vibrant and growing economy across the North.

### What does the future hold for rail in Greater Manchester?

This is such an exciting time to be involved in rail and transport within Greater Manchester. Looking to the future, our strategy team has just produced the 2040 Vision for Transport in our city region, which explores all types of travel, from accessing global markets to transport's role in improving local neighbourhoods. It also identifies the role of transport in supporting long-term economic growth, improving people's quality of life, and tackling pollution and environmental impacts across Greater Manchester.

Rail plays a crucial part in realising this vision and it is the job of my team to prepare Greater Manchester's rail network for the long-term growth afforded by devolution, exploring opportunities to improve services for local people, businesses and visitors to the region. Part of this work involves examining options to take increased responsibility for the ownership and operation of stations in Greater Manchester. Our aim is to implement these changes during the new Northern and TPE franchise and we are working closely with industry partners to ensure the changes we make have a positive impact on services in Greater Manchester.

Also key to realising the 2040 Vision are a number of infrastructure projects including the Northern Powerhouse and the opening of HS2 stations at

Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport which will have a major impact on our region's connectivity.

### What's the biggest challenge the rail industry will face in the future?

This is an interesting time for the transport community as a whole with the scale and pace of change created by the UK's devolution agenda creating both opportunities and challenges. With the creation of Transport for the North and a focus on rail within Greater Manchester, we have the opportunity to implement meaningful changes which



# Women in Rail

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will genuinely enhance connectivity but which raise expectations of heightened delivery before all the elements are fully embedded. The devolution of rail stations presents new challenges in legislation, safety, commercial, financial, and civil engineering for the organisation to resolve but in turn it represents an opportunity to improve facilities, which has never before been afforded to a UK public transport authority on this scale.

*For more information, visit [www.tfgm.com](http://www.tfgm.com)*