



Women in Rail Trustee Story Spotlight – Shona Clive

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Making every voice heard and count

When I look back at my career and journey through the rail industry, I often find myself smiling at the path it's taken me on. Rail wasn't something I grew up thinking I would work in, yet it has become one of the most rewarding and dynamic spaces I could ever imagine being part of. And at the heart of that experience is people and providing opportunities for others. That's why being involved with Women in Rail is so important to me, and why I feel privileged to serve as Vice Chair.

As a person, I've never been someone who seeks the spotlight or wants to be front and centre. My involvement with Women in Rail is not about me, it's about what I can do for others. I became a trustee because I wanted to make a difference, particularly for women, by helping to create opportunities and giving them the chance to thrive in their own careers. I care deeply about supporting those quieter voices that may otherwise go unheard, and I find real joy in helping others succeed. For me, lifting others up, creating space for them to shine, and ensuring that every woman feels empowered to do good and achieve her full potential is reward itself.

Even applying for the role of Vice Chair felt daunting, I hadn't had an interview for over twenty years, and I know just how intimidating those situations can be. The thought of putting myself forward pushed me well outside my comfort zone, and I carried plenty of self-doubt into the process. But I am so glad I did.

Taking that step has been rewarding in so many ways, not only professionally, but personally too. It has given me the chance to contribute to something meaningful, while also helping me to overcome some of my own fears and insecurities. What once felt overwhelming has turned into a source of pride and growth, and I hope my experience encourages others to take a chance on themselves as well.

The Industry

Rail is a sector with enormous potential, both for the country and for the people who work in it. But historically, it hasn't always been seen as a welcoming or obvious career choice for women. Too often, rail was perceived as "male-dominated," something technical or inaccessible. And yet, once you step inside, you realise how wide the opportunities really are, engineering, operations, frontline, technology, customer service, digital transformation, sustainability, the list goes on. I've now had over thirty years in this industry, starting back when it was British Rail and still today, Rail is as relevant now as it was then.

One of the key challenges our industry faces is the skills gap, and this is something I feel passionately about addressing through Women in Rail. We know there is an absolute link between the programmes we deliver and the challenges we face as a sector. By working with schools to inspire young people, supporting returners to rebuild their careers, and championing apprenticeships as vital routes into the industry, we can help to close that gap.

It's about ensuring that women, at every stage of their journey, have the opportunity, encouragement, and support to step into the rail sector and thrive. Through Women in Rail, I want us to play an active role in building a stronger, more diverse pipeline of talent for the future.

What we do, we do it well

What Women in Rail does, at its very best, is shine a light on those opportunities and open the doors wider for all. It provides visibility and encouragement to women who might otherwise not have considered this industry. It creates networks of support, mentoring relationships, and safe spaces for women to share their experiences. Most importantly, it helps to change the perception of rail from a closed club to a welcoming, forward-looking, inclusive environment, this is a critical piece of our society.

For me personally, being part of this movement is about leaving the industry better than we found it. Rail is in the middle of profound change, decarbonisation, digitalisation, re-shaping the passenger experience, and to meet these challenges we need diversity of thought, creativity, and fresh perspectives. Women in Rail is one of the ways we make sure that happens.

Why Regional Groups Are the Heartbeat of Women in Rail

It's one thing to talk about diversity and inclusion at a national level, it's another thing entirely to make it real in someone's working life. That's what our regional groups do. They bring people together. They run local events, local initiatives, and networking evenings. They make it possible for someone who might be the only woman in her team to suddenly feel like part of a much wider community.

I've seen first-hand the impact this has. I've met women who came to their first regional event nervous and unsure, who left with new friends, mentors, and a sense that they belonged in this industry. Those connections often lead to opportunities they might never have found otherwise.

For me, that's where the magic of Women in Rail happens, not just in the big national conferences or headline initiatives, but in the day-to-day support and encouragement that happens in our regions. They are the grassroots, the foundation, and the future.

What I Think of Rail and Its Opportunities

People often ask me, why rail? And I always say, because rail is about more than trains. It's about connecting people, communities, and economies. It's about shaping the way our society moves, works, and grows. It's about sustainability, innovation, and collaboration and rail really is the greenest form of public transport, and I do believe Rail will be forefront and centre for years to come, I mean, where else gets the amount of public funding as rail does.

Whether you're a school leaver, a graduate, a mid-career professional looking for a change, or someone re-entering the workforce, there is a role in rail for you. I think we sometimes underestimate the scale of possibility here. We talk about the "skills gap" and the "talent pipeline," so what excites me is the chance to invite people in who bring different perspectives. Rail doesn't need everyone to look and think the same way, it needs people from all walks of life, with fresh ideas and the confidence to challenge the status quo. That's where growth and innovation come from.

The Importance of Belonging

One theme I keep coming back to in my own reflections is belonging. It's not enough just to recruit more women into rail. We have to create cultures where women stay, thrive, and lead. Belonging means being able to bring your whole self to work, without fear of judgement or exclusion. It means being heard in meetings, being considered for promotions, being valued for your contributions, even the quietest voice needs to be heard.

Women in Rail helps foster that sense of belonging. It gives women role models, allies, and visible proof that they do have a place here. And once you feel you belong, you're far more likely to stay and build a career. That's how we shift the industry in the long term.

My Hopes for the Future

Looking ahead, I want to see Women in Rail continue to grow its reach, particularly through our regional groups and mentoring schemes. I want to see us partnering more with schools, universities, and community organisations, to show young women that rail is an industry worth considering.

I also want to see more men involved. Gender equity isn't a "women's issue", it's something that benefits everyone. Some of our strongest advocates and allies are men who understand the value of diverse teams. I'd love to see that allyship deepen across the sector.

And finally, I want rail to be known as a place where anyone can thrive, regardless of gender, background, ethnicity, or circumstance. An industry that reflects the communities it serves, and that takes pride in its inclusivity.

A Personal Reflection

On a personal level, I sometimes think about the younger version of myself, just starting out, not entirely sure of my path. If I could go back and speak to her, I'd tell her, you belong here. You have a voice, your perspective matters, and you don't need to change who you are to fit in.

That's the message I now want to share with every young woman stepping into rail. Whether you're an engineer on site, a trainee train driver, a graduate in technology, a manager in operations, or a student just beginning to explore careers, you belong. And you are part of something bigger than you realise.

Being part of Women in Rail is a responsibility I take seriously, but it's also a joy. I get to be part of a movement that is changing lives, shaping careers, and strengthening our industry for the future. Paddle boarding and walking my dog on the beach gives me space to reflect and recharge. These moments of balance and wellbeing mirror the values I champion through Women in Rail, helping others feel supported and thrive.

Rail is about journeys, and my journey so far has been made richer by the people I've met through Women in Rail. I am proud of what we've achieved, and even more excited about what lies ahead. Together, we can build a railway industry that is open, inclusive, and, thriving, for women, for men, for everyone.

Thank you so much for reading my story, I feel very privileged to be here to help others.

Shona

Vice Chair, Women in Rail

For more information on Women in Rail, please visit: www.womeninrail.org or contact wr@womeninrail.org