



The finalists for the Inaugural NZ Rail Excellence Awards 2025

EMERGING LEADER OF THE YEAR

Recognising outstanding early and mid-career professionals (less than 10 years in the rail industry) who exhibit extraordinary leadership qualities, technical excellence, and the vision to tackle complex industry challenges with fresh approaches-individuals whose trajectory clearly indicates their potential to become tomorrow's influential industry leaders.

Danielle Ah Kuoi, Head of Train Crew, Auckland One Rail

Taking the helm as Head of Train Crew at Auckland One Rail during a critical four-month secondment, Danielle Ah Kuoi navigated complex operational challenges while leading a large, diverse team with remarkable effectiveness. Her nomination for the Emerging Leader Award recognises her exceptional ability to balance demanding performance and financial pressures without compromising safety or team morale. Building trust across all organisational levels, Danielle has fostered a culture where accountability and mutual respect flourish. Her initiatives have measurably improved crew engagement and operational efficiency. She leads by example, showing resilience in challenging situations while genuinely caring for her team's development.

Danielle has made a significant impact through mentoring emerging talent, championing diversity and inclusion, and advocating for recognition of frontline excellence. Her collaborative approach has inspired renewed pride and professionalism throughout the train crew department. She actively contributes to cross-functional initiatives and brings valuable frontline perspective to strategic discussions. Her leadership has established her as a respected voice with significant impact and boundless potential in New Zealand's rail sector. Her insights are grounded in experience and delivered with integrity, making her a deserving candidate for the Emerging Leader award.

Michelle Hancock, Investment Planning Manager, KiwiRail

Since joining KiwiRail in mid-2022, Michelle Hancock has rapidly established herself as a standout mid-career professional worthy of the Emerging Leader Award. As Investment Planning Manager within the Strategic Metro Investments team, she brings strategic vision to both Auckland and Wellington metro networks, but it's her role as Project Director for the Avondale-Southdown rail corridor that truly showcases her leadership potential. This Auckland project represents New Zealand's first greenfield rail corridor development in decades and stands as the region's most critical upcoming rail initiative.

Navigating a challenging landscape of constrained funding and complex urban development considerations, Michelle has broken from traditional approaches to craft an innovative, logical

programme. Her intellectual flexibility, resilience, and confidence have enabled her to forge new pathways in rail planning while gaining the trust of diverse, high-performing professionals. Michelle actively mentors others while enhancing team cohesiveness, clearly positioning herself among the future leaders of New Zealand's rail industry and demonstrating the qualities essential for an emerging leader in this sector.

Ryan Brooks, Project Manager, Downer Group NZ

Ryan Brooks has established himself as an exceptional leader through his transformative role in the Wiri to Quay Park rail upgrade from 2020 to 2025. Overseeing three major packages — including critical works at Middlemore Hospital, Puhinui to Middlemore, Wiri Junction, and Westfield Junction — Ryan delivered over 4km of complex civil and structural works. His portfolio encompassed formation work, drainage systems, services, overhead line equipment, retaining walls, and signal structures through Auckland's most congested corridor. Within Package 2, he achieved zero reportable injuries across 1.1 million work hours. His innovative redesign of more than 900m of retaining walls accelerated the programme while maintaining exemplary community relations — demonstrating his technical excellence and stakeholder engagement capabilities.

Beyond delivery, Ryan embedded sustainability throughout the project, with initiatives that diverted 75% of waste from landfill and reduced embodied carbon by 51%. A standout feature was his seamless coordination across KiwiRail interfaces — including Track and Signal teams — as well as Auckland Transport, Auckland One Rail, and numerous stakeholders with competing priorities. His ability to maintain momentum in a live rail environment while aligning multiple agencies distinguishes him as an emerging leader in New Zealand's infrastructure sector. Ryan's comprehensive approach continues to elevate standards for safety protocols, sustainability practices, and stakeholder collaboration, making him an invaluable asset to major infrastructure development and a model for future project leaders across the transportation sector.

Brandon Robins, General Manager – Operations, Transdev Wellington

Stepping into the role of General Manager of Operations at Transdev Wellington in late 2024, Brandon Robins has quickly distinguished himself as a nominee for the Emerging Leader Award through his transformative approach to operational leadership. In under a year, he has orchestrated a remarkable team rebuild, prioritising strong internal people leaders while ensuring diversity across the organisation. His leadership philosophy centres on empowerment and development, creating a foundation of trust and accountability that has significantly improved engagement with both the Rail and Maritime Transport Union and Greater Wellington Regional Council.

As a visible, hands-on leader who works alongside frontline teams during disruptions and daily operations, Brandon has created an environment where feedback is actively sought and implemented. His advocacy for "True Performance" - measuring success by actual passenger experience rather than just contractual metrics - has refocused projects across the business on reliability and customer satisfaction. His exceptional leadership potential has been recognised internationally, with his selection to attend the Transdev Group Executive Conference in France in 2025, representing Wellington in global discussions on innovation and customer-centric performance.

RAIL IMPACT EXCELLENCE AWARD: SUSTAINABILITY & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Honouring excellence in initiatives that harness the power of rail to address our most pressing challenges-whether through innovative environmental solutions that advance sustainability goals or through ground-breaking programs that create more diverse, equitable, and inclusive industry participation. This award recognises that leadership in either sustainability or social responsibility represents a significant contribution to the industry's future.

Malia Vehikite, Energy and Sustainability Advisor, KiwiRail

As one of the driving forces behind KiwiRail's Steel Wheels initiative, Malia has helped transform how the company communicates carbon benefits to customers while supporting the organisation's ambitious target of reducing emissions by 40% by 2035. Her, along with the wider team's, comprehensive enhancement of the Steel Wheels methodology involved managing the full project lifecycle, implementing technical improvements to ensure robust calculations, and leading external verification processes to meet the highest standards. The impact of her work is evident in the dramatic expansion of Steel Wheels report distribution - from just 24 customers to nearly 100 - strengthening the credibility of KiwiRail's sustainability messaging.

Malia's technical expertise extended to developing KiwiRail's carbon calculator, where she created verified emissions factors for rail freight, Interislander and passenger services. Her collaborative, customer-focused approach has established Steel Wheels as a trusted tool for carbon communication that supports the case for modal shift from road to rail. Beyond her professional contributions, Malia helped launch the Pasifika Network at KiwiRail and has served on its organising committee since 2022, exemplifying the values of innovation and integrity that make her an ideal candidate for the Rail Impact Excellence Award in Sustainability & Social Responsibility.

Adam O'Sullivan, Operational Improvement Manager – Sustainability, KiwiRail

Adam O'Sullivan, Operational Improvement Manager – Sustainability at KiwiRail, exemplifies excellence in environmental leadership as a nominee for the Rail Impact Excellence Award. During his 14-year tenure, Adam transformed KiwiRail's sustainability initiatives through several high-impact projects. His leadership of the Driver Advice System achieved over 90% compliance in FY25, successfully shifting locomotive engineers from scepticism to widespread acceptance. His groundbreaking Remote Offline Project installed switches on 53 locomotives, enabling trailing engines to be shut down from the lead cab, conserving approximately 1.2 million litres of fuel annually while enhancing safety and reliability.

Adam's Locomotive Idling Reduction Project has decreased nationwide idle time by 52%, eliminating 620 tonnes of CO₂ emissions yearly. As an active contributor to KiwiRail's Carbon Zero Programme, he consistently identifies new opportunities to reduce emissions while fostering accountability across teams. His comprehensive efforts are instrumental in KiwiRail's progress toward reducing carbon emissions by 40% by 2035. Beyond his professional achievements, his volunteer work with rail heritage groups demonstrates his dedication to the wider rail community, training volunteer steam train drivers and preserving rail history. Through innovation, persistence, and collaborative leadership, Adam is transforming KiwiRail's environmental footprint and setting new standards for sustainability in the rail industry.

Brandy Smith, Stakeholder Manager, Downer Group NZ

With exceptional stakeholder engagement skills that bridge community needs and infrastructure development, Brandy Smith stands as a compelling nominee for the Rail Impact Excellence Award in Sustainability & Social Responsibility. Her leadership across two major projects - the Wiri to Quay Park Third Main Line and the Homai Station upgrade - demonstrates how thoughtful community engagement transforms construction challenges into inclusive development opportunities. Her achievements include earning praise from the blind and low vision community for the seamless Homai Station project delivery and fostering positive relationships with residents through construction adaptations, such as implementing alternative methods to protect community wellbeing.

Brandy pioneered inclusive engagement with the blind and low vision community, collaborating with specialised organisations like Blind Low Vision NZ to ensure accessibility remained prioritised throughout construction. Along the Wiri to Quay Park corridor, her empathetic approach - from personalised communications to gift baskets during disruptions - maintained community trust despite significant impacts from noise and night works. Her ability to navigate sensitive situations with residents facing piling activity in their backyards demonstrated exceptional interpersonal skills. Now mentoring others in stakeholder roles, Brandy's work sets a benchmark for community-driven leadership that balances infrastructure progress with genuine social responsibility, demonstrating how rail development can advance while honouring community needs.

INSPIRATIONAL WOMAN IN RAIL

Celebrating the outstanding achievements and contributions of women who are breaking barriers, driving innovation, and demonstrating exceptional leadership within New Zealand's rail industry. By recognising these trailblazers, we aim to increase visibility of female talent, inspire the next generation of women in rail, and accelerate progress toward a more diverse, equitable, and high-performing sector.

Bobby Fischer, KiwiRail Auckland Metro Programme Director, KiwiRail

Spearheading one of Auckland's most ambitious rail infrastructure transformations with visionary leadership and collaborative spirit, Bobby Fischer stands as an exceptional nominee for the Inspirational Woman in Rail Award. As Programme Director of the Auckland Metro Programme at KiwiRail, she oversees multi-billion-dollar projects including the Pukekohe-Papakura electrification, the new third main between Wiri and Quay Park, a network traction power feeder station, and three new rail stations in Auckland's growing south. Her strategic oversight ensures these complex projects meet milestones while maintaining focus on sustainability and community benefits, successfully unifying KiwiRail and Auckland Transport teams toward shared outcomes. Her ability to navigate complex procurement processes while engaging effectively with stakeholders has been crucial to the programme's success.

Bobby's leadership transcends project management through her passionate advocacy for women in rail and her inclusive, empowering approach that brings out the best in her colleagues. Known for working alongside her team rather than above them, she fosters a culture of trust and shared purpose that colleagues find inspiring. Her commitment to public transport as a force for creating liveable cities, combined with her integrity, humility, and drive for excellence, makes her a role model not just within KiwiRail but across the wider infrastructure and transport sectors. On International Women's Day, she celebrated the growing number of women taking significant

responsibilities in rail, demonstrating how women's leadership is reshaping New Zealand's rail industry and inspiring the next generation of female engineers and leaders.

Dr Romy Ridl, Design Management Lead – Civil, KiwiRail

Dr. Romy Ridl is a pioneer of resilience engineering and climate adaptation across New Zealand's rail network. Progressing from Engineering Geologist, Team Leader, Technical Manager to Design Management Lead within KiwiRail's Civil Engineering Team, she has reshaped how civil assets are planned, prioritised, and recovered. Drawing on Kaikōura recovery experience, Romy worked with the team to embed nationwide incident-response systems: pre-arranged consultant contracts, strategic material stockpiles, and enhanced internal assessment and design capabilities—reducing mobilisation time and improving response consistency. She strengthened governance to target highest-need assets and value-engineer solutions for whole-of-life performance. Her contributions to KiwiRail's Climate Adaptation plan demonstrate commitment to integrating climate strategies into long-term asset management. Romy challenges norms to lift efficiency and resilience, testing alternative design and delivery strategies including digital tools, standard designs, and adaptive management plans, whilst maintaining robust safety and design assurance.

Her collaborative approach breaks down silos, bringing stakeholders together based on her belief that unity delivers better network outcomes than siloed disciplines. She actively mentors early-career engineers, supports women in rail, represents New Zealand in international forums like the International Society of Rock Mechanics and Rock Engineering, and volunteers with the New Zealand Geotechnical Society as an early-career mentor and conference convenor. Her practice emphasises teamwork across disciplines to achieve optimal results for the entire rail network, establishing her as a transformative leader in New Zealand's infrastructure sector.

Lynne Morton, General Manager Engineering and Asset Management, KiwiRail

Transforming KiwiRail's engineering capabilities through visionary leadership and technical excellence, Lynne Morton stands as an outstanding nominee for the Inspirational Woman in Rail Award. As General Manager Engineering and Asset Management, she leads a team of over 140 engineers that has delivered \$200 million in design works supporting more than \$2 billion of physical infrastructure across New Zealand's rail network. Under her guidance, KiwiRail has implemented revolutionary new bridge standards that increase resilience while reducing materials by 30% per bridge - creating more sustainable, cost-effective infrastructure during a once-in-a-generation upgrade of metropolitan rail systems across Auckland and Wellington. Her team has significantly enhanced asset management through comprehensive registers for bridges, slopes, retaining walls, and tunnels, while implementing robust risk monitoring processes that have transformed KiwiRail's engineering capabilities during the government's \$9 billion investment in national rail infrastructure.

Lynne's calm leadership has been particularly evident during crisis response, with her team delivering critical emergency recovery works following Cyclone Gabrielle and the Auckland floods, including the award-winning Bridge 57 Pier Wash Out recovery project with HEB Construction. Beyond technical achievements, her commitment to team wellbeing has significantly improved staff engagement scores, while her dedication to supporting women in engineering has helped

transform a traditionally male-dominated field. As a recognised industry leader featured by Engineering NZ, Lynne exemplifies how women's leadership is driving innovation and excellence in New Zealand's rail engineering sector.

Rebecca Brown, Rail Protection Manager, John Holland

Revolutionising rail safety protocols and creating pathways for women in protection roles, Rebecca stands as an exceptional nominee for the Inspirational Woman in Rail Award. As John Holland's Rail Protection Manager, she oversees safety across major national projects including the \$60M Drury Rail Stations Project, \$20M Wiri EMU Depot Stabling Yard Upgrade, and \$5M North Auckland Line Upgrade. Her previous experience as Auckland Rail Protection Manager for KiwiRail has positioned her as a respected industry leader who consistently elevates operational safety standards while advocating for her team's development and success.

Rebecca's innovative approach to critical safety challenges has transformed industry practices, particularly through her comprehensive Bidirectional Running Procedure that incorporates Vortok fencing and dedicated Rail Safety Observers - a protocol now adopted by KiwiRail in their Corridor Access Management Plan. Recognising gaps in formal training, she developed a site-based RSO training program that has upskilled both her team and subcontractors, while her current collaboration with KiwiRail to trial a new Mobile Radio Warning System promises to enhance safety for all personnel working near rail corridors. Beyond technical innovations, Rebecca's commitment to diversity has created meaningful opportunities for women in rail protection, leading a predominantly female team and mentoring numerous women to excel in this challenging field - demonstrating how women's leadership is simultaneously advancing safety standards and workforce diversity across New Zealand's rail sector.

UNSUNG HERO

Recognising the extraordinary individuals whose vital contributions often go unrecognised, yet whose commitment, expertise, and behind-the-scenes efforts form the essential foundation that enables our sector's success and innovation.

Matai Stewart, Construction Manager, Downer Group NZ

Orchestrating one of New Zealand's most technically challenging rail infrastructure transformations with quiet excellence and unwavering dedication, Matai Stewart stands as an exceptional nominee for the Unsung Hero Award. As Construction Manager for the Wellington Station Re-signalling Project, he masterfully coordinated the complex transition of the country's busiest rail junction from a manual lever frame to a modern computerized signalling system.

Working diligently behind the scenes, Matai's technical expertise and calm leadership were instrumental in managing site teams and ensuring seamless integration across engineering and signalling disciplines throughout this critical infrastructure upgrade.

Matai's exceptional commitment was particularly evident during the high-pressure 18-day commissioning window over the Christmas break, where his meticulous planning and execution ensured all pre-works and delivery activities were completed ahead of schedule - enabling the successful "Big Bang" block of line and the network's timely reopening. Matai's mentorship of engineers and delivery teams, particularly in formation construction, has elevated the capabilities of those around him, while his subject matter expertise has shaped efficient design solutions that

delivered value for money to the client. His promotion to Construction Manager during the project reflects the deep respect earned from peers and leaders alike, demonstrating how his quiet influence and dedication have not only ensured the success of WMUP6A but also helped inform future rail projects across New Zealand.

Rommel Pereira, Customer Service Team Leader, Auckland One Rail

Embodying the true spirit of an unsung hero through 14 years of exceptional frontline service, Rommel stands as a remarkable nominee for the Unsung Hero Award. As a Customer Service Team Leader at major train stations and transport hubs, he navigates a demanding environment that includes managing unhappy customers, violence, antisocial behaviour, fare evasion, mental health crises, and medical emergencies - all while maintaining unwavering professionalism and compassion. Described by management as "the glue" of operations, his behind-the-scenes efforts create the essential foundation for Auckland's rail customer experience, as he leads and mentors AOR's diverse team of Customer Service Ambassadors.

Rommel's impact extends far beyond his job description through countless acts of extraordinary service: performing CPR on a member of the public, assisting with a level crossing fatality while off duty, driving to support stranded passengers during Auckland's floods, and delivering lost passports in his own time. His clear thinking and decisive action ensure seamless operations, while his commitment to continuous improvement drives excellence throughout the organisation. Though his preventative efforts often go unnoticed precisely because they avert problems before they occur, Rommel's dedication and quiet leadership have elevated standards across the network, exemplifying the profound difference one individual can make in the customer experience of thousands.

Natalie Chevis, Quality and Systems Assurance Manager, KiwiRail

Creating the essential foundation for project excellence through quiet dedication and meticulous attention to detail, Natalie Chevis stands as an exceptional nominee for the Unsung Hero Award. As Quality and Systems Assurance Manager at KiwiRail, her decade of service across multiple organisational areas has given her unique insights that she leverages to drive meaningful improvements without seeking recognition. Her most significant contribution - the development and ongoing stewardship of the central PMO Knowledge Centre - has transformed how project management resources, templates, and lessons learned are accessed and utilised throughout the organisation, creating a comprehensive hub that she continuously refines to meet evolving business needs.

Natalie's management of the critical assurance gate process demonstrates her commitment to maintaining quality and consistency across KiwiRail's project portfolio. In a traditionally male-dominated industry, her approach stands out not for being loud but for being lasting - engaging even difficult stakeholders with patience and professionalism to ensure systems are not only built but embraced throughout the organisation. Though she doesn't seek the spotlight, Natalie's contributions form the backbone of KiwiRail's project delivery capability, enabling others to shine while her quiet persistence continues to shape the organisation's success. Her work exemplifies the profound difference that behind-the-scenes excellence

makes to New Zealand's rail infrastructure development, making her a true unsung hero whose depth, quality, and value deserve recognition.

Chris Ten-Wolde, Depot and Facilities Delivery Manager, Auckland One Rail

For over 13 years, Chris Ten-Wolde has been the cornerstone of reliable and safe operations across train depots, stabling yards, and stations - a dedication that makes him an exceptional nominee for the Unsung Hero award. Managing everything from buildings and electrical systems to security infrastructure and a team of station facilities coordinators, Chris expertly oversees numerous maintenance contractors while maintaining crucial relationships with Auckland Transport and KiwiRail. Known as a "silent leader" and "safe pair of hands," his exceptional commercial contract management skills, proactive approach, and unwavering reliability have been vital to AOR's operational success and reputation.

Despite high turnover in the Assets team, Chris has remained the constant force, providing stability, training new staff, and addressing critical issues 24/7 regardless of whether they fall within his job description. His responsive and attentive approach to maintaining station quality directly impacts customer experience and safety, while his leadership in major development projects has been invaluable. Supportive as both colleague and manager, Chris creates positive working environments, advocates for employee development, and truly embodies the spirit of the Unsung Hero through his humble, hardworking nature and immeasurable contribution to AOR's operations.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Honouring the distinguished career of an industry pioneer whose sustained excellence, transformative influence, and enduring impact have helped define and advance New Zealand's rail sector over decades of dedicated service.

Gareth Williams, Rail Safety and Assurance Manager, Auckland Transport

With over two decades dedicated to advancing rail safety and assurance across New Zealand and internationally, Gareth has built an exceptional career worthy of the Lifetime Achievement Award. From his beginnings at Tranz Rail through progressive roles at Veolia, Transdev, KiwiRail, and now as Rail Safety and Assurance Manager at Auckland Transport, he has shaped operational safety systems and strengthened organisational safety culture across major initiatives including Auckland Light Rail, City Rail Link, and the commissioning of Auckland's electric EMU fleet. His work upgrading rail operating rules, developing comprehensive policies, and building trusted relationships with regulators and emergency services has significantly improved public safety outcomes nationwide.

Representing New Zealand on international committees and through collaborative projects with the Australian Rail Association and Queensland University Gareth has driven forward the vision of establishing one of the world's safest metro rail systems. His foundation in the New Zealand Defence Force developed the leadership and risk management expertise that defines his approach to rail safety. Through mentoring industry leaders, conducting high-level safety investigations, and advancing best practices through cross-agency collaboration, Gareth has created a lasting legacy of enhanced safety, reliability, and excellence throughout New Zealand's rail network with his unique blend of technical knowledge, operational experience, and strategic foresight.

Robert Lord, Superintendent, John Holland

With an extraordinary 38-year career dedicated to train and tram infrastructure construction and maintenance, Rob Lord stands as an exceptional figure worthy of the Lifetime Achievement Award. Beginning as a 16-year-old apprentice with Victoria's Public Transport Corporation in 1986, Rob has risen to become a superintendent at John Holland, leading landmark projects across New Zealand and Australia. His technical innovations include New Zealand's largest Overhead Line Equipment renewal works on the Wellington Metro Upgrade Programme, Melbourne's first retractable overhead conductor at Auburn Rail Maintenance Facility, and pioneering solutions on the Canberra Light Rail and Caulfield to Dandenong Level Crossing Removal Project, where he implemented cutting-edge technologies - gas tensioning devices and Sky Rail viaducts.

Beyond his technical expertise, Rob's leadership has transformed the industry through mentorship and inclusion. Over the past decade, he has trained and upskilled more than 30 New Zealanders in OLE, including several women who have advanced to managerial positions in this traditionally male-dominated field. His innovative approaches, such as reducing programme timelines through groundbreaking Block of Line methodologies, have delivered significant time, cost savings and enhancing operational efficiency. Described by colleagues as "hugely knowledgeable" and "a great leader" who understands "the importance of fostering a strong team culture," Rob's career - marked by technical ingenuity, visionary leadership, and unwavering dedication to mentoring - has left an indelible mark on the rail industry across two nations.

William Staniland, Head of Operations and Performance, Auckland One Rail

William Staniland stands as an outstanding finalist for the Lifetime Achievement Award, embodying the rare individual whose quiet dedication has made a profound impact on New Zealand's rail sector—often without fanfare, but consistently day in and day out. His capability, reliability, and integrity have made him an indispensable figure whose contributions deserve the highest acknowledgment. Throughout his career, William has approached every task with a calm, methodical mindset, ensuring no detail is overlooked. His ability to remain composed under pressure has earned him respect across many departments and businesses throughout the sector. William deserves to be celebrated.

What truly sets William apart is that while he doesn't seek the spotlight, his actions speak volumes—taking time with new staff, sharing knowledge generously, and fostering a culture of respect within the Auckland Rail Operating Centre (AROC) with all industry partners. William's contributions often go unnoticed because he never asks for recognition, seeing excellence as simply part of doing his job. He ensures everything runs smoothly behind the scenes, enabling seamless transitions through timetable changes, projects, and resource challenges. His presence brings stability, his work ethic inspires excellence, and his impact is felt every day and night. William reminds us that true leadership isn't always loud—it's found in the steady hands and thoughtful actions of those who work tirelessly without expecting applause, making him a worthy finalist for this prestigious recognition.

INDUSTRY LEGEND

Celebrating an individual whose legendary status has been earned through groundbreaking contributions, unwavering commitment to excellence, and the ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges-a visionary whose work has fundamentally altered the trajectory of New Zealand's rail industry.

Grant Dowie, Operations Safety Specialist - DDO and EMU2, Auckland One Rail

Since joining the rail industry in 2014 as a locomotive engineer following distinguished careers in the Air Force and as an air traffic controller, Grant has established himself as a true Industry Legend through his unwavering commitment to strengthening the people and systems that underpin rail operations. He quietly revolutionised driver training by introducing a structured competency management system benchmarked to nationally recognised standards, delivering consistent quality, reducing assessment variability, and establishing clear performance expectations. His groundbreaking work in securing formal recognition for train driving as an NZ qualification elevated the profession from an operational job to a skilled, professional career path, allowing drivers to carry their credentials formally within the rail industry and beyond.

Grant's expertise in ETCS made him the natural leader for critical testing and commissioning programmes, going beyond his formal responsibilities to support industry partners with test trains and proving runs following major infrastructure and signalling changes. Serving as the lynchpin of AOR's integration testing programme for City Rail Link - involving over 1,600 individual test-train journeys to ensure system safety and reliability. As the driver of the first test train through the tunnels and leader of the structured build-up of dynamic testing, he continues to serve as a steady hand and mentor, embodying the definition of an industry legend through his humility, decades of dedication, and transformative yet often unseen impact on New Zealand's rail industry.

Craig Inger, Rail Franchise Manager, Auckland Transport

With over 40 years of dedicated service to the New Zealand rail industry, Craig has established himself as a true Industry Legend whose career spans the full spectrum of passenger rail operations. Beginning his journey as a Locomotive Engineer (train driver), Craig developed a comprehensive understanding of rail operations from the ground up, even representing his colleagues as a Union representative before embarking on a remarkable progression through increasingly senior management positions. His unique career path - transitioning from frontline operations to executive leadership - has given him an unparalleled perspective on the challenges and opportunities within New Zealand's passenger rail services.

Craig's professional evolution includes joining Connex in 2004, before advancing to senior management roles with Transdev where he served as Operations Manager and Planning Manager before taking on Executive management positions. In 2013, he shifted from private sector operations to local government oversight joining Auckland Transport as Train Services Manager, ultimately becoming Rail Franchise Manager - responsible for managing Auckland's passenger services Rail Franchisee, currently Auckland One Rail. This comprehensive career trajectory, spanning both private operations and public administration of rail services, establishes Craig as a quintessential Industry Legend whose contributions have shaped passenger rail transportation across New Zealand for more than four decades.

Mark Jones, CRL Testing & Commissioning Manager, Auckland One Rail

With a remarkable 47-year career, Mark stands as an Industry Legend who has fundamentally shaped Auckland's modern rail network. Since 1978, he has navigated NZ Railways' evolution from government department through private ownership, developing comprehensive expertise across passenger and freight operations. His establishment of Auckland's first Metro Operations Control Room set new benchmarks for standards and professionalism, dramatically improving punctuality from 80% to the high 90% range through structured procedures and disciplined operations despite fleet and infrastructure challenges.

Since 2016, Mark has served as the essential expert for City Rail Link design, effectively functioning as a one-man operator interface across multiple organisations to ensure operational needs were incorporated into engineering designs. Now leading a stations team testing and commissioning CRL stations and systems, he plays a critical role in operational readiness while overseeing recruitment and training for new roles. His comprehensive knowledge ensures perfect alignment between infrastructure, systems, and personnel - guaranteeing the network will operate safely and efficiently from day one. Widely respected as both an industry expert and "top bloke," Mark Jones embodies the essence of an Industry Legend whose contributions will benefit Auckland's rail network for generations.
