



The finalists for the NZ Rail Excellence Awards 2026

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.

Lucy Cammell, Lead Engineer, Aurecon

Lucy Cammell is a Chartered Professional Engineer and emerging leader in New Zealand's rail industry, recognised for her technical expertise, collaborative leadership and commitment to developing future rail professionals. Since beginning her career in 2017 on the North Canterbury Transport Infrastructure Recovery Alliance in Kaikōura, she has rapidly progressed from graduate engineer to trusted leader on some of New Zealand's most significant rail programmes. Lucy has demonstrated exceptional leadership as Project Manager for the Henderson Railway Station project, successfully leading Aurecon's construction phase team through a challenging delivery environment while balancing technical complexity, stakeholder expectations and programme constraints. She also serves as Commercial Lead for Aurecon's City Rail Link programme, providing leadership across New Zealand's largest and most complex rail infrastructure project. Lucy is recognised for her ability to align clients, contractors and project teams around common goals, enabling successful delivery through collaboration, clear communication and pragmatic leadership.

Beyond technical delivery, Lucy consistently goes above and beyond during critical construction activities, most notably leading technical support during the demanding Britomart Christmas Block of Line works, where she played a key role in resolving complex technical issues in real time. She is also helping shape the industry's future as a Committee Member of the Railway Technical Society Australasia, promoting professional development and knowledge sharing, and has worked with the University of Auckland to connect students with industry experts. As Rail Team Leader at Aurecon, she mentors junior engineers, supports chartership candidates and champions an inclusive environment where people can thrive. A passionate advocate for health and safety, Lucy champions a safety-first culture across complex rail construction environments. Through her leadership, technical expertise and dedication to developing others, Lucy is already making a lasting contribution to New Zealand's rail industry and exemplifies the qualities of an Emerging Leader.

Deirdre Oelofse, Stations Delivery Manager, Auckland One Rail

With fewer than three years in the rail industry, Deirdre Oelofse has already established herself as an emerging leader through exceptional operational excellence and transformative leadership. Since joining Auckland One Rail as Facilities Manager in late 2023 and progressing to Station Delivery Manager in 2025, she has demonstrated a remarkable ability to master the complexities of rail operations while delivering outstanding outcomes for customers, colleagues and stakeholders. Rather than relying solely on previous experience,

Deirdre immersed herself in the rail environment, quickly understanding station and facilities operations and introducing fresh perspectives to long-standing challenges. Her impact is evident in the successful opening of the City Rail Link and new stations at Te Waihorotiu and Karanga-a-Hape, the refurbished station at Maungawhau, and new stations at Drury and Paerātā - all projects where she was critical to success, ensuring flawless operations through meticulous build and testing processes.

Deirdre consistently creates high-performing teams by fostering accountability, collaboration and professional development. Colleagues describe her as energetic, highly motivated and deeply invested in those around her, providing clear expectations, mentoring team members and promoting a culture of engagement that strengthens performance and builds capability. She excels at managing complex stakeholder relationships, building trust with clients, contractors, suppliers, operational teams and senior leaders to ensure reliable delivery of station and facilities services across Auckland's rail network. Her solutions-focused mindset balances customer needs, operational requirements, safety obligations and commercial considerations to achieve sustainable outcomes. Beyond day-to-day operations, Deirdre has improved processes, identified performance gaps and implemented practical solutions that enhance efficiency, reliability and service quality. Her trajectory reflects the qualities of a future industry leader - combining technical capability with emotional intelligence, strategic thinking with operational discipline, and innovation with genuine commitment to people. In a short time, she has earned widespread respect while helping shape Auckland's rail network.

Georgina Palmer, Emergency Testing Interface Manager, City Rail Link Ltd

Georgina Palmer demonstrated exceptional leadership throughout City Rail Link's Emergency Operations Testing Programme, playing a pivotal role in preparing Auckland's underground railway for safe passenger operations. Since entering the rail industry in 2020, Georgie has embraced increasing responsibility, drawing on her background in project delivery, change management, health and safety, and operational planning to bring a fresh perspective to complex challenges. At the heart of Georgie's leadership was her ability to unite people. Working across railway operators, infrastructure providers and emergency services, she built trusted relationships, navigated competing priorities and fostered collaboration towards shared objectives. Her ability to influence without formal authority was instrumental in maintaining alignment and momentum throughout the programme. Georgie demonstrated initiative, resilience and accountability, taking ownership of challenges and translating complex operational requirements into practical solutions. She helped lead the development and delivery of realistic emergency exercises across stations, tunnels and trains, empowering stakeholders while balancing safety, operational readiness and demanding timeframes.

An advocate for inclusive and people focused planning, Georgie demonstrated innovation by developing a bespoke passenger management system to safely register, coordinate and account for hundreds of volunteer passengers. Her approach prioritised safety while considering diverse mobility, sensory, cognitive and communication needs, ensuring testing reflected real world railway operations. Throughout live testing, Georgie led with adaptability and determination, coordinating teams, resolving challenges and delivering critical reporting under significant time pressures. Georgie exemplifies an Emerging Leader through her ability to inspire collaboration, lead through uncertainty and achieve meaningful outcomes. Her contribution reflects not only what she helped deliver, but the integrity, judgement, adaptability and people focused leadership needed by the next generation of New Zealand rail leaders.

Christian Woods, Project Engineer, John Holland

In just five years, Christian Woods has made an outstanding impact on New Zealand's rail industry, rapidly progressing from Plant Manager to Project Engineer through exceptional leadership, technical expertise and an unwavering commitment to safety and innovation. His work on the Drury Rail Stations project exemplifies his ability to deliver complex outcomes in challenging live rail environments. Christian led over six months of planning for the Paerātā Station road-over-rail bridge, coordinating the installation of 80-tonne Super-T girders over an active rail corridor within tight Block of Line windows. He orchestrated collaboration between specialist engineers, crane providers, geotechnical consultants to safely deliver works under intense time pressure. Christian drove innovative safety solutions, including developing temporary works that enabled edge protection installation before girder lifting, eliminating working-at-height risks and allowing safe construction during train operations. When leadership was needed most, Christian stepped into a manager role during a critical project phase while maintaining his Project Engineer duties, providing stakeholder confidence and ensuring successful delivery.

Beyond project execution, Christian has built lasting capability for New Zealand's rail sector. He championed the establishment of John Holland's flash butt welding capability, drawing on specialist training to introduce international best practices, troubleshoot complex welding issues and train over seven local personnel. His commitment to developing future rail professionals through mentoring and knowledge sharing has created ripple effects across the organisation. Colleagues consistently seek his advice on planning, constructability and delivery challenges because of his practical mindset and collaborative approach. Christian consistently performs at a level well beyond his experience. His technical capability, judgement and leadership will see him go far in the industry. Christian Woods represents the future of rail leadership in New Zealand.

Izzy Raziff, Engineering Geologist – Infrastructure, KiwiRail

Izzy Raziff is an exceptional emerging leader whose influence, innovation and commitment to improving the rail industry have delivered significant benefits to KiwiRail within a remarkably short period. Since joining KiwiRail in 2024, Izzy has demonstrated emerging leadership through practical application of engineering solutions to complex railway risks. As a Geotechnical Engineer supporting KiwiRail's South Island network, he provides technical leadership across a challenging portfolio of geotechnical assets, contributing to project delivery, design, compliance and risk management. What sets Izzy apart is his ability to combine technical excellence with innovation and a genuine desire to improve outcomes for others. He led the implementation of UAV-based LiDAR technology within KiwiRail's civil and geotechnical inspection and asset-management practices, helping transition this technology into a repeatable internal workflow. The initiative has improved asset visibility, reduced field exposure in difficult terrain, strengthened engineering information quality and improved efficiency for project delivery.

Izzy's leadership was particularly evident during management of the high-consequence Whitecliffs rockfall hazard on the Stillwater-Ngākawau Line. Faced with a potentially catastrophic slope failure threatening worker safety, network resilience and a critical freight corridor, Izzy played a leading role in developing the practical solution. He contributed to three-dimensional geological modelling, monitoring strategy development, detailed design and coordination with specialist contractors. During delivery, he worked alongside rope-access specialists on the cliff face, providing real-time geological assessment and UAV survey support to enable timely engineering decisions in a complex and rapidly changing environment. The project successfully removed the principal instability and reopened the route within the planned timeframe without injury or additional customer delay. Beyond technical delivery, Izzy actively shares knowledge across teams, promotes adoption of digital technologies and supports development of others through mentoring and collaboration.

Tom Revell, Principal- Ground Engineering, KiwiRail

Tom Revell is turning lessons from disaster recovery into better risk management for New Zealand's railway. His leadership combines national technical improvements, practical emergency response and the development of others. His rail career began in 2017 with the North Canterbury Transport Infrastructure Recovery alliance, where he was a designer of slope-protection systems following the Kaikōura earthquake. He has since progressed from consultant to KiwiRail's South Island Geotechnical Engineer, and subsequently to Principal Ground Engineer, extending his influence from individual recovery sites to national practice. A defining achievement is his leadership in developing and implementing KiwiRail's Slope Risk Analysis framework, KRL. Building on KiwiRail's previous approach, the framework adapts NZTA and New South Wales transport methodologies to account for rail-specific likelihood, exposure and consequences. It provides a consistent basis for comparing slope risks and prioritising interventions across the network, translating complex geotechnical evidence into clearer operational and investment decisions. The framework has attracted interest from several other international rail agencies and operators.

Tom's leadership is equally practical during severe-weather emergencies. Working across engineering, maintenance and operations, he provides damage assessments, recovery designs and risk controls that support safe reopening while protecting workers. Looking ahead, Tom is leading advances in technical innovations including track sensors, UAV use, remote geohazard monitoring and geospatial asset information. These initiatives strengthen the ability to visualise hazards, detect change and make evidence-based decisions. His influence extends beyond KiwiRail through co-authorship of the New Zealand Geotechnical Society's Unit 2 and 4 slope-stability guidance, and he supervises three postgraduate students. Tom develops capability in others, creating opportunities for colleagues to take ownership and lead while supporting master's research into practical rail challenges. Tom exemplifies an emerging industry leader: translating recovery experience into better national practice, challenging established approaches and equipping others to build a safer, more resilient railway.

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 groundbreaking 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.

City Rail Link Ltd

City Rail Link Ltd (CRL Ltd) was established to deliver New Zealand's largest public transport infrastructure project - 3.45 kilometres of twin tunnels beneath central Auckland, including two new underground stations and two refurbished ones. Beyond building world-class infrastructure, CRL Ltd demonstrated exceptional commitment to sustainability and social responsibility, setting new benchmarks for the construction industry. The project achieved the 'Leading' rating from the Infrastructure Sustainability Council - the highest level for as-built certification - through industry-leading environmental practices. CRL reduced concrete's carbon footprint by using fly ash as a cement replacement at 29.3 per cent (compared to the 3.7 per cent industry average), diverted 94 per cent of construction waste from landfill, and achieved a 22 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Demolished materials were repurposed to help repair cyclone-ravaged Tonga, exemplifying resourcefulness and global citizenship.

CRL Ltd's legacy extends beyond environmental stewardship. The project broke new ground through its Mana Whenua Forum, engaging eight iwi in meaningful collaboration that strengthened design, employment, procurement, and worker wellbeing. This partnership opened employment opportunities for young Māori and Pasifika through extensive on-site training and mentoring, graduating 43 participants from the Progressive Employment Programme and awarding over \$150 million in contracts to Māori and Pasifika businesses. Worker safety remained paramount across 28 million work hours, with innovative measures adopted internationally. CRL also maintained strong community engagement, supporting local events and businesses through microgrants and independent advice. The project's innovative achievements - including moving on to new foundations 14,000 tonnes of the heritage-listed Chief Post Office (Waitematā Station) - demonstrate technical excellence. CRL Ltd's holistic approach to sustainability, social responsibility, and community partnership has elevated New Zealand's infrastructure capability, leaving a lasting legacy of connectivity, innovation, and environmental stewardship for generations to come.

Khris Dore, Project Manager, KiwiRail

Khris Dore is a deserving finalist for the Rail Impact Excellence Award: Sustainability & Social Responsibility for his exceptional leadership in championing a collaborative, culturally informed and sustainable approach through the Kaikōura Coastal Protection Project. Central to this work has been strengthening KiwiRail's partnership with Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura and Te Hapū o Ngāti Kuri, ensuring mana whenua have an active and ongoing role in shaping solutions for the Kaikōura coastline. A significant achievement has been the creation of a Cultural Monitoring Advisor role, establishing a meaningful pathway for cultural values, mātauranga Māori, local knowledge and mana whenua perspectives to inform project planning and delivery. Through this initiative, Khris has helped broaden the focus of sustainability beyond simply protecting rail infrastructure. The approach recognises that truly resilient infrastructure must also consider environmental protection, cultural responsibility, community relationships and the wellbeing of future generations.

This collaborative framework supports the exploration of hybrid coastal protection techniques that bring together traditional knowledge and contemporary engineering approaches, creating valuable opportunities to protect critical rail infrastructure while respecting the cultural and environmental significance of the Kaikōura coastline. The social responsibility impact of Khris' work is equally important and far-reaching. He has helped move the relationship beyond consultation towards genuine participation and partnership, ensuring mana whenua remain connected to decisions affecting their rohe and its long-term future. This represents a fundamental change in how infrastructure projects can honour Treaty partnerships and embed cultural values into technical decision-making. Khris' contribution demonstrates sustainability and social responsibility in action: protecting critical infrastructure, caring for the environment, respecting mana whenua values, strengthening enduring relationships and creating a more sustainable legacy for generations to come.

Ross Kaufusi, Engineering Design Lead – Civil, KiwiRail

Ross Kaufusi is nominated for his exceptional leadership on rail projects that deliver enduring social, cultural and environmental benefits for communities. As Civil Design Lead for the Drury Rail Stations Programme, Ross led the design delivery of Drury, Ngākōroa and Paerātā Stations, championing meaningful engagement with Mana Whenua to ensure cultural values, narratives and aspirations were embedded within the project rather than treated as a compliance requirement. Through trusted relationships and continuous collaboration, he facilitated the integration of Mana Whenua artwork and storytelling into key station elements, including entrance features, paving, bridge screens, retaining walls and landscape treatments. Ross ensured transparency and inclusiveness throughout the project lifecycle, fostering genuine partnerships that culminated in the successful Mana Whenua blessing and official opening in August 2026. The project delivered significant sustainability outcomes, including low-carbon concrete, extensive material reuse and recycling, support for local businesses, and the planting of 40,000 trees, shrubs and grasses.

Beyond project delivery, Ross has actively supported initiatives that strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion within the rail industry. As a leader within KiwiRail's Pasifika Network, he helped establish a pilot mentoring programme supporting Pasifika employees to develop professionally and create meaningful career pathways. He is also passionate about developing the next generation of Māori and Pasifika engineering professionals, actively contributing as a mentor through South Pacific Professional Engineering Excellence (SPPEEx). Ross has established a model for how rail projects can successfully combine environmental responsibility, cultural partnership and community benefit. His leadership has left a lasting legacy demonstrating that sustainable transport projects can strengthen social connection, cultural recognition and community pride. For these reasons, Ross Kaufusi is highly deserving finalist for the Rail Impact Excellence Award for Sustainability and Social Responsibility.

Romy Ridl, Civil Engineering Technical Manager – Infrastructure, KiwiRail

Dr Romy Ridl is nominated for the Rail Impact Excellence Award: Sustainability & Social Responsibility for her outstanding leadership in improving KiwiRail's infrastructure resilience, sustainability practices and collaborative delivery culture. As Civil Engineering Technical Manager – Infrastructure, Romy leads the geotechnical and water components of the RNIP workbank, overseeing programme development, stakeholder engagement, design delivery and handover to construction teams. Beyond her operational responsibilities, she has applied her doctorate in natural landslide hazards to become a leading advocate for developing KiwiRail's infrastructure resiliency approach to increasing climate, natural hazard and environmental challenges.

Romy has driven strategic resilience initiatives that extend well beyond individual projects. She led the preparation of KiwiRail's Rail Adaptation and Resilience Programme (RARP) and championed the integration of resilience thinking into asset management, engineering standards, investment planning, emergency response and long-term network stewardship, enabling KiwiRail to better anticipate, withstand, adapt to and recover from disruption while delivering sustainable whole-of-life asset outcomes. She exemplifies KiwiRail's "One Winning Team" values through her leadership, consistently promoting collaboration between Engineering, Asset Management, Delivery, Sustainability and Operations teams. Through her vision, technical leadership and commitment to collaboration, Romy is helping build a safer, more resilient and sustainable railway network for New Zealand's future generations.

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.

Louise Pengelly, Director CRL Operations, Auckland One Rail

Louise Pengelly is nominated for the Inspirational Woman in Rail Award for her exceptional leadership as Director of CRL Operations at Auckland One Rail, where she has been leading the operator's readiness for one of the biggest changes the rail network has ever seen - the opening and integration of the City Rail Link into everyday operations. With over 20 years of experience spanning rail, aviation and airport infrastructure across New Zealand and the United Kingdom, Louise brings deep technical expertise and a proven track record in delivering large-scale, complex programmes. Her career includes leadership roles at KiwiRail as Programme Director for Operations Transformation, programme management at Heathrow Airport, and contributions to major UK rail initiatives such as the West Coast Route Modernisation and Hitachi Rail manufacturing.

What truly distinguishes Louise is her people-focused leadership style. CRL readiness is complex, demanding and highly visible, requiring detailed planning, safety discipline and alignment across Auckland One Rail, Auckland Transport, KiwiRail, City Rail Link Ltd, Link Alliance and emergency services. Louise approaches this with energy, calmness and a genuine can-do attitude. She builds teams and creates momentum, helping people feel part of something important. In leading the operational readiness programme she recognises contributions and creates a positive environment that empowers delivery under pressure. Louise leads from the front - hands-on, approachable and deeply committed to developing her teams. That commitment shows in her presence on the ground, standing alongside Train Crew and Stations teams through testing. Louise stands as a visible role model in an industry working to attract more women. She exemplifies the leadership rail needs: capable, collaborative, grounded and people-focused, shaping New Zealand rail's future while inspiring women building careers in infrastructure and operations leadership.

Divya Rajasekaran, Engineering Civil Lead, KiwiRail

Divya Rajasekaran leads KiwiRail's Civil Engineering team of 16 technical professionals across civil, geotechnical, water and coastal engineering, and engineering geology, uniting graduates to principal-level experts across New Zealand around sound engineering, collaboration and professional growth. A Chartered Professional Engineer (CPEng) and New Zealand committee member of the Railway Technical Society of Australasia (RTSA), Divya extends her contribution beyond KiwiRail through industry presentations and knowledge sharing. Under her leadership, the Civil Engineering team has strengthened risk-based asset management, expanded internal design delivery and built closer relationships with regional teams. Divya champions whole-of-life value and a maintenance-first approach, ensuring engineering decisions consider asset longevity, operational needs and cost. She has led standardisation of formation design and supported standard designs for geotechnical and water assets, demonstrating the team's value while supporting cost savings and strengthening KiwiRail's technical ownership.

A defining contribution is Divya's leadership of the engineering-led design process for Auckland Metro formation renewals. Bringing national engineering and regional delivery teams together, she oversees work from scoping through design review, approval and issue for construction, embedding engineering first principles and KiwiRail standards to deliver durable, buildable and cost-effective solutions. Her achievement extends beyond technical oversight - she secures collaboration across organisational boundaries to fundamentally change how work is delivered. Equally important is how she leads: calm under pressure, fair

and consistent. She mentors colleagues, encourages development and ensures achievements are recognised. Through demanding delivery programmes and incident recovery, she remains approachable while providing clear direction and maintaining engineering standards. Divya exemplifies inspirational leadership: delivering change, elevating others and demonstrating that engineering excellence and inclusive leadership reinforce one another. She provides a visible example for women considering rail careers - a leader whose influence rests on expertise, collaboration and the development of others.

Jane Sherriff, Manager - Stakeholder Relations, KiwiRail

Jane Sherriff is nominated for the Inspirational Woman in Rail Award for her exceptional leadership of KiwiRail's Stakeholder Engagement team, where she works tirelessly to build relationships and oversees the management of queries and complaints relating to the rail corridor across New Zealand. From rubbish dumped on the railway to train enthusiasts seeking locomotive numbers, graffiti concerns, vegetable gardens encroaching on the network, and noise from metro maintenance work, Jane engages constructively with a diverse range of stakeholders responding efficiently, effectively and always with a positive attitude. On any given day, she listens, advises and coordinates with rail partners, working alongside her team to find practical solutions. Her quick responses, extensive knowledge of the rail network and strong relationships across KiwiRail, communities and the wider industry enable collaborative resolution of complex issues that could otherwise escalate into negative media stories or complaints to Ministers and Councillors.

What makes Jane truly inspirational is her ability to protect KiwiRail's reputation while building genuine enduring stakeholder relationships. She manages potential reputational damage before it becomes a crisis, keeping negative issues out of the headlines while promoting the positive efforts being made to improve rail for all New Zealanders. Her herculean effort, passion and commitment ensure that communities and partners feel heard, understood, and respected, even when solutions are complex. Jane combines technical knowledge with exceptional interpersonal skills, demonstrating that effective stakeholder engagement requires both expertise and empathy. She exemplifies the kind of leadership that often goes unrecognised but is essential to successful rail operations - building trust, resolving conflict and maintaining positive relationships between KiwiRail and the communities it serves. Jane's dedication, professionalism and unwavering commitment to collaborative relationships make her a deserving recipient of this award and a role model for women building careers in rail and stakeholder engagement.

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.

Grant Daniel, Technical Director, Rail & Mass Transit, Aurecon

Grant Daniel has been a quiet driving force behind City Rail Link since 2014, shaping the systems, requirements and stakeholder relationships that have underpinned the project's success. As Technical Manager for the reference design, he worked across Auckland Transport, City Rail Link Limited, KiwiRail and Auckland One Rail, consistently pursuing what was best for the project. His clarity of thought transformed stakeholder needs into robust requirements that designers and contractors could understand, verify and deliver. Drawing on experience from Taiwan High Speed Rail and Doha Metro, Grant introduced systems engineering to CRL - documented verification of design compliance with requirements. While relatively new in New Zealand, he successfully demonstrated its value, helping it become integral to project delivery and

contributing to a step change in the assurance of New Zealand rail projects. Systems engineering and RAMS practices are now firmly established across the sector, creating a legacy beyond CRL.

Grant's influence extends beyond technical process. Having worked for clients, consultants and contractors, he is a trusted advisor who understands each party's pressures, helping break down silos and focus on practical resolution. He championed Safety in Design, leading workshops and strengthening hazard logs, including managing the tunnel fire engineering SFAIRP risk assessment that confirmed the design philosophy for ventilation, firefighting and evacuation. Grant played a pivotal role in delivering the compliance and regulatory programme required to open CRL, establishing the assurance trail that enabled asset handover on the same day as Practical Completion. Throughout his years supporting City Rail Link, Grant has consistently provided steady expertise and practical problem-solving that keep complex projects moving forward. Grant has been quietly getting the job done with professionalism and deep railway knowledge - making the impossible look routine.

Yudai Noguchi, Rail Planning Systems and Projects Manager, Auckland One Rail

In every company, there are individuals whose impact far exceeds their visibility. Yudai Noguchi is one of those whose relentless behind-the-scenes efforts have helped shape meaningful outcomes for Auckland One Rail (AOR). As Rail Planning Systems and Projects Manager, Yudai works at the heartbeat of metro rail services in Auckland. His work is critical to the successful operation of AOR, particularly with the recent opening of the City Rail Link (CRL). During this period, Yudai took on the responsibility of being AOR's timetable architect for the introduction of CRL. He alone was responsible for creating shadow test plans and working with KiwiRail to get day one timetables integrated. This was the most complicated and critical timetabling work Auckland has ever seen. Managing the competing needs of multiple stakeholders while delivering a resilient operable timetable on the busiest shared network in the country was no small achievement. "Yudai has done all this in a calm, methodical and mature manner that belies his years."

Yudai's contribution extends beyond individual projects. He is often the quiet force ensuring progress happens, with colleagues benefiting from his ability to align diverse interests and keep initiatives moving forward. He is always quick to credit others. The hallmark of an Unsung Hero is not the pursuit of recognition but the consistent delivery of excellence in service of others. Yudai embodies this perfectly. For his unwavering commitment, technical expertise, and extraordinary ability to enable others' success, Yudai Noguchi is a truly deserving finalist for the Unsung Hero Award.

Ian Turner, Civil Professional Head – Infrastructure, KiwiRail

Ian Turner is nominated for the Unsung Hero Award in recognition of his exceptional contribution to KiwiRail's Civil Engineering capability, technical governance, standards development, and leadership. As KiwiRail's Civil Professional Head, Ian provides technical stewardship across a diverse portfolio of civil assets, ensuring engineering decisions are aligned with safety, compliance, and long-term asset performance. While much of his work occurs behind the scenes, his influence is embedded throughout KiwiRail's engineering frameworks, standards, technical reviews, and assurance processes. His leadership has strengthened KiwiRail's ability to manage geotechnical, drainage, formation, retaining wall, river, and coastal protection risks across the national rail network. Ian has played a significant role in advancing KiwiRail's engineering standards and technical guidance. His contributions include the development, review, and endorsement of civil engineering standards covering earthworks, ground engineering, retaining walls, slope risk management, drainage, culverts, formation, and platform assets, while championing climate resilience and asset stewardship.

Beyond technical leadership, Ian is widely respected for his commitment to developing people. He actively mentors engineers, generously sharing his knowledge, providing constructive challenge, and helping others navigate complex engineering issues. Regardless of his workload, he consistently makes time to review work, offer guidance, and support colleagues in delivering high-quality outcomes. What makes Ian truly deserving of this nomination is the impact he has on those around him. He invests in people without seeking recognition, helping engineers build technical judgement, confidence, and leadership capability. His calm approach, technical wisdom, and willingness to share responsibility create an environment where people feel supported and empowered to perform at their best. Ian's leadership has fostered a collaborative culture across Engineering, Asset Management, Delivery, and Operations, building a stronger, more capable, and more resilient Civil Engineering team. He is the very definition of an Unsung Hero.

Seungjin Woo, Architect, Grimshaw Architects

Seungjin (SJ) Woo is nominated in recognition of her exceptional contribution to the Drury Stations Project as part of the Grimshaw architectural team. The Drury Stations Project forms part of the Papakura to Pukekohe Electrification Project, with Grimshaw working closely with Aurecon to deliver the station architecture and help shape the passenger experience for these important new rail assets. SJ has been a key member of the Grimshaw team since the early concept design stages, through developed and detailed design, value engineering, and ultimately construction. She has contributed to every stage of the stations' development and has been a quiet but formidable contributor throughout the project. Her dedication, professionalism, and commitment have played a significant role in the successful delivery of the project, culminating in the recent opening of the stations and commencement of passenger operations. While she rarely seeks recognition, her positive influence is felt across the wider project team through her diligence, reliability, and collaborative approach.

What sets SJ apart is the genuine care and pride she brings to her work. She is deeply invested in the success of the project and consistently looks beyond her immediate responsibilities to contribute wherever needed. Her commitment is driven not by personal recognition, but by a sincere desire to achieve the best possible outcomes. This sense of ownership is reflected in the quality of her work, her support for colleagues, and her unwavering focus on doing the right thing. Through her professionalism, integrity, and quiet leadership, SJ sets an outstanding example for those around her. Her steady commitment, positive influence, and genuine care for both people and outcomes have been instrumental to the success of the Drury Stations Project. She truly embodies the spirit of an Unsung Hero.

INDUSTRY CHAMPION

Celebrating an individual who has consistently championed the advancement of New Zealand's rail industry through advocacy, mentorship, and unwavering dedication to sector excellence. This award honours those who have actively promoted industry growth, fostered collaboration, and inspired others to drive innovation and progress.

Joe Gee, Senior Civil Engineer, KiwiRail

Joe Gee is nominated for the Industry Champion Award in recognition of his exceptional contribution to developing engineering capability, mentoring emerging professionals, and strengthening the knowledge base that supports KiwiRail's rail freight network. Since joining KiwiRail, Joe has become a key contributor to the growth of engineering capability within the Civil team. Alongside his responsibilities as a Senior Civil Engineer,

he has dedicated significant time to mentoring graduate and early-career engineers through practical project-based learning, technical coaching, and ongoing professional support. His commitment to developing others has helped build confidence, competence, and long-term capability across the organisation. Joe's approach to mentoring extends well beyond answering technical questions. He has personally guided young engineers through real rail infrastructure projects involving level crossing upgrades, rail corridor track formation and drainage upgrades, stormwater assessments, and engineering modelling. By using live projects as teaching opportunities, Joe enables engineers to understand both the technical process and the practical engineering judgement required to deliver successful outcomes.

Joe has been instrumental in developing internal engineering capability through the adoption and practical application of digital design tools. He has provided hands-on training in AutoCAD Civil 3D and Autodesk Vehicle Tracking, enabling engineers to undertake grounding clearance assessment and pavement design. His efforts have strengthened technical capability, reduced reliance on external consultants, and enhanced KiwiRail's ability to deliver value-for-money outcomes. What distinguishes Joe is his willingness to invest in others. Colleagues consistently describe him as approachable, patient, and generous with his knowledge. He creates an environment where engineers are encouraged to ask questions, develop problem-solving skills, and progressively take ownership of their work. Through targeted knowledge sharing, technical leadership, and genuine commitment to developing people, Joe is helping ensure KiwiRail has the skilled engineering workforce needed to support a safe, reliable, and resilient rail freight network.

Grant Dowie, Operations Safety Specialist, Auckland One Rail

Grant has built a career defined by service, leadership, and a commitment to raising standards across New Zealand's rail industry. Since joining rail in 2014 as a Locomotive Engineer, following successful careers in the Air Force and air traffic control, he has delivered major improvements that continue to shape the industry today. Throughout his career, Grant has repeatedly taken on the industry's most complex technical challenges. His expertise in the European Train Control System has made him a trusted leader in testing and commissioning programmes across New Zealand. He has played critical roles in major infrastructure projects, including the Papakura to Pukekohe Electrification Project and the Wiri West Main upgrade. One of his most significant achievements was leading efforts to secure formal recognition of train driving as a New Zealand qualification, elevating it from an operational role to a recognised professional vocation.

Most recently, Grant has been central to Auckland One Rail's integration testing programme for City Rail Link, one of New Zealand's most transformative transport projects. He drove the first test train through the tunnels and has helped lead more than 1,600 testing journeys, ensuring safe and reliable operation of the future network. His technical expertise and unwavering commitment to safety have been instrumental to the programme's success. Over twelve years, Grant has delivered exceptional value and improvements, benefiting rail in New Zealand and future drivers, passengers, and the entire industry. Beyond his achievements, Grant's legacy lies in the people he has developed, the standards he has established, and the culture of professionalism he has championed. He remains a respected mentor, trusted advisor, and steady leader, making him a truly deserving recipient of the Industry Champion Award.

Ian Cotton, Former Senior Rail Safety Officer, NZ Transport Agency

Ian Cotton has dedicated almost five decades of exceptional service to New Zealand's rail system, making a lasting contribution to the safety, reliability, and sustainability of rail operations across the country. Since joining the rail industry in 1978, Ian has held a wide range of operational, technical, leadership, and regulatory roles. From frontline train control through to national oversight of operating standards, risk management, and rail safety regulation, his career has been defined by an unwavering commitment to protecting people and supporting a safe, effective transport system for New Zealanders. Throughout this time, he has helped shape many of the operating rules, standards, and regulatory practices that continue to underpin rail safety today. Ian has played a key role in some of New Zealand's most significant rail modernisation initiatives, including Track Warrant Control, centralisation of train control functions, the Auckland Electrification Project, Auckland re-signalling, Wellington Area Rail Projects, and the European Train Control System (ETCS) on Auckland's commuter network.

Beyond his formal responsibilities, Ian's greatest legacy may be the people he has supported. A respected mentor and trusted advisor, he has invested countless hours developing others, sharing his deep technical knowledge, and helping new entrants understand the history and practical realities of rail safety. His generosity and willingness to help have earned him respect throughout the industry. Ian also exemplifies public service through his longstanding support of New Zealand's tourist and heritage rail sector, working closely with the Federation of Rail Organisations of New Zealand and helping volunteer-led organisations navigate complex safety obligations. He gives his time freely to support industry conferences, safety initiatives, and collaborative problem-solving. Humble, respected, and deeply committed to others, Ian has consistently placed service to New Zealand's rail industry above himself, making him an outstanding finalist for the Industry Champion Award.

John Skilton, Programme Director: Future Rail Systems, KiwiRail

John Skilton is nominated for the Industry Champion Award in recognition of an exceptional career dedicated to advancing the safety, engineering integrity, and technological capability of New Zealand's rail system. Since joining New Zealand Railways as an engineering cadet in 1987, John has accumulated almost four decades of experience encompassing signalling and telecommunications design, project management, asset management, engineering leadership, and general management. He has held nationally influential positions including Professional Head Signals and Telecommunications, Chief Engineer Infrastructure, and his current role leading KiwiRail's Future Rail Systems programme. As a senior engineering leader, John has shaped technical decisions and governance of complex, safety-critical change across New Zealand's railway. His influence spans train control, signalling, telecommunications, level-crossing protection, and new technologies. Most recently, he played a leading role in extending ETCS protection to locomotive-hauled freight and passenger services on Auckland's mixed-use network, helping KiwiRail resolve complex challenges that continue to affect comparable international programmes.

John's contribution extends beyond KiwiRail. As Chair of TrackSAFE Foundation New Zealand, he helps lead national efforts to prevent harm around tracks and trains, bringing extensive experience in level-crossing design and risk assessment. He supports the wider signalling profession through the Institution of Railway Signal Engineers, serving as Chair of the IRSE Australasian Section in 2023 and 2024. Equally important is the legacy John creates through people: he generously shares his expertise, mentors others, and develops the capability of the next generation of rail professionals. John's enduring legacy lies not only in the systems and programmes he has delivered, but in the engineering judgement, collaborative leadership, and commitment to

safety he continues to share across the industry. His career exemplifies sustained excellence, transformative influence, and service to New Zealand rail.

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. This award recognises individuals whose legacy continues to shape the industry's future.

The Lifetime Achievement winner will be honoured at the NZ Rail Excellence Awards Dinner - Stay tuned!
