



Work & Play Profile Series *Philip Heathcote*

The right way, the wrong way and the railway

Andrew Fisher, Director in our Interim Transport and Infrastructure Practice, speaks to Philip Heathcote, a highly experienced and knowledgeable consultant about working in the rail sector, what he has learned over the years and what he wants to see from the new government.

Could you start by telling us a what it is that you do right now?

I currently operate as independent consultant with a particular focus upon work-winning in transportation and infrastructure.

What was your first job in rail and how did your career develop?

I started work as a commercial trainee at the long-gone Derby Locomotive Works for British Rail Engineering, and was given the following advice, which I am sure many others received – ‘there is the right way, the wrong way and the railway’. Rail has offered me great variety of experiences, being involved in the construction and maintenance of rolling stock, asset management with a ROSCO, operations within a train operating parent group and, finally, infrastructure electrification projects.

What are the biggest changes you have seen in your career to date?

The biggest single change is the pace of change itself. The lifecycle of technology, ideas and initiatives seems to be getting shorter. A key life lesson, particularly as I have been around a bit, is not to be a ‘stick in the mud’, be curious, learn, don’t stand still and don’t get left behind. Age is not the handbrake, it’s a mindset thing.

When you are recruiting what are the most important skills you look for?

Someone who is self-motivated, curious and takes initiative to solve problems. A candidate also needs to show they can influence through the achievements they have made without direct line authority. Finally, I look for the potential for future growth because they will drive benefit for themselves and the organisation.



What do you see as the key challenges facing rail today?

The lack of a coherent joined-up policy from government. Just imagine if we electrified the remaining 62% of our railway to help achieve the nation’s 2050 net zero target, the jobs it would create in the civil engineering sector, but also in rolling stock manufacture to replace the life expired diesel fleets, where we have the existence of factories, supply chains and jobs under very threat of closure in Derby and Newton Aycliffe. As the activity would primarily be concentrated in the north it would also make an invaluable economic contribution to the levelling up agenda.

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What would you like to see from a new government?

A clear policy yes, but most importantly action, and not yet another review. The railway is blessed with many passionate advocates and we need to hear all views, from local communities, trade unions and yes, the private sector. There will need to be compromises, that much is clear, but government needs to appoint a controlling mind, who is accountable and explains the rationale for the decisions. Could that be Great British Railway, possibly, but only if it is given freedom from political interference, as decisions require an outlook that go beyond an electoral term.

Quickfire

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

Running, because my mind is in the moment and decluttered.

What do you like to watch on tv?

I am not a movie buff, but two TV series that were fabulous and I binge-watched - Succession and The Sopranos.

What is your favourite band?

That's like asking 'which is your favourite child', but those that are currently getting a lot of airplay: Nick Cave, Radiohead, First Aid Kit, Julia Jacklin, Queens of the Stone Age, New Order and Little Simz. At this point, I'd better stop.

Which city could you live in forever?

To quote Samuel Johnson, "when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life".



Andrew Fisher

Director - Transport & Infrastructure Practice
Interim Management

andrew.fisher@veredus.co.uk

07803 023884