



First  **Rail Consultancy**

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WHO WE ARE

First Rail Consultancy, part of First Rail, delivers specialist, expert advice to our clients, covering every facet of a transport operator. Developed out of our experienced and long-standing bid team, we were established as a consultancy in 2019 to support the UK's West Coast Partnership Development (the HS2 Shadow Operator) and have since expanded to a team of around 80 professional consultants.



Scale



First Rail Consultancy is part of one of the UK's largest private transport owning groups:

- First Rail is one of the UK's most experienced rail operators, with **more than 800,000** passenger journeys a day in 2024/25.
- First Bus serves more than 25% of the population with our local bus services with **more than 1.5m** passenger journeys daily in 2024/25.

Agility



We are agile and can mobilise to support programmes and projects with individual subject matter experts or whole teams.

Versatility



We are versatile and our teams, while having in-depth rail expertise, have skills that are transferrable to other sectors. Many come from non-rail backgrounds.

Flexibility



Flexibility – as part of FirstGroup, we can access skills beyond our immediate team including financial, accounting, reporting, procurement, IT and strategy experts.

Industry Status



First Rail is a key member of industry bodies such as the Rail Delivery Group and the CPT, taking an active role developing sector policy with industry partners.

Confidentiality



We understand the importance of competitively sensitive information. For all our assignments we put in place appropriate ethical walls, restrictions and safeguards to protect client interests.

Accreditation



We were the first transport owning group to achieve ISO44001 for collaborative working relationships; we have ISO14001 environmental standards certification and are working towards ISO9001 Quality Management certification.

Recognition



We achieve regular industry recognition, with team members shortlisted as Young Professional of the Year at the Rail Business Awards (2026) and Inspirational Woman of the Year at the Women in Rail awards (2026). FRC ranked Gold in Consultancy UK's ranking for Consultancy Firms with expertise in Public Transport.

WHAT WE DO

Our expertise is rooted in over 25 years' experience of successful rail operations. We now support clients across the aviation, bus and rail sectors.

Our skills are supported by extensive transport experience with many of the team having professional operational backgrounds. However, our skill base is versatile and transferrable to non-transport sectors too.



Engineering

We work with engineering and maintenance functions to ensure the continuity of service through the maintenance and sustainability of rolling stock.



Analysis & Modelling

We provide insights and draw meaning from complex data, also providing the link between finance teams and subject matter experts.



Commercial & Customer Experience

We deliver a strategic view of the existing markets, assisting clients in operational decisions and business case development.



Performance

With extensive experience in rail data analytics and performance management, we support rail operators to improve their performance levels.



Programme and Project Management

We help shape and deliver projects, programmes and portfolios using dedicated resource, or augmenting existing teams.



Operations

We help organisations build the operational foundations to meet the customers, shareholder and stakeholder needs of the future.



Business Consultancy

We provide support and advice to clients across a range of disciplines. Our primary specialism is document production - report writing, bid documentation, business cases. We also devise and deliver comms, workshops, contract monitoring and business liaison services.



Organisational Development & Human Resources

We support our clients by providing organisational design, workforce strategy and employee engagement activity.



Planning

We support customers to grow their existing operations and develop new contracts and business opportunities through interpreting market analysis, and assessing network capacity and resource constraints.



OUR CLIENTS

“ Our teams at First Rail Consultancy are led by experienced professionals who expertly support clients with any operational, commercial or technical assistance. Their experiences cover the key considerations for every transport operator; they are able to seamlessly embed into wide-ranging industry projects and deliver value, while keeping clients at the heart of everything we do.

Graham Stockbridge, Managing Director

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Our Clients



About Us | Senior Management



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Digital Signalling

We have long-running and ongoing involvement in the East Coast Digital Programme (ECDP), a key industry project, with responsibility for delivering the European Train Control System (ETCS) programme in its entirety for open access operators Hull Trains and Lumo. The skillset of our team for this project spans railway operations, fleet change, driver competence, project management, and organisational readiness and change.

We have undertaken change impact and readiness assessments across operations, driver management, training, control, engineering, fleet, rostering and customer-facing functions to understand the impact of digital signalling and ETCS on business workload, supervision and decision-making, and to identify operational risks and opportunities.

We have then designed and delivered activities to embed ETCS into day-to-day operations, including ETCS Foundation training; simulator use; driver, trade union and other stakeholder engagement; amending operating procedures; and mobilisation of change champions to build readiness, capacity and confidence.



Rail Freight

We have produced a suite of work for one of the UK's largest rail freight businesses, delivering evidence-based recommendations to improve efficiency for rolling stock and crew, maximising depot usage and streamlining digital systems. Our work was structured around three key workstreams: locomotive and fleet productivity; traincrew diagramming; and systems analysis. We analysed the client's processes and productivity – ranging from fleet utilisation to information management.

From this, we produced 35 recommendations identifying practical opportunities for increasing fleet and crew productivity, improving maintenance planning and making better use of digital systems to make time savings and improve management information. We have subsequently been commissioned by the client to support the implementation of initial key recommendations.

New Passenger Services

A First Rail Consultancy team provided end-to-end professional support and expertise to a new entrant to the UK rail industry seeking to establish and deliver passenger rail services in the UK. This included project management and PMO support, operational and asset planning, customer and commercial design, and the development of business cases supporting route introduction and rolling stock decisions.

We led delivery in areas where the client had limited experience, including project management, operations and mobilisation, while providing expert support in others.

Our product management team designed and implemented a complete project delivery approach, from delivery timelines and resource requirements to governance arrangements and risk management, including a stakeholder management plan and a programme plan to support phased mobilisation.





Lumo Mobilisation and Launch

We played a key role in the design and mobilisation of the new open access Lumo London–Edinburgh route, from developing business case proposals on the viability of introducing an all-electric service through to transitioning the new service to BAU operations. We designed the new operator’s organisational structure and role profiles, emphasising multi-skilled roles and customer-focused processes from the outset and using our team’s expertise in stock, crew and operations management to recruit, train and mobilise a team with the tools and insights to manage operations efficiently from day one.

Our operations planning and timetable development identified timetable options, analysing demand, journey time competitiveness against air, infrastructure capacity and connectivity to develop an innovative timetable which balanced resilience and cost-effectiveness while delivering customer value and increased rail presence in underserved communities. Since launch, Lumo has delivered strong performance with high operational reliability, contributing to significant rail growth over other travel modes on the London–Edinburgh route. Our consultancy supported all phases of its design, including operational planning, service specification and integration of new paths on the busy East Coast Main Line. Since its launch, we have supported Lumo’s route expansion to Glasgow, leading the operator’s application to the independent rail regulator to extend the route, and the mobilisation of the new Lumo London–Stirling route.

Fleet Renewal

We supported Great Western Railway in its Regional Fleet Renewal Programme to replace its aging diesel-powered regional train fleet. We were engaged to provide planning advice to assist decision-making on the most appropriate replacement fleet solution through modelling, options analysis and the development of a Strategic Outline Business Case. Our team established an appraisals framework, conducted detailed options development and economic and financial appraisals, and worked closely with stakeholders to develop a longlist and shortlist of proposed options.

As well as delivering a Business Case fully aligned with HM Treasury requirements, we provided stakeholder engagement and communication packs, supported project governance and risk assessment, and streamlined procurement documentation.

Our proposed low or zero-carbon options had the ability to:

- Reduce the number of vehicles needed by 4% without loss of service.
- Improve train crew and engineer efficiency through using a standard platform.
- Enable efficient procurement through a single large order giving lower unit costs.



Get in touch

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