

outperformance

issue twelve • autumn 2017

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Blackpool to Preston electrification

Infrastructure spending update

Connect alliance





VGC's key role in the north-west railway electrification

While the debate about the future of the Northern Powerhouse continues to generate thousands of column centimetres and hours of broadcast time, behind-the-scenes investment is continuing on vital infrastructure such as the north-west railway electrification, in which VGC is playing a key role.

The £ billion north-west electrification project has involved the country's leading contractors, with Volker Rail playing a major construction role and Siemens responsible for the signalling systems. VGC teams have been working for Siemens to provide the civil engineering infrastructure required for the signalling. This has included cable routes, hard standings, signal bases, signalling station bases, FLI piling and much more.

"The latest phase of the project has been relatively straightforward," says Graham Piggott, VGC Labour Solutions director. "The challenges have been in the detail, where we've had to adapt engineering designs to the reality of individual situations."

This north-west project is the latest in a series of railway infrastructure projects where Siemens and VGC have partnered. Among recent collaborations were upgrades in north Lincolnshire and at Crewe junction. Graham says "working alongside Siemens has been good for our teams who appreciate the stability that these contracts entail.

"Siemens is a good company to work with," he continued. "Their attitude to safety is exemplary and they are always willing to listen to feedback from our teams."

The only shadow to fall across the northern rail scenario is the government's recent announcement cancelling further investment in electrification of the railway on the basis that it "was no longer needed". VGC's managing director,

Electrification programme



The electrification programme consists of a series of upgrades to the railway in the north of England to provide better connectivity, faster journey times and improved capacity.

Works on the project, which is being undertaken in four phases, began in 2013 and are scheduled to complete in 2019. We've been involved in all four phases, with clients Balfour Beatty and Siemens. The first phase was from Manchester to Liverpool, the second from Manchester to Bolton, the third from Bolton to Preston and the fourth from Preston to Blackpool. The last section involves relaying track, building bridges and footbridges, extending stations and associated works such as drainage along 17 miles of track.

Laurence Mckidd, said, "The decision has caused widespread disappointment across the region. Not only is it a setback for travellers, it also is a blow to the employment prospects of hundreds of people who work for Network Rail contractors."

Happily for our teams, we are experiencing growing demand for our services on many infrastructure projects already under way or planned for the north of England and Scotland.

These initiatives will ensure the future success of VGC and will make sure that we continue to meet our clients' labour needs.



Siemens senior managers thanked Andrew Donnelly and his team (working on LOC bases at Bradshaw Fields) for protecting and supporting a vulnerable member of the public. From left to right: Sean Burdette (COSS), Andrew Cardiff (Siemens project manager NWEF phase 4), Alan Taylor (lookout), Ian Hendry (civils installer), Mark O'Leary (Siemens project director), Lee Cavill (COSS), Andrew Donnelly (team leader, COSS), Jamie Burdette (civils installer)



Investment in infrastructure is good news

Confirmation that the government is committed to delivering the high-quality infrastructure needed to sustain a more competitive and productive economy is positive for the construction and engineering industries.

Last year's decision to make the National Infrastructure Commission an executive agency of government to help plan, prioritise and ensure efficient investment set the scene for a programme of spending that will create and sustain employment over the next ten years.

Current high profile projects include the High Speed 2 (HS2) rail link from London to the Midlands and beyond. This £56 billion investment involves multi-million framework and enabling works contracts that will challenge all participants.

VGC is well placed to secure contracts for skilled trades and labour and specialist support services.

"We are confident that we have the organisation, skills and resources to outperform on any contracts we may be awarded," says Chris Ryan, VGC Labour Solutions director. "Cost is a key concern, as ever, but at the same time we have a marvellous opportunity to create a diverse and representative workforce, fulfilling local employment requirements and offering apprenticeships to a wide range of applicants."

VGC is poised to satisfy requirements, having invested consistently to ensure best practice in safety, diversity and in technology support as demonstrated by our new CRM, labour database and payroll systems. We have also set up a special team to prepare for our involvement in HS2 contracts.

The only concern on an otherwise optimistic outlook is the impact of Brexit on the availability of skilled workers. "We are already planning to address anticipated shortages of skilled operators by up-skilling workers, young and old, to acquire qualifications, by using apprenticeships and by encouraging training at all levels," says Chris.

HS2 is just one of the many major infrastructure projects VGC is focusing on. Highways England is planning £3.2 billion of investment on road improvements between now and 2022. The Birmingham tram project has just started while we are in the concluding stages of the north-west electrification project (see below). And there are huge developments in the energy sector at Hinckley Point and Sellafield and in a projected new station in Anglesey in north Wales.

With our commitment to outperformance, and our proven track record on major projects such as Crossrail, Heathrow upgrade, EGIP and the Tyne & Wear metro, we look forward to contributing to the UK's exciting planned infrastructure programmes.



Commitment to health and safety produces unexpected bonus

BE SAFE WITH vgc

Safety statistics

As of 31 July 2017.
*Accidents per 100,000 hours worked

1,844,068

hours worked over last 12 months

139

days since last RIDDOR reportable accident

1,229,491

hours worked since last reportable accident

0.06

12 month RIDDOR AFR*

Promoting a culture of health and safety continues to be a challenge for industry in general, and for the construction and engineering sectors in particular.

Colleagues know their views are valued, and that there is a structure in place for issues to be resolved in a supportive environment.

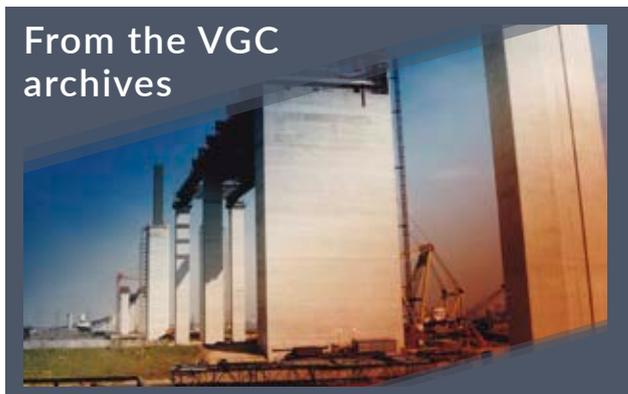
So while we are seeing an improvement in the quality of the reports from site, we are also seeing an improvement in dialogue between various levels of staff and management within the company. One key influencer reported that the behavioural training had even helped him in his relationship with his teenage son!

“It is encouraging and rewarding for all concerned that our investment in behaviour-based safety is producing unforeseen positive outcomes,” says Ciara Pryce, group services director. “We believe that our long term commitment to a strong and supportive safety culture will continue to deliver benefits across the organisation in terms of management development and a fair and open diversity culture, as well as workplace safety.”

VGC has been committed to best safety practice ever since the company started. It was enhanced by our Be Safe by Choice behavioural safety programme, launched in May 2012.

The training delivered to all levels of staff, and the work of our key influencers, have led to a marked improvement in the reporting of close calls and near misses. This in turn has improved safety behaviour on site, and had a positive impact on RIDDOR accident rates; our 12-month AFR (accidents per 100,000 hours worked) is 0.06.

We have also seen an unexpected additional benefit. Be Safe by Choice equips our key influencers with softer skills that help them to engage in difficult or sensitive conversations. Their improved interpersonal skills give colleagues the confidence to approach them for support or advice around a variety of subjects. Conversations that initially focused on health and safety issues and work planning now include cultural and personal issues.



From the VGC archives

1988 - 2012: the Channel Tunnel and Channel Tunnel Rail Link

VGC played multiple roles in HS1. Over 200 VGC people worked on the civil engineering from Rainham to Dagenham for Morgan Sindall Vinci and on short tunnels from Stratford to Kings Cross for Skanska. Our specialist teams laid concrete-embedded track along the route for client Tarmac, created new track and signalling on the rail link through to Kings Cross St Pancras, and helped to build the Medway rail bridge.

We also provided infrastructure for cabling along part of the rail link route and laid more than 12 miles of track past the Medway for Amey.

Photograph: Medway bridge under construction (VGC archives)

Guest column: James Woodcock

Samaritans corporate fundraising manager



Statistically, construction workers across the industry are at higher risk of suicide than average. An ONS survey, *Suicide by Occupation*, released in March this year, found that manual workers in construction are at 3.7 times greater risk of suicide than their peers in other sectors.

Some people find it difficult to be open about their problems and, equally, to ask for help when they're struggling to cope. Many don't recognise the signs that they're at risk, and those around them often hesitate to ask relevant questions, in case their attention is seen as unwelcome interference. Many issues can contribute to suicide risk, including unemployment, social isolation, alcohol or drugs misuse, financial problems and relationship breakdown.

An unwillingness to ask for help might stem from any number of causes, but the more people Samaritans can reach with the message that it's good to talk things through and get help early, rather than waiting until you hit a crisis, the more likely we'll be able to tackle the suicide statistics.

Suicide is complex and what affects one person may not have the same impact on another, so there is no one-size-fits-all solution, nor a failsafe way to tell if someone is at risk of suicide.

If you are interested in finding out about the ways Samaritans can support your workforce, please visit samaritans.org/for-business



Hard work and determination have carved a career for Viorica Voicu in VGC's Track Partnership contract

Viorica's interest in working on the railway was prompted while on a short-term contract with Stoneward at Baker Street station.

This experience encouraged Vicki (as she is known to her colleagues) to study for her CSCS card and other qualifications including tickets in sleeper drill, band saw and stressing equipment. She now plays an important part in VGC's Track Partnership contract for London Underground.

Since joining VGC in July 2015 Vicki has been based in Walthamstow where she has adjusted well to the 12:00 to 21:00 shift pattern. Working principally in ballast track renewal (BTR) as a platelayer and trackman, she enjoys the camaraderie of the eight-person BTR gang. Their work includes setting up the sleepers, fitting the rail to them and tying them in to give a secure track for the tube trains to run on.

Vicki is an advocate of our 'Be Safe by Choice' campaign: "I always wear the correct PPE and I encourage other people if they forget. I also look out for trip and other hazards to make sure people are aware of any risks. Safety is a very important part of being competent at your job."

Track Partnership's senior delivery engineer commended Vicki's professional approach. "I was very impressed with Viorica's work ethic. She does any task asked of her with a good attitude and is one of the hardest-working labourers I have seen."

VGC has worked for London Underground on this contract for thirteen years. By employing people of Viorica's calibre, that relationship looks set to continue.

VGC is supporting Samaritans through a fundraising partnership this year.

Raising awareness of the issues is also important. At the dinner to round off the VGC Golf Day in May (see photograph above), during which we raised £1,235, James Woodcock spoke about the charity's vital work. Earlier in the year James attended a Track Partnership event, where he talked to supervisors and workers about the support the charity can offer. We hope to welcome Samaritans representatives to more events in the coming months.

To find out more please visit vgcgroup.co.uk/charity

Clients recognise outperformance

"I am extremely proud of the people who outperform expectations and show our clients why VGC is the leading construction services provider."

Laurence Mckidd, managing director

Four Lines Modernisation (4LM)
Volker Rail's general manager emailed about our civils engineering work at Tower Hill station for client 4LM: "I was impressed with the way the station assets were protected and the professional attitude of your staff."



The Crossrail general foreman at Shenfield station commended James Piercy, Mihai Gligor, Jamie Crowe, Joe West and James Byrne for their "quick thinking" in helping to detain a suspect before the police arrived.



Costain's health and safety adviser on the Crossrail Anglia contract awarded VGC the subcontractor of the month award for both March and April 2017.



Skanska's operations director sent "A huge round of applause to all of you for the success we all share on completion of the M1 junction 19 improvement scheme."



A Track Partnership crane controller commended Moseray Kabba for helping to enforce exclusion zones.

The ballast track renewals project manager thanked the gangs for their hard work and dedication at Burnt Oak, commenting: "The gangs were vigilant in looking after each other's safety. All of the site was tidy throughout the weekend, and they left the site in immaculate order."



CVU's health and safety adviser described our Edgware Road site as "an example to all: fantastic set-up".

Transport for London's quality manager described our drainage project on the A10 for client CVU: "The site is well managed, long may it continue."



Morgan Sindall Energy's section engineer commented on our project at Kensal Green substation: "It's a very nice piece of work... I am impressed with the progress of work so far. Well done!"

Morgan Sindall presented Paul Quinn with a Safety Champion's award for "demonstrating continual high standards of safety and quality".



ATC's electrical works manager congratulated the Crossrail C644 team for overcoming a series of complications and challenges, "pulling together proactively, and presenting a good quality of workmanship."

An ATC senior general foreman said that Paul Anderson, working on Crossrail at Stepney Green, "stands out from the crowd and goes that extra mile; his interfacing with the principal contractor, and his procedures and paperwork, are outstanding."

The Crossrail field engineer nominated Donal McCarthy and Carlos Allca for a values award for collaboration on C644. "They have taken on works left by a previous contractor and vastly improved on the quality of the works, and delivered on their promises. Despite a very tight schedule and a restrictive site they have never compromised on safety and have ensured the team are empowered to speak up. They are open and honest, never over-report and tell it like it is."



The Siemens project director presented a Gold award for innovation to Joe Atherton at the safety standdown day in Leyland earlier this year. He also thanked Joe for his excellent safety culture.



Better together – CONNECT group prepares for HS2

VGC is among a group of construction industry key suppliers finding new ways to provide vital support services and equipment for major infrastructure projects.

CONNECT is a new initiative inspired by the experience of working on the Olympic Park development in 2012. Realising the benefits gained when suppliers of plant, labour, training and other specialist services worked together so efficiently, ten leading companies, including the VGC Group, have combined to form a partnership that will support tier one contractors on the construction of the High Speed 2 (HS2) railway.

The partnership was informally launched at an event in Birmingham on 28 June. 300 delegates heard the City's mayor commend the new alliance and highlight the role it could play in contributing to the Midlands' economy during the construction of the new high-speed rail link.

"The CONNECT partnership has the potential to make a big and helpful impact on the HS2 project," says Chris Ryan, labour solutions director.

As part of the board of directors for the new partnership, we are working on setting up the governance and behaviour structures to which all the partners are committed. Assuming these activities come together as planned, CONNECT will be formally launched in London in late November.

Photograph: Ciara Pryce, group services director, Stephen Burns, business development director, and Chris Ryan, labour solutions director at June's CONNECT event in Birmingham.

VGC facilitates major housing development



While VGC is used to involvement in major infrastructure projects around the UK – we have contributed to projects on roads, bridges, railways, power stations and airports - facilitating the infrastructure for housing development is a new undertaking.

In November VGC Construction was contracted by Eurovia, one of the UK's leading highways and infrastructure maintenance companies, to provide enabling works and section 278 road contracts on a number of sites.

Initial projects at Syon Park in west London and at Burnham in Buckinghamshire were delivered successfully before the invitation came to undertake major road reconstruction and drainage work at Houghton Regis near Dunstable. This will serve future housing and commercial developments, as well as a new council depot and recycling centre.

The development, known as HRN1, is a high quality, sustainable urban extension of 5,150 new homes to the north of the Bedfordshire town. HRN1 is well connected to the road, rail and air network in the region, making it an ideal location for new business, community and leisure facilities.

The housing provision requires the construction of all the infrastructure associated with such a substantial investment. Thanks to key influencer Vlad Birtalan and effective collaboration with our client, all earthworks, roads, services, and drainage activities are well under way with no incidents on site.

Commenting on his company's choice of VGC to provide essential infrastructure for the development, Scott Jaycock, Eurovia contracts manager, said, "VGC has demonstrated that it can deliver sensitive construction projects on time and on budget so we are pleased to extend our relationship into the housing infrastructure sector where we're confident we'll continue to work well together to our mutual benefit and that of our clients."

"We are delighted to be supporting Eurovia on this important project," said William Dalton, VGC contracts manager. "We have been working with Vinci, the parent company, for some time in other areas, and we're pleased that our reputation for managing high profile projects efficiently and effectively has contributed to a strong relationship."

Will continued: "HQSE manager Richard Wheeler and I are working closely with LoHAC (London Highways Alliance Contract) contractors working for CVU and Transport for London to develop a safety forum on buried services, including sharing best practice on searches, permits and working methods. We are on an upward trajectory and are well placed to support the delivery of the government's ambitious infrastructure programmes."

Chairman inspires graduates



Sean Fitzpatrick, our executive chairman, delivered the keynote address at the graduation ceremony of St Mary's University School of Arts and Humanities this summer. The ceremony took place in Westminster

Cathedral in London and coincided with the anniversary of Sean's graduation from the college 47 years ago.

Busy placing people

VGC Personnel has recently placed experienced candidates including planners, quantity surveyors, risk managers, quality managers, environmental advisers, project managers, and section and site engineers on major projects including HS2, Birmingham tram, Heathrow and Gatwick and the M6 motorway.

Guillaume wins safety competition



Key influencer Guillaume Grimbeek won VGC's charity week "See it, Share it" competition. He received the bottle of bubbly VGC was sent for being shortlisted for the 2017 Construction News Diversity Champion of the Year award. "See it, Share it" encourages all staff to share good practice and

close calls. Guillaume noticed and reported broken hinges on a London Underground safety gate.

Safety stand-down day a success

24 members of VGC Construction staff were joined by a colleague from CVU, a major client, for a safety stand-down day at Cardinal House in mid-June. The core message of the event, which was delivered by HSQE Manager, Richard Wheeler, was "Be right and be safe".

Another ISO accreditation

VGC has progressed our ISO accreditation to the updated ISO 9001 2015. This recognises our commitment to quality, and to involving all staff in identifying risks and opportunities. The accreditation will help drive further improvements across the business.

VGC hosts supervisor development programme



In early August Balfour Beatty used VGC's Ruislip training facility for the roll-out of its development programme for their suppliers' foremen on Track Partnership works. People from VGC, CRS and McGinleys, hand-picked from drainage and ballast track renewal (BTR) teams, attended the initial session. The programme, which lasts for up to 18 months, provides a career path from foreman to supervisor and then to senior supervisor. It is transferable across all Balfour Beatty projects.

"Rainbow Warriors" help Samaritans



Samaritans are VGC's chosen charity for this year and benefited from the fund-raising efforts of VGC's "Rainbow Warriors" when they completed the 5-kilometre Colour Run in Wembley Park on 11 June. Congratulations to Laura, Theresa, Kimberley, Chantal, Naomi, Emma, Ciara, Chelsey and Dee on raising £590.

Women in construction workshop



Encouraging more women to consider a career in construction is among the EDI initiatives we undertake. As

has been widely reported, only 11% of the workforce in the construction industry is female, a figure that drops to only one per cent of people working on sites around the country.



Because one of the most effective ways to change the situation and encourage diversity is to tell girls studying for GCSE about the opportunities in the industry, Kimberley McGinty, VGC's skills and employment adviser, presented a workshop to a class of 13-year-olds in Northwood School in Middlesex in early summer. Kim's presentation was well received by the girls; she will take the workshop to other schools in west London over the coming months.

The VGC Group:

Tel: 08456 201 201 www.vgcgroup.co.uk

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