



# GLOBAL LIGHT RAIL AWARDS 2023

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There was a record attendance - and a host of surprises - at this year's celebration of excellence and innovation at London's Honourable Artillery Company in October.

**T**he World Cup, and almost 500 light rail and metro urban systems in operation... the year 2022 was certainly eventful across the world's public transit industry. There are always successes - and challenges - that face us all, but we are certainly up to the task.

This was the opening message from Nicholas Owen, journalist, TV presenter and committed light rail advocate, returning again to welcome 280 attendees from almost every continent to the the Global Light Rail Awards (GLRA) at London's historic Honourable Artillery Company on 4 October. There were over 110 entries, demonstrating just how prestigious the event has become.

Scorching weather and heavy floods are everyday stories, and nations are waking up to the realisation that it's everyone's fault. The responsibility lies with us to change the way we run our lives.

The GLRA judges chose **Metro de Sevilla** as the **Winner** in the **Best Environmental and Sustainability** category. They praised a star-performing Spanish green tramway that has slashed energy consumption by a third over the last decade simply by driving trams more carefully. In 2022, it went further



▲ ABOVE: Meet light rail's Rising Star Alexandra Sjöholm. The Head of Marketing and Sales at Škoda Group in Finland was described as "unwavering and exceptional" by the Global Light Rail Awards judges.



▲ Energy saving is a way of life for Metro de Sevilla in Spain, where half its trams run on solar power. Congratulations to Jorge Maroto and Clara Lozano from Metro de Sevilla who collected the Environmental & Sustainability Initiative award.

by installing 2000 solar panels on its buildings, generating two million kilowatts of energy per year, enough to power half its trams.

With its laser-like focus on 'Net Zero', a **Highly Commended** award went to **Metro Málaga** from the same country. Sustainability is top of the agenda in this township of just over 200 000 people, and a new extension puts a third of its population within easy reach of a tram. Ridership has more than doubled since 2019, with only two additional stations.





▲ Keolis Nottingham has gained the industry's respect for tackling customer challenges head-on. It was also a moment to remember North Star Consultancy founder Richard Brown.

The **Richard Brown Best Customer Initiative** category was renamed as a memorial to North Star Consultancy founder Richard Brown, a long-term supporter of the Global Light Rail Awards, who we lost during the last year.

**Keolis Nottingham (UK)** was named **Winner**. As Nicholas Owen remarked: "The trouble is, passengers often don't appreciate that we have a business to run. They try and travel without a ticket, and sometimes cause wilful damage."

The GLRA judges were impressed with Keolis' four-month zero-tolerance campaign. Security officers held trams at stops to check passengers boarding and leaving, and over 22 000 fare evaders were caught.

Two other entries received **Highly Commended** awards.

The **Midland Metro Alliance** in the UK's West Midlands did its best to look after passengers during construction of its latest Birmingham Eastside and Brierley Hill extensions, with communication that was praised from local businesses.

The second award went to operator **West Midlands Metro** from the same conurbation, which increased customer satisfaction levels from 53% to 91% in 12 months by pegging fares, using digital technology to support schools, allowing community groups to travel at a discount, and supporting others in difficulty.

The category **Winner** for the **Significant Safety Initiative** award was **KeolisAmey Docklands** for its use of Artificial Intelligence. The judges remarked: "It's every tram driver's nightmare when a bulky item is thrown onto the track, and worst of all attempts at suicide. At Custom House station in London, computerised cameras think for themselves, surveying the full length of platforms."

On test for 12 months, they picked up false alarms, trespass, and bottle throwing, and weren't fooled when testers used fabric dummies instead of real people.

A **Highly Commended** award went to **West Midlands Metro** for its novel 'Trap and Drag' door closing mechanism that reduces the risk of serious passenger casualties.

The **KeolisAmey Docklands** team was back on stage to receive another trophy, this time **Highly Commended** in the **Technical Innovation of the Year (Infrastructure)** category, for the London Artificial Intelligence project that has saved lives. The GLRA judges rated it again for its innovative features.

Also **Highly Commended** was **AECOM** for its research into sound absorption during the planning of a new tramline. Residents in



On top form as ever, GLRA host and light rail enthusiast Nicholas Owen entertained guests with stories of his travels around the world.



▲ Good use of Artificial Intelligence can save lives, as Keolis Amey Docklands has demonstrated with its UK trials. It was a popular Safety Initiative category winner.

Toronto, Canada, wanted straight answers when transit operator Metrolinx proposed the Lakeshore East Joint Corridor line. Online kit called an Immersive Sound Studio received 100 000 online and mobile phone hits.

Senior staff from **Keolis Hyderabad** travelled nearly 8000km (5000 miles) from India to learn of their success as category **Winners**. The story was related how a power failure shut down the line into a major shopping centre for five days, lost millions of rupees in ticket revenue, and angered traders. An overhaul of the power system was enacted, solving failures, expensive power leaks, and a lack of power for trams at stations at the end of the line.

It was a good night for **Škoda Group** from Helsinki, Finland, a newcomer to the GLRA. The **Winner** in the **Technical Innovation of the Year (Rolling Stock)** category has gone back to the drawing board with its *Forcity Smart Artic X54* (Jokeri) to reconfigure the internal layout, offering unparalleled comfort with recycled leather seats, wide gangways, and 40% more floor space than its competitors.



▲ It was a thoroughly worthwhile 800km (5000-mile) journey to London from Hyderabad in India for Shyam Chandra Mishra and J. Krishna Mohan to collect the Technical Innovation of the Year.

**Highly Commended** went to **Comfortdelgro** from Singapore, which has found a solution to the climatic headache of an average of 176 days of downpours every year. Water penetrating tiny gaps in trams' bodywork caused corrosion to small components that blew fuses and led to poor performance. The solution is a neat little plastic seal that only cost GBP5 (EUR5.75), plus a small bypass switch.

The **Supplier of the Year** category proved tough for the GLRA judges because of the large number of entries.

The selection of **Mott MacDonald** as **Winner** was unanimous. It requires great skill to provide tramway operators with advice and keep politicians on side at the same time, and matters were particularly complex in Manchester, UK, at the time that the new High Speed 2 extension from Crewe was a hot topic (the project was cancelled in September this year).

Creating good interfaces between fast main line and urban transit modes at major inner city termini is not easy, but Mott MacDonald consistently shows it knows how this is best managed. As Nicholas Owen commented: ➤



“You need a company with stamina, enthusiasm, and above all the influence to get all this to happen. You have it here.”

The **Highly Commended** award went to **Colas Rail**, which devised the EXODIGO Artificial Intelligence programme to survey large areas of new tramway alignment to easily discover unidentified underground pipes and cables that do not appear on plans.

The GLRA judges commented: “This is another example of AI saving both time and money. On the West Midlands (UK) Eastside extension, it saved the need to dig big holes. We can’t understand why everyone isn’t using it.”

The transformation of **Edinburgh Tram** from political embarrassment to a system of the highest quality brought loud applause from the audience, full justification for it being named as **Winner** for the keenly-contested **Project of the Year >EUR50m** category.

The award was made for the 4.4km (2.9-mile) extension that took three and a half years to complete from scratch, and was spot on its GBP207m (EUR237m) budget when it opened on 7 June.

It was a great all-round effort, not just for Edinburgh City Council (whose Senior Responsible Officer Hannah Ross walked up

to the stage), but also Turner & Townsend, Sacyr Farrans Nepal, Morrisons Energy Services, Siemens, and Anturas Consulting.

**Metro de Malaga** was **Highly Commended**. On top of previous accolades, the judges noted how it is genuinely disabled-friendly because 100% of its stations and stops are accessible, with 10% of seats reserved for the needy. A third of the city’s population of 216 000 now has easy access to a tram, and that will rise when the next (northern) extension opens in five years’ time.

There was little to choose between the project modellers, construction crews,



◀ The fresh approach to tram design by Škoda Group from Helsinki, Finland, impressed the judges, and Alexa Sjöholm received the award on behalf of the company from UK Tram Managing Director James Hammett.

▲ Mott MacDonald’s consistent competency makes it a first choice for advice on major projects, and its team has been named as Supplier of the Year.

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spanner-wielders and workshop teams in this GLRA category, but **Metroflow**, the GBP104m (EUR120m) scheme to resolve congestion on the UK's Tyne and Wear Metro emerged as **Winner** of the **Outstanding Engineering Achievement** award.

There have been problems during the entire 40-year life of the Sunderland line of the Newcastle area's rapid transit system because of single-track running, despite the presence of a parallel freight line. The logical solution has been to electrify it for use by Metro trains.

Navigating the complexity of the line's ownership by Network Rail was a major issue, but Project Metro, completed earlier this year by Nexus and Buckingham Group, is an overwhelming success and is improving system-wide service reliability.

When the new *Class 555* trains enter fleet service, 24 000 more passengers can be accommodated every day. The scheme was completed on budget.

A **Highly Commended** award went to **Efacec** for its TimeKeeper technology, a serious approach to solving the problem of trams over-speeding. This is already working well in Rio de Janeiro, Bergen, Odense, Tenerife and Nottingham.



◀ **Hannah Ross** of **Edinburgh City Council** was joined on the stage by the team who have made **Edinburgh Tram's** new extension such a success, and the **GLRA's Project of the Year** over **EUR50m**.



Trams are monitored every second of their journeys, and if speeds are not respected, brakes are applied. **Manuella Costa** travelled from **Lisbon** in Portugal

to London to collect the award. Having heard his role at the heart of the UK Tyne and Wear Metro's **Metroflow** project, the GLRA judges were delighted to name its principal coordinator **Alex Dodds** as **Winner** in the **Employee of the Year** category.

Network Rail's Light Rail Knowledge Manager dismissed suggestions that the

conversion of a little-used freight line for metro use was unachievable, and brought both sides together in total harmony. His new schemes include Manchester's for tram-trains, extending the Tyne and Wear Metro to Washington, and a range of Restoring Your Railway projects to return fixed track services to towns that lost them 60 years ago.

There was an emotional **Special Mention** for **Blackpool Transport** tram conductor **David Kershaw**, who despite family tragedies has cycled 550km (340 miles) for charity. His managers listed his other many achievements, and attached a host of complimentary letters from customers.

There was loud applause when **Blackpool Transport** was named **Team of the Year**. As well as full-time employees, the group

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► The Tyne and Wear Metroflow project was a worthy winner in the Outstanding Engineering Achievement category.



▲ Alex Dodds, Network Rail's versatile Light Rail Knowledge Manager, was named as Employee of the Year.



▲ Enthusiastic, loyal, dedicated and above all competent and hard-working - just a few ways of describing Managing Director Jane Cole and her Blackpool Transport Services Tramway Team.

of 12 comes from a variety of professions for the annual illuminations, which attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to the North West UK resort's seafront.

The 139-year-old system, last survivor of the UK's first generation, maintains a number of historic cars that are lit up for night-time outings. The drivers and conductors who make up Blackpool Transport Services Heritage Tramway Team have helped increase business 28% this year, while Facebook 'likes' are up 130% compared to 2022.

A team from India were **Highly Commended**. Equality in the workplace is a sensitive subject, and **Keolis Workforce for Women** - WOW for short - was founded in Hyderabad, last year. It urges women to join male-dominated departments. In a fast-growing city of 12 million people and whose Metro carries 500 000 people a day, this operator has been internationally recognised and commended for its aggressive recruitment drives and mentoring programmes.

A big hitter on the world stage was invited to join the platform as **Winner of Manufacturer of the Year** - none other than **Alstom**.

With over 8000 light rail vehicles to its credit over the last 30 years, in 140 cities, Alstom was praised for its consistently outstanding performance. The judges said of Alstom products: "They're the VW Golf of trams; they're reasonably priced, and they run well."



## Congratulations to Keolis winning teams from across the globe.

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In the last 12 months alone, there has been activity in Rio de Janeiro, Barcelona, Strasbourg, Quebec, Toulouse, Pennsylvania, Paris, Cologne, Ecuador, Vienna, Delhi, Bangkok, Singapore, and Santo Domingo, to name just a few.

**Highly Commended** was Finnish newcomer **Škoda Group**, which is winning new business from customer feedback to its *Jokeri X54* product. There was also a **Special Mention** for **Stadler** (a trophy winner in 2022) for the warm response to the first deliveries to the UK of the new *Class 777* fleet for Merseyrail (Liverpool), and '555s' to the Tyne and Wear Metro. The judges believe that greater recognition will come when the new trains have been proven in passenger service.

**MetroTenerife** was welcomed to the stage again as the **Project of the Year <EUR50m Winner** for a root-and-branch overhaul of its computer software. All around the world, technology progress is often held back by a requirement to integrate with older kit, and this Canary Islands' system decided upon a complete clear-out, replacing five networks, often incompatible, with just one.

Live performance information is conveyed to the control centre, and teams can spring into action if there is a problem with a vehicle, track or signalling. With project HEIMDAL, an illuminated display is easy to understand, and as Nicholas Owen remarked; "It's so simple... green means great, amber means warning, and red means get out and fix it now!"

The entries showcased many other inspiring and ground-breaking projects, and those shortlisted came from Austria, Turkey, the Middle East, and the UK.

**Highly Commended** was **CAF Istanbul Metro**. December 2022 brought the introduction of a new driverless fleet that allows services to run every 90 seconds. Extra trains can be put into service at the click of a mouse, and be parked anywhere overnight ready for instant use the following day instead of trekking back to the depot.

A nomination for the **Rising Star** award at the GLRA surely carries just as much weight as a professional qualification, and it is clear that those who enter their employees derive immense pleasure from broadcasting their achievements.

Five were listed for an award in 2023. **Hamish Falconer** (Project Manager, **Midland Metro Alliance and Colas Rail UK**) is building Birmingham's Eastside extension. Like all good leaders, he knows the value of teamwork, and always puts others first. Alliance Director Peter Cushing says: "He has a brilliant career to come."

**Katie Rigg** works for **Stadler** in Newcastle (UK). Being made redundant from her retail store manager's job after ten years in 2021 has turned out well. As a procurement assistant at the smart new Metro depot at Gosforth, she has



▲ Wherever you travel in the world, you're never far from an Alstom tram - and the grand total will soon run into five figures. François Giraud, Market & Product Director/Light Rail Vehicle Platform collected the GLRA's Manufacturer of the Year accolade.



▲ MetroTenerife's problem-solving HEIMDAL exercise was named as Project of the Year under EUR50m. On stage are Damaso Arteaga, Teresa Benet and Jacobo Pérez.





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shown skill in buying in quality items at the right price.

**Connor Hardy** joined **Nottingham Express Transit** as a tram driver in 2019, and **Keolis** was quick to promote him to Safety Manager. There was a citation from HM Principal Inspector of Railways Dominic Long who said he is "... engaging, open, and honest to deal with, inspiring others to achieve the same high standards."

**Helen Cooper**, Assistant Project Manager from **West Midlands Metro**, only joined the operation in April 2022 on a temporary contract, but has already been promoted twice. Her MD Sophie Allison says: "Helen adapts quickly and easily to changing situations to ensure that all her projects are successful."

The GLRA judges were unanimous, though, in their choice of **Winner**.

**Alexandra Sjöholm** from the **Škoda Group**. She is credited for breathing new life into the Finnish tram manufacturer. Starting as a junior in the strategy department, she soon became head of marketing and sales, and achieved the seemingly impossible – an order from Germany.

Said her nominee: "I marvelled at her mastery of exceptional technical knowledge, genuine belief in the product and unwavering affection for her product. Her commitment is unwavering, infused with love, passion and fervour."

**Comfortdelgro**, Singapore was chosen as **Most Improved System Winner** for



▲ **Tomorrow's leaders: Three of this year's Rising Star nominees were together on stage to collect their Highly Commended Awards - Hamish Falconer (Midland Metro Alliance and Colas Rail UK), Connor Hardy (Nottingham Express Transit) and Katie Rigg (Stadler UK). Helen Cooper (West Midlands Metro) was unable to be present.**

its root-and-branch approach to improve a light rail system that had a poor reputation for reliability. Delays have been cut by a staggering 93%.

The Sengkang and Punggol lines have served the north of the country for 20 years, but have been bedevilled with inferior track and defective vehicles that have now been addressed by a concerted team effort. Meetings were sometimes held every day. One of the GLRA judges commented: "No-one passes the buck any more. It's all about where we are now, not where we were."

**Highly Commended** went to **Metrotenerife** for its on-board monitoring



▲ **Comfortdelgro in Singapore has upped service performance by an incredible 93% with its ruthless root-and-branch offensive on reliability. Phil Sanders collected the GLRA trophy for the Most Improved System on behalf of Comfortdelgro.**

equipment that has sharply reduced the number of breakdowns; diagnosis of all equipment is continuously transmitted to the control centre.

The prestigious title of Global Light Rail Awards **Operator of the Year 2023** has gone to the Middle East. The **Winner, RKH Qitarat** in Dubai, played a vital role in the 2022 Football World Cup. The state-of-the-art automated network, mostly underground and across the city of Doha, was pushed to the limit with six times its usual business, a total of 18.2 million journeys. Its tramway, now in its third year, has four lines and 25 stations.

Even without football, the Metro's year-on-year growth has been over 70%, and the system can boast another amazing



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► As well as footballers, another winner in the 2022 World Cup in Qatar was transport operator RKH, which handled 128 million passengers in a fortnight, and ran 100% to time. Representatives from RKH Qitarrat collect the Operator of the Year award.



◀ **Edinburgh Tram's Head of Safety Colin Kerr's skills were recognised with a prestigious Judge's Special Award. TramForward (award sponsor) Chairman Paul Rowen (left) also offered his warm congratulations.**



**Trams (UK), Transdev Dublin (Ireland), and Transdev Sydney (Australia).**

This year's GLRA **Vision of the Year** award has gone to a city of almost six million people – Toronto – which generates 20% of Canada's total economy. Its public transport needs a big vision, and **Metrolinx** has this with a CAD100m (EUR69m) programme to grow and integrate its extensive light rail and suburban rail routes. This means new strategic interchanges, electrification of heavily patronised lines, a new subway route, and 32km (20 miles) of new segregated light rail that is ready for the first services.

A **Highly Commended** award went to the **Doha Metro** in Dubai for its 2022 World Cup performance. **SYSTRA Bologna** was also given a **Special Mention** for tackling its poor reputation for traffic congestion, pollution, and road accidents in a classic city that is famed for having the world's oldest

university. By 2030, a wireless tramway will run through this Italian city's urban centre.

The GLRA judges made a **Judges' Special Award** to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution through professionalism, dedication and passion, and at the same time led a complex new project to an immaculately successful opening: **Colin Kerr**, Head of Safety for Edinburgh Trams.

The judges offered this testimonial: "Over the last few years, and largely on Colin's watch, the reputation of this expanding UK tramway has shifted from the naughty corner to becoming a centre of excellence, doing its job to absolute perfection."

"When the new extension at Newhaven carried its very first tram on test at the beginning of 2023, who was walking in front to ensure that all went smoothly? Colin of course."

Following his decision to step back from a full-time job, Colin had his arm twisted to work in Edinburgh a couple of days a week, and he is also valued by his colleagues as interim Chair of the Light Rail Safety and Standards Board. **TAUT**

statistic: a full 100% of services – not 99.9% – running to time is often achieved.

Although narrowly missing out on trophies, a **Special Mention** was given to **Keolis Downer Yarra Trams, Melbourne (Australia), Edinburgh**

**The 2024 Global Light Rail Awards will be held on 2 October 2024.**



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