



08 Jul 2024

Author: Caroline Wilkie

Article type: Publication

Page: 45

Rail Express

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a license

page 1 of 2

Industry associations

Driving Safety and Efficiency: A Decade of Success for the Rail Industry Worker Program

The ARA is continuing to grow and develop the Rail Industry Worker Program to support the industry's tracking of worker competency.



Caroline Wilkie, Chief Executive Officer, Australasian Railway Association

The Australasian Railway Association's (ARA) Rail Industry Worker Program (RIW), the national competency and safety management system for Australian rail workers, has been enhancing rail industry safety culture for more than a decade. The RIW Card is now used by 100,000 rail workers and almost 6000 companies and has been adopted by all major Australian network operators.

The RIW program brings together a worker's competencies, education and health assessments into a single electronic record. Each worker receives a smart card linked to their profile which can be used to verify their qualifications to perform roles on a rail network. The RIW system also helps employers comply with Rail Safety National

Law (RSNL) and other regulations.

The ARA established RIW in 2013 on behalf of the Australian rail industry to fill a significant gap in managing worker competency, harmonising job roles and understanding workforce capabilities across the country. Governed by representatives from accredited rail network operators, infrastructure owners and principal contractors, RIW continues to evolve under the stewardship of the ARA.

RIW SUPPORTS A STRONG SAFETY CULTURE

The RIW system puts the safety of workers and rail users at the forefront of every shift. It assists network operators ensure work is undertaken by suitably trained and experienced workers.

An analysis conducted by Herbert Smith Freehills in 2023 reviewed how the RIW system assists rail transport operators, including rolling stock operators and rail infrastructure managers and contractors to manage their obligations.

Herbert Smith Freehills concluded that the RIW program is "a powerful tool for ensuring compliance with those key elements of an RIW Program Participant's obligations under

the RSNL, and the principles required for compliance with the general duties under WHS law."

Given the scale of construction currently underway in the rail industry, with a \$155 billion pipeline of infrastructure projects across the country, the RIW system is increasingly critical in ensuring safety and efficiency on job sites. Real-time verification of competence and fatigue management has been central to worker safety and the ability of the RIW system to suspend and block workers who do not produce negative drug and alcohol tests has also reduced the potential for safety incidents.

RIW ENHANCES WORKFORCE DATA

Beyond being an important tool for safety, compliance and competency management, RIW's ability to provide a system-wide single credentials program provides additional benefits for industry and workers.

A key focus for the ARA is supporting a growing, sustainable rail workforce that promotes skills development. ARA research has shown that our 165,000-strong Australian rail workforce is battling with a "retirement cliff" and a 70,000 skills gap, mostly in operational and project roles, including engineers, train drivers and controllers and IT specialists.

The ARA's The Rail Workforce – An Analytical Overview published in December 2023 also found that about 35 per cent of the Australian rail workforce would retire by 2035, with almost a third of train drivers currently aged over 55.

Data integrity is critically important to safeguard the value of workforce data. Recognising this, the RIW program introduced a direct upload function for Registered Training Organisations. The function simplifies the process of adding competencies to worker profiles. The feature complements the similar direct upload function for Authorised Health Professionals.



The RIW card is a national competency and safety management system for rail workers.



08 Jul 2024

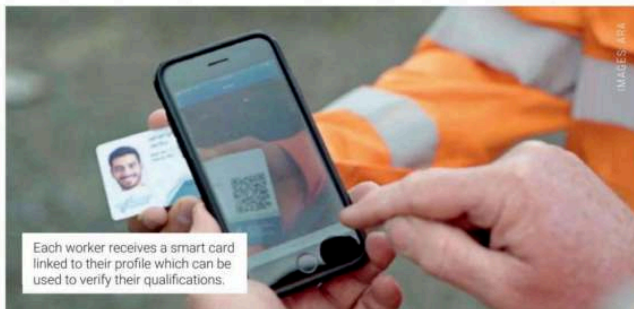
Author: Caroline Wilkie

Article type: Publication

Page: 44

Rail Express

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a license



Each worker receives a smart card linked to their profile which can be used to verify their qualifications.

In combination, these measures improve data integrity, speed up job role certification and further enhance worker safety and compliance.

UNLOCKING WORKFORCE MOBILITY AND SKILLS PORTABILITY

The detailed workforce model also facilitates the harmonisation of skill requirements for job roles common across rail networks and sites. Skills harmonisation unlocks workforce mobility, and the digital RIW cards support that portability.

The ARA has brought industry subject matter experts together to create nationally consistent, standardised job roles. These National Job Roles establish the competencies and health obligations required to complete specific jobs on any rail network.

In 2023, the ARA introduced 120 National Job Roles to RIW. The new roles cover disciplines in power and electrical,

and signalling, which are areas of critical demand across our industry. A suite of civil construction roles has also been defined. These full workforce roles facilitate the use of RIW on rail sites that commence as civil construction projects. This means even greater portability of skills and mobility for our workforce.

In addition, the ARA released a new National Assessment Framework. The framework helps employers ready their workforce to meet the requirements of the National Job Roles.

The adoption of National Job Roles prevents unnecessary re-certification of worker competencies wherever identical work will be performed. Employers can mobilise staff working over many sites and network jurisdictions and it gives them the opportunity to identify training gaps and opportunities to expand their workforce and business capabilities.

What this means in practice is that

workers can move between different job sites, swipe their RIW card and, with an appropriate briefing, begin work immediately.

The benefits of National Job Roles are not lost on State and Federal governments either. Governments have increased their focus on skills harmonisation and recognition across employment, training, and education portfolios.

RIW CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

As our industry continues to grow and develop, so does the RIW program.

In 2024, the ARA is working on behalf of industry with the National Transport Commission (NTC) on the review of Rail Safety National Law (RSNL). Our participation in the review helps the ARA ensure RIW remains fit-for-purpose and compliant with any changes to RSNL and is part of our program of work to improve safety, interoperability and harmonisation.

The ARA continues to improve functionality and develop new features in response to the needs of participants. We also consult with industry to further harmonise competency and health requirements to establish National Job Roles.

The program's commitment to data integrity and collaboration with regulatory bodies like the NTC underscores our industry's dedication to maintaining the highest standards of safety and compliance.

The ARA is also looking at RIW's success as a blueprint for the future. RIW is a great example of a collaborative industry initiative driving positive change and fostering a safer, more efficient rail network.



The detailed workforce model also facilitates the harmonisation of skill requirements for job roles common across rail networks and sites.