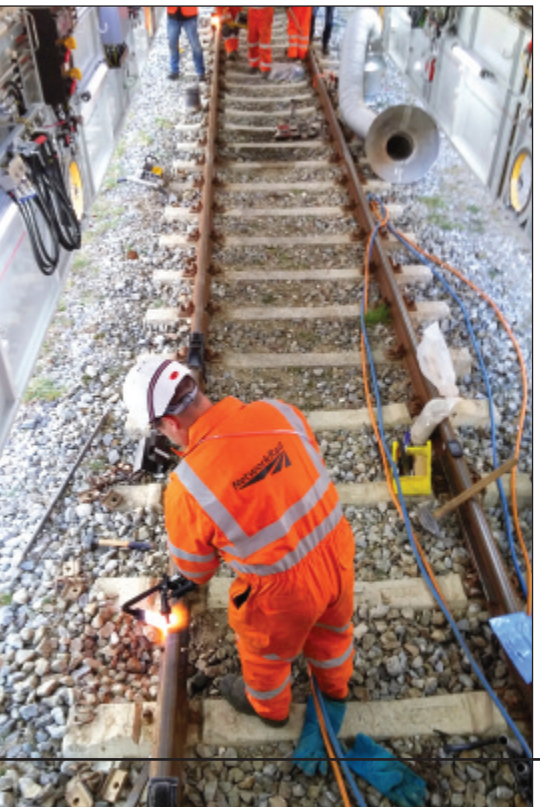
A maintenance revolution for the UK - update

Plasser UK's Mark Simmons details the latest on the Robel Mobile Maintenance System for Network Rail.

Sarah Weinberger and Anita Brys from Robel will, I hope, have forgiven me by the time this issue arrives on your desk. The number of times they have had to rework the front cover of this issue of *Rail Infrastructure* tells the story of how the machine still changes so quickly and yet does not acknowledge the quality of the first version.

The Robel Mobile Maintenance System (MMS) gained labels, then logos and then long after the final magazine deadline had passed they found me in the office again, excitedly saying, 'We've got to use a photograph of the machine working in the twilight!'

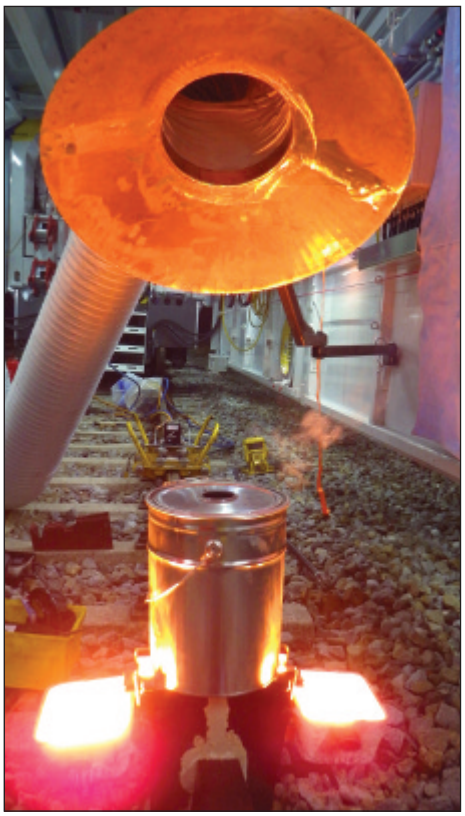
Yes - working. The 11th progress meeting, held at the Robel factory in Freilassing, Germany, took place in the middle of Network Rail taking control of the machine for a week of nights. During the day, the Robel staff continued with their planned programme of commissioning.



The future on track - for certain!

Real credit must be paid to the fabulous group of Network Rail welding staff who came across to cut up Robel's test track, move the rails around, put them back in place and weld it all back together in the night before the commissioning staff needed to use the track again the next day.

In a new working environment they worked hard, both to prove the machine and the small plant developed by Robel and to develop and improve the Network Rail operational processes. Each night after completing



their tasks, they convened in the hotel and continued to talk about the job, think of new ideas and areas of continuous improvement to help ensure that, by the time the machine arrives in the UK, the team and machine will be ready to perform at the highest level.

In a carefully planned programme, designed to gradually test each function and idea in a managed and structured way, they cut rails, lifted a rail out using the synchronised hoists, moved and placed a rail carefully in the specially designed rail storage area in the intermediate car. They welded (and took continuous air quality measurements) with the ventilation louvres open and closed, with the extraction system fitted, removed and even blowing rather than extracting!

On the evening the front cover photograph was taken, the Network Rail team cut a 44 foot section of rail (45 foot would have coincided with sleeper centres), lifted it out and placed it back, welded it and then ground off the welds in record time. All of this while the combined paparazzi of Network Rail, Robel, Colas Rail and Plasser UK staff photographed and discussed every part of the operation.

Progress on the next systems

With such successful initial trials going on, you may think there was nothing to discuss in the 11th progress meeting, however a vital component was to check on progress and this now covers systems 1, 2, 3 and 4. Yes, the frames for the fourth system are now in production and the project team had an opportunity to view each build in its current state before proceeding out to the test tracks to visit system number 1 and watch the welders complete their 12th weld inside the MMS. A new team will take over for the weekend and begin to test the machine on a pad changing operation in creep mode before Robel finally gets the machine back.