

# The world of rail, from Afghanistan to Crossrail

A bright young engineer from Afghanistan has worked on Crossrail and is about to study for his Master's in the USA, having received pointers on his career from the UK Rail Industry Training Trust, launched by RTM. **Adam Hewitt** reports.

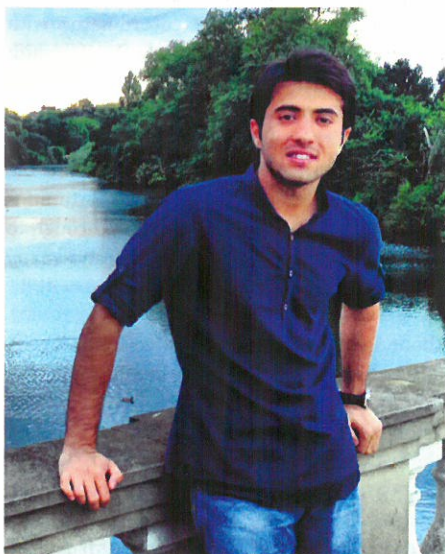
**A**hmad Farid Amiri, 25, is from Afghanistan: a country whose rail infrastructure is rudimentary to say the least. But it has been "one of his biggest desires" to work in rail.

After high school in Afghanistan, he managed to get a scholarship to the prestigious Yildiz Technical University of Istanbul for his undergraduate degree in civil engineering.

Towards the end of his course there, he came over to Newcastle for a three-week intensive Erasmus exchange course, called *RailNewcastle*. While there, he had a conversation with RTM's Roy Rowlands, a director of the UK Rail Industry Training Trust, at a networking event.

Rowlands told Ahmad of the UK opportunities available in rail, including on Crossrail. It was to prove a fruitful conversation, because Ahmad's follow-up research led him to the Young Crossrail programme.

In an interview on the phone from Afghanistan, Ahmad told RTM that he has family in London, so while staying with them, he took the chance to research Crossrail and then apply. "I submitted all my documents, and luckily was accepted for a summer work placement on Crossrail.



"I joined the Westbourne Park site, with the BFK joint venture of BAM Nuttall, Ferrovial and Kier. I worked there with a helpful senior engineer and two other young engineers, one from Spain, one from England."

## 'Crossrail helped shape my future'

His role was in tunnel inspections: going out every day to check the tunnels and produce reports. "We had different types of tools to measure any cracks that were developing inside the segments of the tunnel. There was some paperwork involved, in terms of taking notes, measuring cracks, and sometimes we were measuring the temporary problems occurring inside the tunnels and reporting to our seniors.

"I learnt a lot from Crossrail not only technically, but also in terms of management, dedication to safety, dedication to knowledge, and sharing knowledge and enthusiasm to learn. It was a very good experience for me, and helped to shape my future."

He spent five weeks with Crossrail, before returning to Turkey to complete his undergraduate studies. "After graduation, I wanted to work specifically in the rail industry. I came back to Afghanistan in September 2013; unfortunately we don't have railway infrastructure, so I started working for a US-based company as a quality control engineer. Now I'm planning to do my graduate studies in the project management field."

He has now been accepted on a Fulbright scholarship to do his Master's degree in the US from March this year.

## An unusual opportunity

He said: "It is very unusual, a chance to study abroad if you are from Afghanistan, because of the economic situation, which is not good for students. In 2008, when I was applying for my undergraduate scholarship, I was a little bit lucky, but I do think I deserved it."

Ahmad said he enjoyed the *RailNewcastle* experience, having been selected as one of five

students from Turkish universities to take part. *RailNewcastle*, funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission, is aimed at the EU's newest members and prospective members: Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

Ahmad said: "I had to undergo several exams and interview procedures, and show my knowledge about speaking English, and information about the rail sector.

"When we came to Newcastle, it was at first a little bit strange because I had to get along with guys from different countries, with different backgrounds, and we were separated into groups – each had a specialist topic to research.

"I was a participant in a research group specifically focused on the problems with rail freight in Europe.

"It is one of my biggest desires, to work in the rail sector – I especially want to work in the field of management. Of course, there will be some design, and other aspects of engineering as well, but management is very important, to properly deliver big projects – like Crossrail."

He told us: "I want to thank Roy – he was the person who gave me the pinpoint information I needed about Crossrail, and I really would like to thank him."

Lauren Hiller, Young Crossrail programme coordinator, said: "Crossrail are committed to inspiring the next generation of engineers and through the Young Crossrail programme we have been able to place 90 work experience students with hosts across the project.

"We really enjoyed hosting Ahmad and it's fantastic to hear he had such a positive experience; this demonstrates how mutually rewarding work experience can be for both student and company. We wish him the best with his career."

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

W: [www.crossrail.co.uk/careers/young-crossrail/](http://www.crossrail.co.uk/careers/young-crossrail/)