

Kiel Americas

The True Value of Seat Refurbishment

Refurbishment has become a key focus for rail operators looking to improve sustainability, extend asset life and optimise budgets. Railway-News speaks with Kiel Americas' Head of Parts and Services, Jeremy Taluzek and General Manager Nicholas Gwynne, about the company's expanding refurbishment capabilities.

Railway-News: Why is refurbishment such an important part of Kiel's service offering?

Jeremy Taluzek: It's a core part of Kiel's service offering, supporting our commitment to cost-effective, customer-focused solutions and sustainable design. By extending the lifecycle of our seating products through the replacement of high-wear components and offering upgrades – such as integrating modern technologies not available during the original production, we help customers reduce costs associated with wear and vandalism, both direct and indirect.

Our seating is built with a modular, recyclable design that allows for targeted part replacements. This significantly reduces waste, minimises environmental impact and ensures ongoing affordability without compromising performance or quality.

RN: What are the cost benefits of refurbishment vs. full replacement?

JT: Refurbishment enables operators to retain the seat's main frame, which is typically one of the costliest components, while replacing only high-wear

elements like cushions, covers or inserts. This approach significantly extends the seat's overall lifespan and provides a refreshed, modern appearance, often making it indistinguishable from a brand-new seat.

Nicholas Gwynne: The cost saving really depends on what we're replacing so it can vary vastly, but there will always be some level of saving made by choosing this option.

RN: What trends are you seeing in operator demand for refurbishment over replacement?

JT: Trends often depend on key factors such as budget constraints, the lifecycle stage of the seating and the desire to implement modern upgrades. One notable trend we're observing is the shift from fabric upholstery to more durable plastic inserts. This change reflects a broader industry focusing on long-term efficiency and operational resilience.

Plastic not only offers easier maintenance but is also better suited to withstand the high levels of wear and tear common in public transit environments.

RN: What misconceptions around refurbishment would you like to correct?

JT: There's often a misconception that refurbishment is merely a stopgap or a compromise in quality and appearance compared to full replacement, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

Refurbishment allows our customers to maximise the value of their existing seating systems without sacrificing aesthetics or performance. In many cases,

wear is only surface-level – limited to upholstery or external components – which can be easily replaced or upgraded.

By refreshing elements like fabric or plastic inserts, we preserve the integrity of the original structure while avoiding the unnecessary cost and waste of replacing the entire seat. This approach delivers a sustainable, cost-effective solution that still meets modern expectations for design and durability.

RN: What do you offer in terms of options for upholstery, materials and customisation?

JT: We offer a wide range of upholstery options to meet diverse aesthetic and functional needs, including a variety of colours, patterns, textures and materials such as vinyl, wool and leather.

Our experienced sewists can accommodate numerous customisations such as decorative stitching, contrasting piping and more, to help customers achieve a tailored, high-end finish.

To support the decision-making process, we also provide

high-quality renderings that showcase these options in context, giving customers a clear, realistic preview of the final execution before production begins.

RN: Can you walk us through a typical refurbishment project? What’s the average turnaround time?

JT: When we receive a refurbishment inquiry, our first step is to review the project scope with our engineering team to determine the required materials and components. In some cases, we request a sample seat to disassemble and evaluate. This allows us to accurately assess the refurbishment process, including labour time, and identify which elements may need replacing, such as foam and seat covers or whether additional work like stripping and repainting is necessary.

Turnaround time for refurbishment orders varies based on several factors. These include project size, the extent of seat damage, component complexity and material availability. That said, our highly skilled sewists and upholsterers can typically complete relatively straightforward seat designs in just a few hours per seat.



Refurbishment of a driver seat in a used ambulance – before and after

RN: How do you work with clients who want to manage installation in-house vs. those who want full service?

NG: We offer a flexible refurbishment model designed to accommodate both in-house installation and full-service needs.

For clients who prefer to manage installation internally, our typical approach involves receiving seat assemblies or cushions at our facility, performing all necessary refurbishment work such as reupholstery, foam replacement or component upgrades, and then shipping the completed units back for reinstallation by the client's technicians. We provide clear labelling and, when needed, installation guidance to ensure a smooth reassembly process on their end.

For clients seeking a full-service solution, we're actively expanding our capabilities to include on-site services such as disassembly, pickup, refurbishment and reinstallation. While this is not currently our primary model, we are exploring partnerships and operational adjustments that would allow us to deliver a fully managed, turnkey refurbishment experience in the near future.

This dual approach allows us to support a wide range of project needs, from cost-conscious clients with in-house teams to those looking for a more comprehensive, hands-off solution.

RN: What would you say are Kiel's biggest differentiators in this market?

NG: Our modern, modular design philosophy sets us apart. It allows us to reuse and replace only what's necessary, reducing cost and environmental impact. Wherever possible, we use recyclable materials, although in some cases flame, smoke and toxicity standards limit this. Still, we push for sustainability where we can.

Our experienced team also ensures a consistent level of quality and craftsmanship across all projects. The global scale of Kiel Group allows us to adapt quickly to supply chain challenges and maintain reliable service.

RN: How has Kiel managed parts and service logistics in the face of supply chain and tariff challenges?

NG: These challenges have impacted the entire

industry, but Kiel Americas is uniquely positioned to respond with agility and resilience. As part of a global organisation, we have the ability to quickly adjust procurement strategies and leverage the extensive supplier networks and resources of our sister companies worldwide. This built-in flexibility allows us to minimise disruptions and maintain reliable service for our customers.

While the long-term effects of evolving tariffs and ongoing supply chain volatility are still unfolding, we remain proactive and are continuously identifying cost-effective alternatives and adaptive sourcing solutions to ensure consistent value, quality and delivery performance.

RN: What's next for Kiel's refurbishment and parts service in North America?

NG: With over 80 years of industry experience, Kiel Americas is committed to becoming a true one-stop shop for our clients. We are continuously expanding our capabilities and anticipate significant growth opportunities in the months and years ahead. As part of this evolution, we're investing in greater vertical integration, enhancing control over our processes, increasing efficiency and ensuring we can deliver the highest quality service at the most competitive price.

"The quality of your work and dedication to excellence have made a significant impact on our operations and enhanced the comfort and safety of our personnel."

Johnn Reitz Fire Chief of Bellwood Fire Department

For more information visit our website www.kiel-seating.com or email us jtaluzek@kielamericas.com.



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