



Severn Lamb

Moving with the Times

IAAPA Expo Europe in Barcelona was the perfect opportunity to catch up with leading suppliers and spot the latest trends shaping the attractions industry. Yet, if you really want to understand what keeps a company successful year after year, the tradeshow floor is rarely the best place for reflection.

So, with coffee in hand, we caught up with Patrick Lamb, Managing Director of Severn Lamb, to dig a little deeper into what keeps this British transport specialist such a must-see stop on the IAAPA main aisle.

True to form, Lamb brought his trademark mix of insight, charisma, and humour - and was more than happy to share what keeps Severn Lamb firmly on track.

InterPark: You stepped in as a third-generation leader. What did you keep the same and what did you deliberately change?

Patrick Lamb: Reflecting on the past, the transition from second generation to third was organic rather than a deliberate, planned strategy.

There wasn't a specific moment in time, simply a gradual process as my father stepped back and I stepped up, building on what he and my grandfather had achieved before me. The changes we've seen, and continue to see, reflect the need to adapt to an ever-evolving industry, markets, and technologies. The world is very different today than it was then, but our core purpose has remained constant: we move people.

On my office wall, I have a montage of legacy company brochure covers each with a different strapline, from Recreational Transport Specialists to Visitor Transportation. In every era, people asked, "but what does Severn Lamb do?" The answer remains simple: we move people on rubber tyres, rails, or elevated tracks around theme parks, resorts, and leisure attractions. That's our heritage, and it continues to define our future.



IP: You now span heritage styling and contemporary EV platforms. What are most clients asking for?

PL: One of the most exciting aspects of Severn Lamb is that there's no "typical" client request, every project is unique. However, over the past decade, a clear trend has emerged: clients increasingly want heritage or period-styled vehicles powered by clean, quiet, and efficient electric drivetrains. Balancing the charm of the past with the technology of today is both a challenge and a thrill.

Our goal is to deliver guest experiences that feel authentic as if the vehicles were truly from a bygone era while providing operators with modern, emission-free powertrains that are cost-effective and simple to maintain. It's about blending craftsmanship with innovation delivering 21st-century engineering wrapped in timeless style.

IP: Southend Pier's battery-electric trains were a leap; what were the three hardest engineering problems you solved?

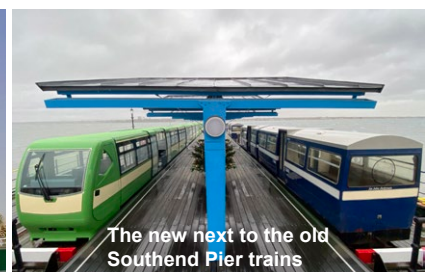
PL: The Southend Pier project in the UK, was truly generational - my father led the business when we designed and delivered the original diesel trains more than 30 years ago, so to have the opportunity to create the next generation of pier trains was both an honour and a challenge.

The project's engineering requirements were complex and often conflicting. First and foremost were the strict weight constraints of the historic pier itself. The maximum gross vehicle weight was non-negotiable, so every component had to be optimised to stay within those limits without compromising performance or passenger comfort.

Secondly, we needed to increase passenger space and accessibility - more headroom, a larger saloon area, wider and more accessible doors - all while retaining the existing station infrastructure and platform heights. Packaging modern motors, batteries, and control systems into such tight parameters demanded creative engineering and close collaboration across our design and production teams.

Finally, the operational environment and limited servicing access presented another layer of complexity. Once the trains are out on the pier, opportunities for maintenance are extremely restricted, and the location is constantly exposed to the elements. We therefore designed with long-term reliability and ease of servicing in mind, using modular assemblies, robust materials, and quick-access features to minimise downtime.

Balancing all these elements - efficiency, accessibility, and durability was no easy task, but the result is something the whole team can be proud of.





IAAPA Atlanta 2005



IAAPA Orlando 2024

IP: You've been very active with IAAPA (including committee leadership) and hold the ICAE credential. How did your involvement change your view of the supply chain / the industry?

PL: Our connection with IAAPA runs deep, this year marks 40 years of continuous membership, something we're incredibly proud of. Severn Lamb has grown alongside IAAPA, and that long-standing relationship has shaped how we see the attractions industry and our place within it. It's given us a front-row seat to the evolution of the sector from the early days of mechanical systems and manual controls to today's world of smart, sustainable, and fully integrated attractions.

Personally, my involvement on committees and earning the ICAE credential has reinforced just how interconnected our industry is. Manufacturers, designers, and operators all rely on one another to deliver safe, innovative, and unforgettable experiences. IAAPA provides the forum where those conversations happen - where ideas become standards, and collaboration drives progress.

That community aspect is what makes this industry special. IAAPA's global reach ensures that whether you're building a park in Orlando, a zoo in the Middle East, or a heritage tram in Europe, there's a shared commitment to excellence. For Severn Lamb, those connections have opened doors to partnerships, inspired new ideas, and kept us at the forefront of people-moving innovation for over four decades.

IP: What's the most requested customisation from attractions right now?

PL: Accessibility is without question the most common area of customisation today. Operators are rightly more focused than ever on inclusivity, ensuring all guests can enjoy the same experience. That often means wider door apertures, ramped access, wheelchair spaces, and flexible seating layouts all integrated seamlessly into the design rather than added as an afterthought.

Beyond that, attractions are increasingly requesting integrated audiovisual systems, onboard lighting, and smart features like GPS-triggered announcements or automated door systems. The trick is ensuring these enhancements add to the guest experience without complicating operation or maintenance. Our role is to find that sweet spot between creativity and practicality, ensuring every feature serves a purpose and stands up to the rigours of daily use.

IP: For large resorts with multi-stop networks, what's your guidance on dwell times, door strategies and throughput?

PL: Every site is different, but the underlying principle is the same: people flow is the heartbeat of the operation. We always start by mapping out the expected passenger volumes, loading/unloading times, and stop frequency. Dwell time should be optimised to balance efficiency with comfort - too fast, and guests feel rushed, too slow and throughput suffers.

Door configuration plays a huge role. For higher throughput, dual-sided loading or multiple door sets per car can make a big difference, especially at peak periods. Automation and audio-visual cues can also improve efficiency. Ultimately, it's about designing vehicles and systems that match the operational rhythm of the attraction where loading feels effortless and the experience remains enjoyable for everyone on board.

IP: If you could redesign a past project with today's tech, which would you revisit and what would you change?

PL: That's a fascinating question and a tough one. I'd probably revisit some of our early diesel-hydraulic projects, where today's electric drive technology could make a transformative difference. At the time, battery systems simply didn't have the capacity or efficiency we have access to now. With modern lithium-ion solutions, regenerative braking, and advanced control systems, we could deliver the same performance with zero emissions and far less maintenance.

There's also the digital side real-time monitoring, diagnostics, and predictive maintenance. These tools would have allowed us to offer even greater reliability and lifetime value. But that's part of the beauty of engineering - constant evolution. We're always learning, always improving, and always looking for ways to enhance what came before.

IP: When you're opening discussions about a new attraction, what detail most reliably predicts project success?

PL: The single biggest predictor of success is clarity both in vision and in communication. When a client has a clear understanding of the guest experience they want to create and shares that openly, everything else tends to align smoothly. Early collaboration is key; we can solve most technical challenges upfront if we're involved early enough.

Headaches usually arise from scope creep or late-stage design changes. Attractions are creative environments, and it's natural for ideas to evolve but significant alterations once manufacturing has started can impact timeframes and budgets. We encourage transparency, early sign-off, and open dialogue throughout. When the client, designer, and supplier work as one team, the results are always exceptional.

IP: How do zoo/theme park/attraction operators' needs differ when specifying people-moving platforms?

PL: Each has its own operational rhythm and guest expectation. Zoos, for example, often need vehicles that blend with natural landscapes, prioritise quiet operation, and accommodate frequent stops for boarding and viewing. Theme parks, by contrast, usually focus on throughput, durability, and visual impact; the vehicles themselves often become part of the spectacle.



Double Decker Trolley



Resorts and mixed-use destinations tend to prioritise comfort, aesthetics, and seamless integration with the wider environment. That might mean electric trams that glide through pedestrian zones or road trains with custom theming that reflects the site's identity. Our design philosophy is always the same: understand the environment, the guests, and the operator's priorities, then create something that enhances all three.

IP: What's your current baseline for accessibility-ramps, door apertures, hearing loops, signage - and what goes above and beyond?

PL: Our baseline always meets or exceeds international accessibility standards, but we aim to go further. Every new vehicle design begins with inclusive access in mind step-free boarding wherever possible, wheelchair spaces, handrails, tactile surfaces, and clear signage. Door apertures and aisle widths are designed to accommodate mobility aids comfortably.

Beyond the basics, we're seeing greater demand for onboard hearing loops, visual display systems, and even smart communication tools for visitors with sensory sensitivities. These enhancements not only improve accessibility but elevate the overall guest experience. Accessibility isn't just a compliance exercise it's central to creating welcoming, world-class attractions for everyone. ♿

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Lightning Round to raise a smile

- Finish the sentence: "A great people-mover feels like..."

First-class fun.

- Your favourite railway sound.

It's an oldie but a goodie. "Choo-choo"

- A small design flourish that makes you smile every time.

The sound of our traditional train whistle.

- If you weren't moving people, you'd be...?

A professional sportsman

- How many model railway sets do you own?

Too many to count!