

# WSRA Reform Group EGM Statement

Dear WSRA Members

## Why are we asking you to vote for a further EGM motion?

The answer lies in the recent Review Report, *The Road Ahead*, published in December 2015. You should have received a copy. If you have not, please contact the WSRA office and ask for one.

(Call 01823 433856, or download: [www.wsra.org.uk/about-us/documents/](http://www.wsra.org.uk/about-us/documents/) and click on "Coombes Review")

This Report was produced in response to the vote by the membership at the May 2015 EGM which called for a review of the operation of the WSRA and more importantly the place the WSRA should occupy within the West Somerset Railway Family in the future.

The Report finds that significant change is needed and lists what is required. Its most important conclusion is that the current trustees cannot lead these changes and need to resign immediately. The trustees, who are the subject of this EGM motion, have lost the confidence of the rest of the WSR Railway Family including the WSR plc and equally importantly of the working volunteers on the railway. The WSR plc have said:

*"The West Somerset Railway PLC fully supports the objectives of, and call for, an EGM".*

The Report recognises that until there is a new group of trustees no progress is possible and it paints a bleak picture of what is likely to happen to the WSRA in these circumstances.

## The story so far:

- An abortive bid for the Freehold without consulting the wider railway family or the Association's membership.
- Failure to conduct the voting process properly at recent general meetings of the Association, and the blatant destruction of statements that you should have received from the Reform Group with your voting papers prior to the last AGM.
- Expulsion, without following the process in the Association's Articles, of members who attempted to ask legitimate questions about these points.
- Editorial bias of the Journal which paints a one sided view of the WSRA and does not permit publication of any view counter to that of the trustees.
- Failure of the trustees to engage with the Partnership Development Group in any significant way. This group was designed to bring the railway family and other stakeholders together to agree common goals for the railway.
- Spending huge sums of money on legal fees for purposes that are unclear. We are confident the donors assumed their money would be spent on restoring locomotives, rolling stock and heritage infrastructure on the railway.
- Lack of any significant grants for heritage projects around the railway for at least the last two years.
- New trustees, elected by the membership, blocked from seeing relevant information they required in order to carry out their lawful duties. This led both of them to resign and write to the Charity Commission setting out their concerns.

- Selling the Association shares in locomotive 4160 without consultation with the membership. The purpose of this shareholding was to ensure the locomotive remained on the WSR after being restored to traffic by the Iffy Rivet Company, a volunteer group, many of who still work on the railway. There was no transparency in the sale and the value obtained for the shares was questionable. Avon & Somerset Police are considering a report on the matter and liaising with the Charity Commission on the way forward.
- Complete failure to engage with the Review Process itself as documented in the Report.

This situation cannot be allowed to continue if we are to preserve our Association as a positive and vibrant force for the ongoing improvement of the WSR in the future.

## Where we are now

You will have seen that other trustees have been co-opted. You may think that this shows a positive change from the existing trustees and question why this EGM motion is now required. However what has actually happened since the Review report was published?

You have been invited to comment and many of you have, overwhelmingly in support of the Review. Meanwhile the immediate reaction from the then chairman, Peter Chidzey, was to seek to discredit the review and claim it was biased. It's worth remembering that the independent review chairman was selected by then Chairman Peter Chidzey and Vice Chairman David Williams.

A Management Development group was formed to bring forward the proposals that the Review motion required but these proposals have to be approved by the trustee board. This process has stalled and nothing of note is forthcoming. It's a classic case of talks about talks, not at all what you, the membership, voted for.

You may have seen that the two vice chairs and the chair stood down but the co-opted modernising trustees are still in a minority on the trustee board and cannot move forward while the six trustees we seek to remove retain a blocking vote. The Report is clear that without the change that we are proposing the only future facing your Association is a long, slow and lingering decline.

## A Bright Future

Members, it's your Association, and we all want it to be a vibrant organisation, a useful member of the West Somerset Railway family and a critical friend of the PLC. There are opportunities for obtaining external funding for our railway through the Association which are not open to the PLC. We all want the railway to prosper and with proper leadership your Association could do so much more to help. We've waited long enough: let's start now!

## What to do

We urge you to vote **FOR** the motion so that a new trustee board can be established and bring forward to the membership the proposals for modernisation of the Association for the good of the whole West Somerset Railway family.

Please try to come to the meeting. If you can't come please appoint a proxy you trust. If you assign your proxy vote to the chairman of the meeting, please complete the voting section in full, please do not leave it blank under any circumstances.