

# WSRA Review Presentation

by Robin Coombes to PDG 18 February 2016

The Review, instigated by the WSRA members by resolution, was conducted and written by the Review Panel made up by representatives of WSR organisations and others to give balance and independence, of which I was only the Chairman.

The Review was published in December 2015. The headline findings were the governance of the WSRA was not fit for purpose and the Trustees as of November 2015 should immediately resign. The Review made a number of further recommendations to be discussed only once new Trustees were in place.

The Review Panel ceased to exist after publication, therefore the views expressed today are my personal views and not of the Review Panel.

I will address three questions:

- 1. What are the wider lessons from the Review?**
- 2. What should the PDG do now in response to the Review?**
- 3. What are the issues that the PDG will face or can assist with in respect of the future of the WSRA?**

## The wider lessons

- The Review exposed a fundamental lack of good governance of the WSRA. This goes beyond the basic submission of company returns to statutory bodies. It goes to fundamental standards of leadership, respect, transparency, systems of management, responsibility, financial control, integrity.
- It must be a wake up call to all organisations. You would not expect a signaller, guard or driver to operate trains without extensive training and passing of a test of competency, yet a Director / Trustee can be appointed with no training or knowledge and allow them to manage assets (they hold in Trust if a charity), finance and potential safety critical operations.
- The problems of the WSRA go back a long way, which indicates past failures of the Railway Family leadership that could not resolve them and issues were allowed to fester. I accept this is easy to say in hindsight, even I have been surprised by the tenacity and blind stubbornness of the Trustees to refuse to act in a reasonable way.

- The WSRA is a classic case of organizational paranoia but underlying this are individual(s) who have created the narrative, propagated it and influenced others.
- It has demonstrated how resilient, dysfunctional, and delusional individuals can become once inside a bunker.
- What starts as a problem inside one organization can spill out and cause problems for everyone.
- Overall there is one simple lesson – **for it not to happen again.**  
For the WSR Family that means two things if it is to act as a family. Looking at yourselves - are you fit for purpose to play a role in WSR Family? Overall creating a Family leadership structure (PDG?) with appropriate checks and balances that can deal with problems sooner rather than later.

## What should PDG do in response?

- The dispute has now moved beyond the WSR, it is I would suggest causing damage to the whole Railway. This is dangerous and those outside do not understand the different players and roles. It is now billed as a fight to the end – be it an EGM, Courtroom or the actions of a statutory body. The point of no return has I believe been passed. My personal view is that the end is inevitable only that the final script has not been written. It would be my recommendation that now is the time for total unity of the WSR Railway Family. What is important is that there is a crystal clear message that the actions and behavior of the Trustees are totally unacceptable and against the WSR and therefore the Railway (PDG) asks them to immediately resign. This is not a message to the Trustees (they appear deaf) but to the other players, - visitors, staff, volunteers, members of the WSRA, other authorities and perhaps most important now the media (both formal and social).

## The future

- It is far from certain if the WSRA can survive and if it can in what form. Much will depend on how damaged it is and critically the support the Railway provides to get it back on its feet.
- **First step** will be to find the right people to act as Trustees and lead the organization both on a short-term basis and longer-term, the members of PDG can play an important role in finding and recommending people. First, expertise will be needed and later a balanced profile of Trustees that will have strong leadership and embrace the future.

- **Second step** is stabilisation. We can all guess but nobody knows for sure the full extent of the mess, there are no short cuts, there will be both firefighting and a full and detailed audit of every aspect, and a new system of governance and management put in place. Again the members of the PDG can help by giving space while things are sorted out and practical help to shoulder and share some of the problems that will inevitably be found. Think of it as the equivalent of a landslip on the railway. Everyone would rally round to help, in this case we are talking about an organization.
- **Third step** is to carve out a new role for the WSRA that does not duplicate what is already being done elsewhere in the railway family. This will be a matter for members and the PDG to find and develop. The Review makes only the most tentative suggestions but there will be more than enough challenges for the Railway that a member-based organization can make for amazing and lasting contribution to create a better WSR for generations to come to enjoy and play an active part.