



West Somerset Railway P.L.C

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News from the Boardroom

A regular update on PLC Board meetings December 2017

Changes in board membership

Alan Nicholson, Paul Hancock and Ben Grellier have decided to leave the board for various reasons. Ben is happily staying as a front line volunteer and has had his arm twisted to complete several important pieces of work around our volunteer strategy and the reward and thank you scheme. Alan has been working on the platform at Bishops Lydeard and we are grateful for their continued support. The board expressed thanks for all the work that Paul, Ben and Alan have done.

We believe there is a great need to work even harder to achieve the 'one railway' goal. Accordingly, we have asked the WSR and the WSSRT to provide trustees who can become full board members of the PLC. This will not only strengthen the PLC board but also go a long way to promoting closer working between the different organisations.

Chairman and Vice Chairman

The board were pleased to elect Ian Coleby as the new chairman and Frank Courtney as vice chairman. Both Ian and Frank are long standing volunteers. Ian began his WSR 'career' in 1983 and has been at various times a signaller, curator of the Gauge Museum and trustee of the WSR. He remains the archivist and director of the WSSRT and recently became editor of the WSR Journal.



Frank has been a train guard since 1987, and was the Chairman of the West Somerset Railway Association during 2016. For several years he managed the annual Thomas the Tank Engine event and this year co-ordinated the successful Flying Scotsman visit. His professional career has been in education finance management, and he has managed UK education authorities and undertaken extensive work overseas.

Board contact details are on the next page.

New directors

We recognise the need to enhance the board and bring in new skills. In addition to the support of the WSR and WSSRT, we have asked the paid staff to select someone to act as an associate member of the board. This person will play a full part in the life of the board and will bring a valuable new angle into our work.

Are you keen to support the board?

We are also looking for others to come forward from across the railway and the wider community to be part of the board. We already have a couple of volunteers! If you are also interested in this opportunity, please contact Ian Coleby or Frank Courtney for a chat about what's involved and what you can offer.

Lineside passes

We are really pleased to agree to the reinstatement of new lineside photographers passes in 2018. The issue of passes was paused during 2017 whilst we assessed the safety implications. These have now been clarified and the full process will be published by the commercial office. The principle change is that in future, applicants will be required to pass the standard Personal Track Safety course held in house on the railway. Further details will be issued soon.

Operational Matters

The General Manager reported on the December train services. It has been another busy (and challenging) period with Dunster by Candlelight, Santa Specials, Santa Expresses and QB trains, followed after Christmas by a 6-day daily running period, including the Winter Steam Festival. Detailed operating plans and working timetables have been drawn-up for each operating day. Virtually every day is 'different' – in terms of number/type of trains etc – and this makes the planning and preparation particularly time consuming. The festive train period has been challenging in the need to balance a number of variables, and inevitably there has had to be compromises somewhere. The Infrastructure team have been busy with track renewals and drainage work and have had a substantial programme of tamping and ballasting along the line. The board were

pleased to see the success of these activities and said a big 'thank you' to all concerned.

We were pleased to see the success of the HOPS trial and agreed to its further implementation.

Budgets and finance

The railway needs to live within its means and consequently we have to manage our money and finances very carefully. This is important if we are to have a line that is sustainable into the future. To secure this, the board have asked for a complete review of the budget for 2018 – that is a review of what we intend to spend and what we will get from fares and our other income. While that is going on, we have asked for a freeze on recruitment – it doesn't make sense to take more people until we have clarified our earning potential for the year. Frank Courtney and Richard Maw are working on the review with the budget managers and the plan is for the review to be completed in January.

Washford Lease

We have been in negotiations for several months with the Somerset and Dorset Railway Trust on their lease of Washford station. We are pleased that these have now been completed and a new agreement has been reached which gives the SDRT an extended lease on the station. This will support any new bids for grant funding the SDRT may apply for.

Station House

We are very pleased that we have now completed the purchase of Station House at Bishops Lydeard. This building was erected in 1872 by the Bristol and Exeter Railway as station master accommodation. It has been rented out for many years and we intend to continue that, at least for the short term. We are pleased that the building has been secured for the future.

Board Contacts

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