



"ONLINE"



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY AND THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY ASSOCIATION FEBRUARY 2009.

FROM THE BOARDROOM

Budgets

The Board had previously agreed operating budgets for the year, and these have been passed to Heads of Department. The Board felt it essential to minimise fare increases to just recover the extra cost of coal, and all other cost increases will have to be absorbed by careful and economical working. The elimination of waste will be absolutely critical, and improvisation and make do and mend will be needed provided always that quality of service to our customers, and the safety of all is not risked.

We have felt confident enough to approve a limited number of capital improvements. Work on a replacement buffet for No3058 will continue because of the obvious income potential, Odney Manor can continue thanks to a legacy and we hope to set aside funds to overhaul Watchet Mineral Line Bridge in the 2009/10 close season.

Board Resignation

Earlier this week I received a note from Robin White confirming his resignation from the Company, Trust and Association Boards with effect from 1st February 2009. Amongst many other contributions to the development of the Railway, Robin took the embryonic Historic Coaches Train project and made it his own, and Trust, Company and Association will meet shortly to plan the way forward with this.

I know that you will want to join me in thanking Robin for all his contributions to that and other Railway projects, as we wish him well for the future.

Liaison Meeting

There will be a "meet the directors and volunteer liaison meeting" at Bishops Lydeard Village Hall from 1430 - 1630 hrs on Saturday 14th March. David Morgan will be in attendance to answer questions about the investigation into Rail Grinding and his Report, and there will be opportunities to raise other matters of interest or concern. All working members paid or volunteer are cordially invited to attend for information, comment and lively discussion.

(Mark L Smith)

SPECIAL EVENTS

As I write this report we are only 7 weeks away from the start of the 2009 Spring Steam Gala on Saturday 21st March and there is still much to do if we are to be ready on time. Hopefully we now have an agreed list of visiting steam locomotives that are representative of the "Big Four" and will be available on the day. Already two of the "stars" of the show are resident in Williton Works, SR "West Country" Pacific 34046 "Braunton" and GWR "King" Class 6024 "King Edward I" undergoing winter maintenance. In due course we expect them to be joined on the Railway by LNER A4 Pacific 60019 "Bittern" currently resident at her home base on the Mid-Hants Railway and LMS 46100 "Royal Scot" currently in the last stages of a major overhaul at Southall. Assuming they all come together in good order for the six days of our Spring Steam Gala then we have the makings of a winning cast in terms of visitor attraction.

Away from the spotlight we are trying to hire-in an extra set of coaches to complement the WSR- based fleet so we can roster 4 sets of 8 x Mark I coaches with a view to addressing potential problems with overcrowding. On-train toilet availability is another customer complaint that Andrew Forster and his Carriage and Wagon Team are doing their best to address. Finally lack of hot food outlets on our Railway is being addressed by bringing-in external catering outlets that will be sited at principal stations to augment the "Quantock Belle" operations and the Company's buffet cars.

Looking beyond March the Mixed Traffic Weekend on June 11th to 13th promises to have a diesel hydraulic flavour about it so far as the diesel traction element is concerned following assurances given by Robert Tiller, DEPG Chairman and Chief Engineer, that both Class 35 "Hymek" D7017, and Class 52 "Western" D1010 "Western Campaigner" will be available to support Class 42 "Warship" 832 "Onslaught" and Class 14 "Teddy Bear" D9526". As yet visiting locomotives apart from D9520 from the Nene Valley Railway are to be confirmed but the wish is to see a visiting "Western" and "Warship" to complement the Williton-based fleet. The

name of the game in this potentially difficult year ahead is to deliver attractive, quality Special Events that promote the best of the West Somerset Railway and so contribute significantly to the growth of the business. For the March Spring Steam Gala we hope to attract 9,000 passengers, a 505 increase over 2008 and just 1500 less than the record 2007 attendance of 10,529. The Gala leaflet has gone to the printers and we have already sold 60 Rover Tickets in advance, before our publicity hits the market place. That is an encouraging sign. However we need your help to make this major Special Event a great success by getting the word out to family, friends and work colleagues encouraging them to benefit by booking in advance for a great day, weekend or short break on our Railway.

Finally we need a lot of people to volunteer for duty to stage the Spring Steam Gala successfully over six days and I would ask you all to let your respective roster clerks or Station Masters know your availability at an early date so we can all be assured we will have sufficient staff on duty to look after our visitors properly so that they go home having enjoyed their day with us and will come again later in the year. I thank you in anticipation and look forward to escaping from the Diesel Depot at Williton to meet, greet and thank as many of you as possible around the Railway during the event.

(John Cronin)

BE A BUS CONDUCTOR FOR A DAY!

The Railway will again be running its Vintage Bus Service between Duster Station and Dunster Castle on the Sunday & Monday of each Bank Holiday weekend. If you have an interest in buses you could be a Bus Conductor for the day!

As most of the vehicles used are open platform double deckers they are required to carry a conductor for safety reasons. There are no fares to be taken or monies to balance at the end of the day and the conductor's job is basically to guard the platform and ensure no passengers put themselves in danger of falling off as well as dealing with questions and generally projecting the image of the West Somerset Railway.

We currently have only two regular volunteer conductors, who obviously may not be available for every Bank Holiday, so it would be good to add a few more volunteers to the roster. The duty is not too onerous, starting at Dunster with the arrival of the first down train from Bishops Lydeard at 1038 and finishing in time to meet the 1702 departure to Bishops Lydeard. Volunteers from up the line can travel down on the first train and return on the 1702 while during the day the bus makes seven return trips to Dunster Castle having met down trains until early afternoon and then running to meet up trains in the afternoon. There is plenty of layover time for a cup of tea and, of course, passengers and non-passengers are all interested in the vehicles and lots of questions are asked and photographs taken.

If you are interested please contact Alan Grieve by email at alan.grieve@tiscali.net or by telephone on 01643 706389

DIESEL NEWS

During the month post the Festive Season work has continued on the many DEPG projects at Williton with completion of the repairs to Class "Hymek" D7017 at the top of the list. As always with complex projects of this type, we have completely overhauled a Maybach MD870 engine for the first time in preservation, slippage occurs and the current forecast is the first attempt at a start will not be until mid-February. This means it could be mid-March at best before we can provide a space in the maintenance shed for Class 52 "Western" D1010 "Western Campaigner" that will put extra pressure on the Williton Team hoping to have the DEPG flagship locomotive ready for the June Mixed Traffic Weekend.

Away from the demands of the diesel hydraulic fleet the diesel electrics have also been receiving attention at Williton. Class 08 D3462 was withdrawn from service in early January so we could progress her annual maintenance at a time when she is not required as the Bishops Lydeard station pilot. She was also carrying some deferred repairs in traffic including a leaking water pump that has been replaced together with a leaking radiator element. Currently the work is progressing to plan to have her ready for a return to duty in good time for the build-up to the Spring Steam Gala in March. Class 33 D6566 has also been withdrawn from traffic so we could fit a new set of batteries, the existing set were new 10 years ago and were showing signs of age, with difficulties in starting if the locomotive was not used for a few days, a real problem for us with the usual cycle of use for diesel locomotives on the West Somerset Railway. The rest of the DEPG fleet are stored at Williton for the winter although Class 47 D1661 "North Star" could be made available for service at short notice if required.

Away from the locomotives our new DEPG Diesel Depot mess room was officially opened on Saturday 24th January by WSR Chairman Mark Smith, who thanked the DEPG members present for their continued loyal support of the Railway. Mark Smith particularly reminded all present of the dark days of last June and July when Company used the DEPG diesel electrics to substitute for the non-availability of the steam fleet in providing the advertised public passenger service for 43 continuous days at the height of the wheel/rail interface crisis. In stepping-in to protect the steam fleet from further wheel damage and so ensure its availability for the peak summer season the WSR Board gratefully recognised the DEPG Management took a calculated risk in offering their diesel service to save the steam to keep the Railway open whilst the Civil Engineer addressed the rail profile problem. In the event it was not tyre wear but brake block wear that created a problem for the DEPG Team who had to undertake a full reblock of D6566 one Saturday evening without an inspection pit at Williton in order to ensure the locomotive was available for service

the next day. Without doubt, this use of our locomotives on a daily basis demonstrated that they actually perform better with regular use. In recognition of the DEPG loyal support of the WSR in its time of need, Mark Smith presented a framed "Certificate of Commendation" to DEPG Chairman Robert Tiller, who in response thanked Mark Smith for the kind words of appreciation and the gift of the unexpected Certificate that will be proudly displayed on the wall of the new mess room for all to see. Then after a cup of tea it was back to work for all on duty.

(John Cronin)

WSR TRACK CONDITION

Following the recent ultrasonic rail testing undertaken by Network Rail over the full length of the line, I received a note of thanks from Network Rail's Project Manager for the testing and I have reproduced this below for the interest of readers.

(Paul Conibeaere)

Many thanks for making last Thursday a successful days testing on the WSR. The continued improvement in the track can be seen from the lower number suspects of found on this occasion.

It should be noted that we have trialled this vehicle at a number of heritage railways in recent weeks and this was the first occasion we have been able to record at 15mph. On the other lines the railhead condition (and joints) meant we were unable to capture data fully above 10mph.

CIVIL ENGINEERING NEWS

Crowcombe Heathfield has received a lot of attention in recent weeks and the work undertaken has included the following:

WATER WATER EVERYWHERE – When West Somerset experiences very heavy rainfall one of the locations on the WSR that experiences flooding is Crowcombe and at times in the vicinity of the foot crossing at the Minehead end, only the rails can be seen standing out of the flood waters. Identifying the sources of the problem was assisted by discussing the matter with joint Station Masters, Mike Hodge and Walter Harris and as a result a number of improvements are being implemented to try to alleviate the problem. One of these is a new cross grid gully that has been installed in the approach road, this will divert excess surface water flow into an existing ditch. Any surface water that still finds its way to the back of the platform

will then be diverted by another grid gulley and a small bund wall into an existing catch pit. An existing debris grid at the end of the approach road ditch is also intended to be modified, in order to assist it from blocking up so easily and also for it to be safer for the Station Team to keep clear of debris. As soon as some dry weather arrives we can then start to investigate the track drainage system, but the preliminary inspections do not bode well for an easy solution.

SUSTAINABLE POINTS – The turnout at the Minehead end of Crowcombe Station has been showing signs of wear and a plan of component replacement and repair has been instigated in order to increase the life of the lead in a cost effective manner. This plan has been commenced and it is proposed that approximately 30% of the timbers (the long sleepers in a turnout), will be individually replaced, the crossing vee has been weld repaired and it is intended that the switch blades will also receive the same treatment in order to keep them within the required dimensional tolerances.

SLIP SLIDING – The foot crossing at the Minehead end of the station has suffered from its regular immersions under water and even when salted and gritted it was still dangerously slippery. Proprietary coverings and treatments do not normally maintain a heritage appearance and they are also expensive. As a result an effective but low cost solution was devised, that involves an initial heat treatment followed by the application of a paint and sharp sand mix. This has created an effective non slip surface that has blended in well with the surroundings and as a result it is intended that it will be applied at other locations along the railway in due course.

BLUE ANCHOR – The level crossing renewal at Blue Anchor is the C.E. Dept's largest project in the 08/09 winter work programme and the preliminary work that has been undertaken has included:

1. Obtaining a temporary road closure that S.C.C. has now formally granted for the duration of the works i.e. Monday 2nd February to Friday 13th February 2009 inclusive.
2. Appointing a contractor to supply and install the temporary road signage that must accord with the S.C.C. specification and this extends to more than forty signs.
3. Local residents and business's in the Blue Anchor and Carhampton areas receiving a hand delivered mail shot giving them advance notification of the closure and thanks are due to John Watton and Brain Ricketts for kindly volunteering to arrange to do this.
4. Appointing a specialist contractor to remove the existing road surface and to install the new surface to the standard agreed with S.C.C.

5. Arranging with the RAMS team to undertake some maintenance work to the Minehead end elevation of the signal box, with access from the road during its closure to road traffic.

Please note that both the public and any WSR staff or members, who are not a part of any of the project work teams, will not be allowed within the work site or on the station platforms whilst the work is being undertaken in order that site safety can be maintained. Foot access will be maintained across a temporary board crossing and this will be re-located as site work conditions dictate. If you come to view the work then the best viewing area will probably be the grass area on the Carhampton site of the level crossing, but please do not park in, or block, the access to the camping coach car park.

(Tony Phillips)



TECHNICAL ADMINISTRATOR VACANCY

WEST SOMERSET RESTORATION WORKS

The West Somerset Railway Association is accepting applications for this challenging post until 6 Feb 2009. If you would like to be a part of the Williton Restoration Team and have the skills to:

- Update job control systems to include monitoring hours of engineering staff in relation to job cards and timesheets
- Monitor budgets
- Manage industrial sites
- Generate computer based reports
- Implement and monitor health & safety requirements
- Act as a customer liaison
- Work with volunteers

Then, this post could be for you!

Location: Williton Restoration Works,
Williton, Somerset TA4 4RF

Roughmoor Industrial Estate

Terms: Temporary post. Will be reviewed as a permanent post in line with commercial development of the business

Part time – 30 hours per week

Salary: £14,560 per annum pro rata for 30 hours

Contact: Gareth Winter, Engineering Manger, 01984 633547

Closing: 6 Feb 09

To apply, send a CV to the Williton Restoration Works address above.

In 2008 the Model Railway at the Gauge Museum, situated in the former Goods Shed at Bishops Lydeard Station, was opened 100 days of the year with a grand total of 9525 visitors. The Model Railway Team would like to thank all the visitors who visited in 2008 and hope to see them all back and hopefully more in 2009. The Model Railway is currently closed for winter maintenance - the new branch line is now completed and the new fiddle yard now has track ready to be laid enabling more trains to run each day. The future development depends very much on funding, which it is hoped will increase soon, as at present the Model Railway depends on donations from the public. The Model Railway will hopefully be open again in time for the Spring Steam Gala.

WILLITON NEWS

Braunton

34046 completed its 2008 operations at the Winter Steam Festival and is back at Williton having run over 1500 miles with no significant problems. The priority is fitting of main line equipment and completion of the tender whose tank is virtually finished and whose frames are almost ready for riveting. The design changes to suit roller bearing axleboxes were approved in early December and work is in progress on the patterns for the necessary castings and on machining the horn blocks.

Thanks are those who responded to the appeal to form support crews with over 40 names listed, 28 attending the inaugural meeting in November. A programme of

working days has been instituted covering cleaning, preparation and disposal duties and for staff familiarisation and training. The management agreement with the owner is being updated to formally recognise the transition from restoration to operation and maintenance.

6412

In December the chassis was re-wheeled and the boiler and bunker and cab fitted ready for transport to the South Devon Railway, the loco. leaving Williton by road on 8 January in John Antell's care..

6695

Left Williton in steam in early November for Minehead and now under hire to the company.

6024

Having completed its main line Xmas Torbay Express duties and taken part in the Winter Steam Festival, 'King Edward I' returned to Williton for storage until the Spring Gala, some minor repairs, and the owners' winter maintenance programme.

3501 I

On 17 December a large Alleley's transporter was manoeuvred into Williton South Yard to pick up 'General Steam Navigation' for delivery to its new home.

7820

Having been partially stripped to free the boiler, this was lifted off the frames on 23 December and is now parked on the ground in the South Yard for the tubes to be removed. The chassis is parked alongside.

Workshops

Following locomotive water shortage difficulties during 2008 Special Events the Company asked for more regular access to the emergency water supply tank. This has been lagged and work is in progress on lagging or trace heating all delivery pipes to avoid having to drain down in the cold. Unfortunately the recent spate of cold weather found some weak points which had to be repaired.

Inside the workshop QB coach 'Aries' is receiving attention to its roof and some body repairs and Braunton support coach BSK 35451 is due in for overhaul and fitting out.

(Mike Johns)

THANK YOU

It is so easy to criticise these days, so a "thank you" will not go amiss I'm sure. We all take for granted the work that goes on behind the scenes of the Railway from the top to the station offices, engineering departments etc., etc. The list of people without whom we would not have a Railway is endless and I think that we are very lucky to have such a gang. Not to forget the on-train crews that have to put up with me and what we do without our wonderful buffet staff. (they have saved my life – figuratively- more than once).

So thanks very much once again and let's all pull together once more in 2009.

(Graham Hooper – Volunteer)

ROBIN WHITE STEPS DOWN AS ASSOCIATION CHAIRMAN

A brief note concerning the Chairman of the WSR Association. The WSRA Vice Chairman, David Holmes writes "Many of you may already be aware that Robin White has resigned as Chairman of the WSRA Committee due to pressures in his business and personal life. Robin's tenure of the post has been relatively brief but occurring as it did during a difficult period for the WSR was not short of challenges. Robin will be missed about the railway. As Vice Chairman I will now undertake the responsibilities of Chairman until the Committee has had the opportunity, to consider and appoint a new Chairman. Please be assured Association staff and members will be kept informed and told of any changes as soon as possible. During the short period of transition the day to day business of the WSRA will continue as normal. If you have any particular questions or comments then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

(David Holmes, WSRA Vice Chairman)

PASSENGER FIGURES IN JANUARY

In the four days of operation at the start of January we carried 2,230 passengers. The first three days were busy but as per usual the last Sunday before the holidays end and the children go back to school was quiet.

THE FLOCKTON FLIER

Orders for the dvd of the two series of this popular children's television series of the 1970's are now being taken by the Minehead Station Shop on Fridays, Saturday and Sundays when trains aren't running and also on operating days. Please ring 01643 700387 between 10.30 and 15.30. Cost is £15.99 including post and packing for a very good children's adventure story, not to mention a chance to see some familiar(ish) folk when they less waistline and more hair. Release date of the dvd is March 16th 2009.

WSRA MEMBERS DAY SUNDAY 8th MARCH 2008

The Associations Members Day will take place on Sunday the 8th March, this is a new event in the WSR calendar and 600 plus members are expected to take the opportunity to look behind the scenes on the railway. A notice to all Heads of Departments and Station Masters should have already been sent a notice to make you aware that this event is taking place. It is hoped to have as many attractions on the railway will be open on that day to facilitate the aim of the day and to also promote and recruit volunteers. I can be contacted on 01823 433856 or 01823 430194 or wsra@btinternet.com
(Ian Aldridge WSRA Volunteer and Tracker Co-ordinator).