



# West Somerset Railway P.L.C

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## News from the Boardroom

### A regular update on PLC Board meetings January 2018

#### Operations Strategic Plan

The Board were pleased that Richard Jones, Head of Operations, was able to present his report on the department to the board. Richard joined Operations last year and has since made great progress in motivating the Operations team and building a renewed team spirit. One result of this is that no services were cancelled in 2017 due to lack of operating staff.

At the heart of Operations are the volunteer staff and Richard reported that there are now more qualified guards and signalmen than a year ago. The board asked Richard to develop a plan to recruit, train and retain more volunteers to these critical roles.

Given that its key role is the provision and safe operating of train services on the WSR, the Operations Department takes a very keen interest in the Railway's SMS. As a first step, the Department is keen to see the existing SMS reviewed and the Head of Operations has offered to actively play a leading role in achieving this.

Richard proposed some changes to the medical and eyesight tests for guards. The board asked Richard to prepare detailed proposals and agree these with the General Manager.

Richard commented that the current

**Stakeholders Meeting  
24 February 2018  
Bishop's Lydeard Village Hall  
2pm.**

Operations Department accommodation was uninspiring and in need of refreshing. The board agreed and asked Richard to come up with some costed proposals to improve it.

The board were pleased to endorse Richard's report and asked him to provide an update on progress in May.

#### Winter Works

Work has started on the remaining section of the Minehead Relay (Alcombe Foot Crossing up to, but not including Seaward Way Road Crossing) which was postponed for Flying Scotsman work. Work will be completed by Half Term running.

#### Liaison with WSRA and WSSRT

Paul Whitehouse and Chris Austin, Chairmen of the WSRA and WSSRT respectively, joined us for an update on the Board's activities. They were interested in the changes to the management structure and the budgets for 2018. It was agreed that they should meet separately with Richard Maw to review this in more detail.

## Budget for 2018

Frank Courtney presented the revised budget for 2018. Frank, working with Richard Maw, assisted by Michael Rowe and the departmental heads, has undertaken a line-by-line review of the budget that had been previously submitted to the board in November.

The revised budget is now forecasting an achievable surplus for the year and we plan to boost this with another 'large engine' event in September, similar to (but smaller than) the successful Flying Scotsman event in 2017. Frank and Richard are now looking at improved monitoring and progress reporting on financial performance and improvements to the expenditure approvals processes.

## Management and Board Restructure

The board approved a restructure of the senior management team to strengthen our focus on achieving our goals. Richard Maw will become the Finance Director and will task manage the commercial and finance teams, being supported at board level by the vice-chairman, Frank Courtney. Paul Conibeare is the sole head of service and is line manager for all staff. He will focus his work on the operational side of the railway, that is mechanical engineering, infrastructure, operations, safety and HR. We will be developing a series of achievable but challenging targets to ensure we meet our goals. Both Dave Horton (ME) and Andrew Young (IE) have begun to produce business plans for their teams and we will be looking at how best we manage their funding and implementation. All restructures are challenging and we expect that all staff will work towards the successful outcomes from this one. Both Richard and Paul are full board members.

## Southern Gateway

We have carefully considered all the feedback that has been received concerning the Southern Gateway project. It is clear from this that some aspects of the proposal, such as the bridge, two storey car park and extended visitors centre lacked support. The general consensus was that the proposals were too extensive and would alter the character of the station too much. We are talking to the District Council about development of the toilets and car park and considering how the Norton Fitzwarren site can contribute to the southern end of the railway in the longer term. Future plans need to take this into account. The PLC Corporate Plan (which will include reference to all aspects of the southern end of the railway) is being revised and will be available for consultation in late February. Once this is complete and generally agreed, more detailed work on both Bishops Lydeard and Norton Fitzwarren can recommence.

## Heritage committee

The Board acknowledged that we need to bring additional focus onto heritage. Although we have a heritage committee, the membership has shrunk and needs refreshing. We have therefore proposed to the WSSRT that they take over chairmanship of the committee and that the Trust spearheads all heritage aspects of the railway. This is not the PLC avoiding the issue, but rather recognising the importance, passing the role to someone who will actually do it. The WSSRT are considering this transfer of responsibilities.

## And Finally....

Best wishes to Geoff Pateman who is nursing a broken bone after slipping on ice on his way to the board meeting. Rapid action by Sarah Hayes saw Geoff delivered to Musgrove Casualty. We pass on best wishes to Geoff and hope he has a speedy recovery.

## Board Contacts

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