

## **LOCAL TRANSPORT COMPANY BOSS BECOMES ACTING CHAIRMAN OF WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY plc**

The Board of the West Somerset Railway Plc met yesterday (Monday 24 September) and appointed Jonathan Jones Pratt unanimously to become the company's Acting Chairman for the next three months.

Mr Pratt became a WSR plc director earlier this month on 13 September and is already well known on both the WSR and within the heritage railway sector through his ownership of two steam locos: former GWR engines No. 4936 Kinlet Hall and No. 7027 Thornbury Castle. He also has strong local commercial credentials via his business interests in JJP Holdings which operates a number of commercial transport activities through North Somerset and Somerset.

The key appointment was made by the plc Board in order to provide a period of stability for the rest of this year whilst also providing a clear leadership focus for an agreed business recovery plan which is required to both reduce costs and seek to improve visitor numbers. The WSR plc Board also discussed the need to make a long-term appointment as Chairman, so the company intends to advertise for a suitable and permanent candidate as soon as possible.

In recognising that the WSR is facing a number of issues over the next few months, the Board will be initiating staff consultation meetings in early November in order to push forward an improved culture of wider communication with WSR personnel, and so work collectively in dealing with business challenges.

The resignation of Bill Knell as a director for personal reasons was also accepted by the Board with regret and he was thanked for his professional help and advice in assisting with a number of HR issues currently facing the WSR wider railway family. The Board all wished Mr Knell well and hoped that he will continue to support and visit the WSR in the future.

Jonathan Jones-Pratt comments:

***"I am both pleased and honoured to accept this position as WSR plc Acting Chairman and will readily embrace the role and the evident challenges which the railway faces.***

***"I thank my board colleagues who invested their trust and support in me by making this appointment, and I look forward to working with all of them.***

***"I aim to provide stability to the wider WSR family and also seek to ensure that we create a best practice culture from hereon.***

***"My ultimate aim is to not only protect the West Somerset Railway but also take our team together on a journey of recovery to better times and success after a downturn in our business recently in a turbulent marketplace.***

***"That said, I am under no illusions that there are many challenges to be overcome, but every effort will be made with my personal commitment to ensure success and create a joined-up vision for the future of the entire railway.***

***"Finally, and by no means least, it's important that I and the plc Board also thank our two principal support organisations, the West Somerset Railway Association (WSRA)***

***and the West Somerset Steam Railway Trust (WSSRT).***

***“Both the WSRA and WSSRT have provided their full and public support to our recent initiatives in moving forward, and we look forward to working together in order to drive this great railway forward for the rest of 2018, into 2019 and beyond.”***