



# **THE PLATFORM**

THE OFFICIAL E-NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

No. 6 March 2021

## ***From the Chairman***

It certainly seems like a long time since our railway was fully operational, despite the short period of working just before Christmas. But now we really can plan to move things forward. This newsletter has been delayed so that we can absorb the impact of the latest government “roadmap” for getting things going again, and announce a provisional date for reopening. We still have much more planning to do, but we expect to start passenger operation on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Initially this will be Bishops Lydeard to Williton with some trains to Watchet. We hope then to run further with extension to Minehead later in the summer.

I am really grateful for the extraordinary support the railway has received over the last year or so. It is no exaggeration to say that we would not have survived without this support in all sorts of ways. It will take quite a while before we can say that the railway is totally secure for the future, but we have made great progress. In the closed period we have worked to develop our infrastructure, our rolling stock (including coaches and locomotives) and, very importantly, our safety approaches and documentation. We will continue to run an authentic historic steam railway, and we can show 21<sup>st</sup> century approaches to safety of operation.

The West Somerset Railway has a really bright future, and this summer, once again, we will be running steam trains to the seaside. And I look forward to seeing very many of you again in person.

***Jon Jones Pratt***, West Somerset Railway PLC Chairman



20<sup>th</sup> December 2020 – 7828 *Odney Manor* heading up to Crowcombe Heathfield with a Santa Express.

**IN THIS ISSUE....** When will trains be running again? ... Board Changes ... Santa Trains 2020 ... The DEPG ... News from the WSRA ... Work Behind the Scenes ... WSR Vacancies



2-6-2T No 5199 crossing Kerr Moor in late December

## ***When will trains be running again?***

As the Chairman has set out in his introduction to this newsletter, the intention is that passenger trains will start on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> May. The good news is that the work that has taken place over the last twelve months means that from the point of view of infrastructure, locomotives and coaches, and staff training and updated safety systems, we will be all ready to go! Over the last twelve months a huge amount of work has been taking place on each of these areas to make sure everything is ready to go. We fully intend to make sure this happens. Now that the Government have set out the “road map” for getting life back to some semblance of “normal”, we have a good basis for planning – although of course we know that it is possible that dates may change.

We have to do this in a way in which our passengers and staff are safe from the Covid virus, and also in a way in which we make some money. We have to generate enough money to get us through next winter, and there is no point in pretending money isn't important. At the time of writing we are, of course, still in a national lockdown for non-essential activity. Sadly, the WSR is not an essential service in a formal sense (although for many of us normally spending time on the railway it is an essential aid to our sanity!)

We will be undertaking an intensive period of staff practical “refresher” work, starting at the beginning of the Government Step 2, currently planned to be after 12<sup>th</sup> April. Staff, including volunteers, have been undertaking a variety of remote training over the close down period. Whilst this serves a very important role in keeping people up to date, clearly there is a need for practical re-familiarisation with trains and with the line.

Passengers on public trains will need to be socially distanced, so seats will need to be pre-booked. Initially trains will only offer an “end to end” service, without no travel being possible between intermediate stations. We expect to be back into Minehead at the end of June or early July. At the moment all this is provisional, not least because the government dates are to be reviewed as the virus infection rates become clear. As soon as we have firm dates for each development, we will announce this on the West Somerset Railway website.

In order to achieve social distancing on trains, and avoid crowding on platforms, trains will have to operate – at least for the start of the year – as “excursion trains.” What this means in practical terms, is that passengers will have to pre-book (on the internet, or by phone) and will be allocated seats. The booking will specify a particular train, out and back. For the high season, after we have gained more experience with this type of operation, we will be looking at the possibility of an intermediate “walk up and go” all stations operation, possibly with the DMU. But social distancing is going to have to be the watchword, for as long as it is recommended by the government.

## **Board Changes**

One of the aspects that has arisen from the various recent discussions with the Office of Rail and Road, is the need for the Board to refocus its work and to increase the professional expertise. Within this context the Board is currently recruiting for directors in the field of Rail Infrastructure and Mechanical Engineering respectively. (The Board is also open to hear from other experienced individuals with appropriate specific expertise, for discussion and consideration.)

The Board recently lost the valuable experience of its Vice Chairman, Mark Smith, who has retired. Mark has made a major contribution to the railway over many years and in a number of important roles, including as Managing Director and Board Chairman. He is also nationally recognised and respected for his work with the Heritage Railway Association. The role of Vice Chairman will be taken through process and we hope to announce the succession plan once appointed. Mark has kindly agreed to remain involved and will act as a mentor for the new person in the new role to ensure a smooth transition and learning shared.

The Board has now been joined by Joy Boswell as Finance Director. Joy is a chartered accountant and head of the Corporate Team at Four Fifty Chartered Accountants, Weston super Mare. Joy has supported the board for the last two years at both board level and within the company, it was felt that this was now the right time for Joy to become a full director.

In order to provide additional continuity experience, the board has also been re-joined by Frank Courtney. Frank has over 30 years' previous experience on the railway including as a director, and as Chairman of the West Somerset Railway Association. For the last year he has been a Board Adviser, and will now be focussing on training and communications.

Martin Brown and Mike Thompson have decided to stand down. Martin and Mike have made substantial contributions to the work of the railway during a very difficult period and we are grateful to them for their efforts. Martin joined the Board two years ago and has worked in several areas during the difficult lockdown and closure period. Mike has focussed on commercial development and made a significant contribution in analysing and developing commercial approaches. The other Board members would like to put on record their thanks for the contribution that both have made. The roles will be reallocated on a short-term basis and a further review of Board responsibilities will take place in due course. In the meantime, both will be continuing to support the board on an advisory capacity basis.

Jonathan Jones Pratt, Chairman, said: "The last two years have been very challenging for the Board and for the railway as whole. It is clear that thanks to the work and effort of a very large number of committed individuals at all levels on the railway, and with the help of our wonderful wider group of supporters, we are now moving forward and look forward to much brighter times ahead. I am grateful for the support of the Board over this period, which has been very taxing. We are always sorry to lose board colleagues, but we now need to enhance our expertise with some new blood and look forward to the restart of trains later this year – which is what we all wish to see. We have received an outstanding number of applicants who have expressed interests in the Director roles and interviews have begun. We believe that some excellent appointments will now flow from the process of which in turn further strengthen your Railway structure for the future as we continue to protect and rebuild the asset."

## **Santa Trains – 2020**

### **Mike Thompson writes:**

The decision to go ahead and run Santa trains for Christmas 2020 was a difficult one for the railway, mainly due to the increasing uncertainty over the growing second wave of the resurgent Covid virus. However, in October, it was apparent that the spread of the virus was still low in the South West. We were also aware that many of our volunteers are in the higher risk age groups so we had to ensure the risk of transmission was minimised for those who wished to support our Santa operations and if enough volunteers wanted to work. But when we checked with roster clerks and heads of department, it soon became clear that many of our volunteers wanted to 'get back to operating' trains.

Two main factors influenced the final decision to go ahead – the first being that all bookings are made in advance, so we would know ahead of time how much revenue would be produced – and theoretically could have

cancelled trains if demand was low before costs were incurred. The advance nature of bookings also meant we could allocate well-spaced seats and install protective barriers between family groups, either by allocating entirely separate compartments or by installing plastic shields between seating bays in the open coaches to protect each group.

Once the decision had been taken to go ahead, the Commercial, Operations and Infrastructure teams got to work on putting in place everything that was needed. There was lots to do and it seems everybody rose to the occasion in so many excellent ways. Bookings also took off, especially when the government announced that we were coming out of the November lockdown on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

To allow time for staff refresher training, the final timetable was delayed for a week and planned for three round trips per day between Bishops Lydeard and Williton commencing on 12<sup>th</sup> December, with increased time being allowed between trains to allow for enhanced cleaning to take place. We decided to site customers in the lower car park at BL so they could board the trains directly from their cars, which helped to reduce mingling in reception areas. The format at BL proved to be very successful with excellent help from our many volunteers who turned up to book in arrivals, marshal cars, sell drinks and snacks from our 'pop-up' shop (the bus stop) and to check temperatures.

All the trains ran very well – the only hiccup being a fallen tree on 24<sup>th</sup> December just uphill from BL station. Fortunately, we had just enough time to get a qualified chainsaw person onsite and to get the track signed off, as safe to use. In the end we got slightly lucky with the Covid spread, in that Somerset remained in Tier 2 up until Christmas. Our area was then placed in Tier 3 from Boxing Day, which would have prevented us from operating Santas, and unfortunately meant we had to cancel our planned Winter Steam Journeys

The reaction from both adults and children has been very positive, with many pointing out how nice it was to be able to enjoy some traditional activities during these difficult times. The result for the railway was over £55K in revenue and a significant operating profit to add to the bottom line.

We would like to thank everyone, both WSR volunteers and paid staff, who helped to create such a wonderful experience. It is truly a magical feature of our railway community that so many people come together to create such a positive outcome and everyone involved should all be very proud of the final result.



*Visitor 2-6-2T 51XX Class No 5199 outside Minehead shed. Although in its working life, 5199 was based in the West Midlands, fellow class members 5172 and 5186 amongst others spent many years based at Taunton shed, and worked the Minehead branch.*

## ***The Diesel and Electric Preservation Group (DEPG)***

*The DEPG are important feature of the WSR. It was 26<sup>th</sup> August 1961 when Class 33 D6566 first entered service. That is an incredible 60 years ago! The DEPG team do an excellent job keeping these historic locomotives in working order. Since we have not featured the DEPG in The Platform before, we make no excuse for giving them some extended space this time. We look forward to incorporating regular contributions in the future.*

**Andy Royal** (DEPG staff and volunteer representative) writes:

December turned out to be a very busy time for the DEPG team based at Williton. The first priority was ensuring that the two Class 33 locos D6566 (33 048) and D6575 (33 057) were maintained in a full state of readiness in support of the WSR's "Santa Express" services that ran between Bishops Lydeard and Williton three times daily for seven days between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2020.

Although these services were steam-hauled, the first service of the day was assisted by Class 33 D6575 that was attached at the rear of the train. This was a risk mitigation measure to ensure good timekeeping on the first service of the day, when railhead conditions could be at their worst. The diesel was removed when the train returned to Bishops Lydeard and spent the rest of the day on shed, on standby, just in case it was needed again.

These services turned out to be a big success and many passengers expressed their appreciation for the care and attention that was given to the Covid-19 precautions – although most would not have noticed the important part being played by D6575 in ensuring that their day went precisely to plan!



*Class 33 D6575 (33 057) at the tail end of the first "Santa Express" of the 2020 season, with the WSR's 2-6-0 'Mogul' number 9351 at the head of the train. Photographed descending Castle Hill towards Williton on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2020 by Peter Nicholson © CC BY-NC 3.0*

Our other priority during December was vacating the Old Goods Shed so that scaffolding could be erected to contain any loose slates and other debris that could be dislodged by wind and weather. The Old Goods Shed has been the home of the DEPG since 1979 and was the main engineering workshop for the DEPG until the Diesel Depot was completed in 1997.

Since then, the Old Goods Shed has become the home of our Class 14 'Teddy Bear' locomotives D9518 and D9526, so vacating meant moving our fully restored and operational loco D9526 out of the shed to take up residence alongside the platform at Williton station (the undesirable but easy part) and the gathering up of the many parts of the fully dismantled D9518 and finding space for them elsewhere on the site the difficult part.

This work was tackled over several weekends by a team from the DEPG, with heavy lifting capability provided by the WSR's RRV under the expert control of Matt Brewer. The work was completed just before the lockdown came into effect.



*The WSR RRV doing the heavy lifting inside the Old Goods Shed on 5th December 2020. Photo by Martin Howard © CC BY-NC 3.0*

The shed also houses a wagon loading gauge although it is not in its original position. It is suspended from a roof truss to show how it would have appeared when in use, hanging above the rails to warn the staff against exceeding the height limit of loads in railway wagons. Such loading gauges were usually located near the neck of a goods yard suspended from its own mast, so that every wagon leaving would pass under it. The goods clerk was provided with a small office that still has its original fitted desk with drawers and cupboards. It was last used as part of the DEPG's heritage centre.



*Inside the Old Goods Shed at Williton facing south – showing the railway and roadway either side of the central platform. The loading gauge hangs over the track (below the light fitting), to warn the staff against over-height loads on wagons. Photo by Martin Howard © CC BY-NC 3.0*

British Railways withdrew the goods service from Williton in 1964, so this building served the local community for just over one hundred years - and it has served the DEPG for the last 40 years.

Behind the scenes, the DEPG has completely renewed its website [www.depg.org](http://www.depg.org) and is in the process of introducing an online store. The next development effort will be integrating it with the social media channels that have been in operation for a while and which are becoming an ever more important means of keeping young people involved and connected with the WSR family members.

The close and effective relationship between the WSR and DEPG social media channels is already evident, with one supporting the other on a regular basis to ensure that news gets transmitted quickly and effectively, to the widest range of followers. Recent efforts have focused on the "birthdays" of some of our locomotives:

- BR-Swindon built Class 14 number D9526 turned 56 on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January
- Beyer-Peacock 'Hymek' number D7017 turned 59 on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January
- Beyer-Peacock 'Hymek' number D7018 turned 59 on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January

Locomotive "birthdays" are generally taken as the date that the loco entered service, so the works plates of these locos will all show the previous year as being the year that their main frames were "laid down" in the workshops where they were built.

		
<p><i>BR-Swindon built Class 14 D9526 takes a rest at Minehead between passenger workings on 1st September 2018.</i></p> <p><i>Photo by Terry Deacon © CC BY-NC 3.0</i></p>	<p><i>DEPG Class 35 'Hymek' D7017 passes Dunster with the 13:30 Minehead to Bishops Lydeard service on the 23rd of September 2017.</i></p> <p><i>Photo by Gary Lemon © CC BY-NC 3.0</i></p>	<p><i>The DEPG's Beyer-Peacock 'Hymek' D7018 stands resplendent at Crowcombe Heathfield on the 8th October 2019.</i></p> <p><i>Photo by Martin Howard © CC BY-NC 3.0</i></p>

Later this year, we will be commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> birthdays of both of our Class 33 locomotives, D6566 in August and D6575 in November, so let's hope that restrictions are lifted by then and we can hold an appropriate event to celebrate their major (and often unsung) contribution to the operations of the WSR.

By the way, the DEPG provides a weekly information broadcast email entitled "roundup" that is available to anyone, not just members. To join this mailing list, please email ROUNDUP ADD to [contact@depg.org](mailto:contact@depg.org)

## **News from the West Somerset Railway Association**

**Mike Sherwood** (Chairman) writes....

So, to update you all on all things WSRA at the moment.

You'll all know that the joint fundraising team were successful in supporting the WSR plc to allow them to win the DCMS grant. This is great news for the WSR and worthy of celebration. Focus now turns to the administration of the grant and I am pleased to see that there will be oversight and scrutiny via a recently announced project board which WSRA have been invited to attend. Input from the charities will be useful as we have a good understanding of the amount of oversight and reporting that funders require. The terms of the grant make it very clear that it can be withdrawn if WSR don't satisfy these criteria.

The matter of the sale of Promotions is now concluded and the incident report to the CC has been closed. WSRA have loaned WSR plc £70,000 as part of this deal.

The WSRA AGM has been completed, accounts signed off and some new trustees appointed. The WSRA web site has all the details. Diana Ricketts-Tanner has stood down for personal reasons and will be much missed, Diana remains involved in the volunteer project for WSRA by request of the WSSRT, and the WSR plc and unanimous decision of the trustees.



Work on 4561 continues (photo left), the cylinders are back at Williton and WSRA continue to fund the work on the overhaul there. I am pleased to say that Bob Meanley has agreed to act as WSRA adviser to the re-build. The blog is up and running for those who want to keep a closer eye on progress. The next job is to get the cylinders re-lined with the frame extensions which apparently entails turning them upside down (Don't ask me guv, I only fire them!). I know that Ryan will welcome back volunteers (in line with Covid rules of course) with the proven skills to

assist the team.

WSRA continue to look at other ways of supporting the railway and have agreed funding for the first part of a programme of rolling stock refurbishment. Discussions about the next steps in this process are ongoing as I write. There is money in the rail renewal fund and we will be talking to the WSR plc about how best to deploy this as well. A lot of you are aware I "bang on" a lot about external grant funding, a source untapped by the WSR family until a few years ago. I'm pleased to tell you that Kate Williams has brought £72,000 in external funding to the railway via the WSRA so far in a year when we've not run any trains.

## ***Business Development***

***Steve Williams (Business Development Director) writes...***

### ***Cultural Heritage Recovery Fund***

The Cultural Heritage Lottery Fund grant Programme is in full swing. The Programme Board continues to meet fortnightly to approve projects and to review progress with the non-financial aspects of the grant. Key developments so far have been:

- In excess of 60 projects have been signed off for implementation across Infrastructure, Mechanical, Covid 19, Operations and Commercial
- at the end of January 2021, £430,000 of the £865,000 grant had been committed/spent. The submission for the next 40% of the grant went in on 12<sup>th</sup> February
- the Heritage Trust has committed £62,500 towards heritage trackwork replacement/repairs at Blue Anchor and Doniford
- the Association has £29,000 to contribute to rail renewal in addition to programme spend
- the PLC is pursuing 2 apprenticeships, one for Williton Restoration and one for Customer Services at Minehead,
- a new People Engagement Group has been formed following completion of the Volunteer Recruitment preparation work. This involves the PLC, Association and Heritage Trust. They are focusing on:
  - Proposals to improve our management of the environment in line with one of the key objectives of the grant to contribute towards zero carbon emissions
  - Proposals as to how we look at achieving improved inclusion and cultural diversity together with health and well-being
  - Building on the work of the Heritage Trust and Association in 2019 and early 2020, developing new ideas about community outreach and engagement including use of WSR TV

## ***Williton Strategic Review***

The partnership group (Association, DEPG, Heritage Trust and PLC) is making good progress. Using the original draft 2017 planning framework, each organisation is developing an updated strategic statement and an option appraisal model is being constructed to assess the relative benefits of each proposal. The work not only includes Williton yard but also considerations about any future developments of the station itself.

The overall strategic intention is to develop the facilities at Williton to become a strategic engineering centre with access for visitors on a managed basis. When outline proposals are ready, they will be discussed by each organisation and then shared more widely through Partnership Development Group, social media, HOPS and other outlets.

## ***Provision of Covered Accommodation for Carriages and Goods Rolling Stock***

As many people will know, one of the key weaknesses of the WSR is the lack of covered accommodation both for operational and heritage coaches together with selected goods rolling stock. The Association and PLC have now started a piece of work to scope what is needed and how it might be achieved together with the range of locations available. This work is in its early stages but as with Williton, once proposals had been seen by constituent organisations, they will be shared more widely for comment with the WSR railway family.

## ***Washford***

The PLC Board is pleased to be able to say that it has reached agreement with the S&D Trust on providing more time to enable the discussions and negotiations about the new 10 year lease to be developed and concluded. Negotiations on the Heads of Terms is underway and it is hoped that these can be concluded satisfactorily to enable the core lease work to begin.

In the meantime, the PLC is forming a small workgroup of those involved with Washford station together with members of the Board to develop and then implement a mobilisation plan that will see the PLC assume responsibility once again for the management and upkeep of the station. Proposals will be shared widely with PLC staff and WSR volunteers in due course.

## ***CHRF Round 2***

Government has recently invited applications for a further round of Cultural Heritage Recovery Fund monies covering the period April to June 2021. The PLC has submitted an application for £430,000 (50% of the Round 1 Grant.) A decision is expected in mid to late March.

## ***Infrastructure Engineering Capital Programme and Option Appraisal***

At its January 2021 meeting, the Board approved an outline Capital Programme for 2021 to 2024 for Infrastructure Engineering. This contains 10 projects with major costs attached to them for which targeted fundraising will be required. The Programme has been shared with the Association to enable the Board of Trustees to identify projects which they would like to support through fundraising activity.

At the same time, the Board has approved the establishment of an option appraisal exercise to look at the future configuration of Infrastructure Engineering bases along the WSR. This has been stimulated by the CHRF programme and the lack of dedicated covered accommodation for equipment and materials in certain locations particularly for permanent way. The option appraisal will go ahead shortly and it is intended to involve IE staff in the thinking and development of proposals as we go along.

If anybody would like to have any further details on any of the above, please contact Steve Williams PLC Director at [steve@williamsemail.uk](mailto:steve@williamsemail.uk) or 01823-462898.

## **Musings by Geoff Cross**

*Geoff retired as Stations Co-ordinator at the end of December, and kindly contributed the following comments. We look forward to seeing Geoff back on the platform (the real one) at Crowcombe soon and for many years to come.*

Life on the West Somerset Railway has been active and varied for me since I joined in 2003. Starting as a Trainee TTI, and eventually taking over the departmental reins from Dave Johnson for a number of years before taking up the challenge of becoming the first dedicated WSR Training Officer also serving on the HRA Training Committee. Specialization along the way included a planned introduction of railway-wide PTS qualifications, (and being the sole instructor!). This was one of the most formidable challenges, which has now become quite a normal thing to do .....However, it took eight years to achieve that level! Along the way I was asked to be involved in any number of projects and schemes .....or is it that I couldn't say no?

In 2016 things got so busy for me that I finally had to call it a day on the Training front, but there is no rest for the wicked is there! Crowcombe Heathfield station was thought to be in need of assistance, and I was asked to help out.....of course, long story short, I ended up as Station Master. Rebuilding a good base of volunteers, and really leading the team has been paramount and evidently successful, but circumstances were soon presented which saw me also appointed as Station Co-ordinator. A job I readily accepted, and have been able to fulfil, as well as looking after Crowcombe Heathfield station and several "other projects". Highlights have included being involved with Flying Scotsman the Taunton Shuttle and Winter Wonderland. I have to say I've found most of them to be very enjoyable, and worthwhile.

Then came Covid. Getting stations back to work during 2020, producing protocols, guiding various projects on individual stations as well as at Crowcombe, keeping everyone informed and ensuring morale is kept high has taken its toll I'm afraid, and lately I've been suffering the odd health issues which have been telling the old body to slow down a bit. This is why, regretfully, I decided to step down from the Co-ordinator's position. Now, here's the sales pitch.....Being Stations Co-ordinator is an ideal position to be at the centre of things. Working with the Station Masters, and over 260 station volunteers, the stations are a key component of the railway, with any number of interesting things going on all of the time. You would very soon develop a complete picture of what makes the railway tick along the whole length of the line. The position is ideal if you don't want to be focussed on one place. Of course you will need to be "reachable" especially by email, and be prepared to transmit company instructions and policies to all ten stations via the Station Masters, so the job does entail an amount of admin'. It's also a two-way situation where you sometimes have to find answers to individual Station Master's questions and queries. Traditionally, there are two Station Masters' general meetings held each season.

There will certainly be one needed within the next couple of months before HOPEFULLY the re-start of railway services in March. There will be much to discuss. It's the Co-ordinator's task to organise these meetings, and arrange "guest" speakers. They usually last for a couple of hours with tea and buns. This is an exciting time to take the plunge and consider this position. The re-start will mean changes to some operating practices, and some other interesting changes which will involve stations. I just wish that I had the energy to contribute further. But for now, my tenure as Station Master at Crowcombe Heathfield is enough to be going on with. However, I will be quite happy to offer advice and support if required. If you have a fairly good knowledge of how the railway works, and the functions that stations carry out in the great scheme of things, the role of Stations Co-ordinator is certainly worth considering.

## **Work Behind the Scenes**

These sections of *The Platform* give a brief insight into some of the other work that has been ongoing during 2020 and into 2021.

### **1 - The Safety Management System (SMS)**

As a public railway, we have a substantial responsibility to make sure our passengers are safe when they visit and travel on the railway. We also have a responsibility to make sure that everyone who works on the railway is safe, whether staff member or volunteer. In Victorian days railways were dangerous places but as time has

passed, railways have, thankfully, become much safer. This has not happened by chance but by those that operate railways focussing on safety and learning from mistakes.

The safety regime on the West Somerset Railway, like any railway in the UK, is carefully governed by legislation enforced by the regulatory authority, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR). One aspect of this is that each railway is required to have a Safety Management System (or SMS). The SMS is set out in an extensive document which covers all aspects of managing the railway safely. It links in to other aspects of ensuring safety, including the Rule Book and the competence system, by which all staff are monitored and assessed for their understanding of the particular tasks they undertake. "Safety Critical Staff" (the term is self-explanatory but includes drivers, firemen, guards and signalmen) undertake a range of regular exams and tests to assure their competence.

Although an SMS has been in place on the West Somerset for several years, over the last six months the opportunity has been taken to undertake a complete review and updating of the SMS. This present full review (and rewrite) will be complete by April, although it will be important from then on, to continue to review the SMS on an ongoing basis. The new SMS will then be incorporated in all WSR staff training and updating. The work has been undertaken by an external consultant, Stephen Roberts - who is a specialist in the field - working with Director Andy Castledine and Board Adviser, Frank Courtney.

## **2 – Human Resource Policies**

All the companies' human resource policies are being re-drafted and re-written and this work will be completed in the next six weeks or so. Since the policies were first written, significant elements of legislation have changed, and it was also important to make them as clear and unambiguous as possible.

## **3 - Seaward Lane Level Crossing Minehead - Update**

This is no longer behind the scenes if you know where to look! The former signalling interlocking is now no longer connected, and further work on the signalling system is under way in preparation for full renewal and replacement to connect into the new crossing equipment. It has proved necessary to undertake a ground survey of the site of the new switch room on the south east side of the crossing, after which the concrete base for the room will be laid and the pre-fabricated switch room can be installed. The provider of the CCTV system has now undertaken a full on site demonstration and test, setting up a test installation so that all aspects of the CCTV installation have been tested prior to permanent installation. Meanwhile the ground plan (which includes full details of wiring channel locations and other details) has been finalised, and has been submitted to the ORR. The ORR now conduct a formal consultation with the Highways Authority. The Highways Authority is of course Somerset County Council with whom we have been working closely. Detailed negotiations are now underway with the Principal Contractor. A particular challenge has been to ensure that the testing distinction between aspects of signalling (which are the responsibility of the WSR team) and the barrier operation (the responsibility of the principal contractor) are absolutely clear and mutually agreed. This has now been completed.

It is very difficult to forecast exactly when the crossing will reopen. In a project as complex as this it is inevitable that unexpected aspects come up that have to be dealt with. We have found that the Covid situation has not helped. Paradoxically contractors have been exceptionally busy on the main network because Network Rail are taking the opportunity to rebuild a large number of crossings when traffic is relatively light. However, we should know a firm date very soon.

## **West Somerset Railway Vacancies**



### **Volunteer Vacancies**

The West Somerset Railway (WSR) is one of Britain's leading heritage railways. It operates preserved steam and diesel trains between Bishops Lydeard and Minehead to a timetabled service between April and October supplemented by Galas and special events. The PLC employs a small number of paid staff and together with the supporting organisations on the WSR, has over 1000 volunteers.

We currently have the following volunteer vacancies:

#### **Safety & Compliance Lead Volunteer Manager**

For an application pack to arrange an informal discussion prior to application, please contact:

Sam Eastaugh, HR Administrator  
Direct Dial: 01643 704996, Email: [hr@wsrail.net](mailto:hr@wsrail.net)

**Closing Date - 14th March 2021**

Details of the WSR can also be found on [www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk](http://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk)

### ***What other information is there to help keep up with the WSR?***

There is much other information available to help you keep up to date with WSR developments. If you have access to Facebook, please keep in touch with the WSR Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/WSrail/>

For railway staff (including volunteers) please make sure you keep up to date through the HOPS on-line system. Regular more detailed briefings about railway developments, including specific detailed regular briefings on COVID-19, are available to download from HOPS. Training information will be sent direct to appropriate staff, but also be made available on HOPS.

The excellent West Somerset Railway Journal, edited by Ian Coleby on behalf of the WSRA is sent free to WSRA members but is also available to purchase from Bishops Lydeard shop. Have a look also on the various WSR Facebook pages including WSR Infrastructure Engineering and WSR Mechanical Engineering Department News.

And, of course, everyone is recommended to keep a close eye on Steve Edge's "unofficial" WSR site at [www.wsr.org.uk](http://www.wsr.org.uk) There is a regular flow of all sorts of information and the best, most up to date flow of pictures you are likely to find anywhere.

## ***Please Contribute and Help Us***

Although the PLC and its support groups have been successful in obtaining a large grant from Government towards preparing to operate the railway which will make a real impact, this will only last until March 2021. There are also many things that the grant could not cover or were not eligible under the rules. We still need to address those challenges and therefore ***your donation*** remains a very important way in which you can contribute to the future prosperity of the WSR. The plain fact is – despite all the hard work – there won't be a West Somerset Railway for future generations if we don't weather this very difficult time and all pull together. We need your help to do this please.

The railway itself (through the Plc) needs cash to survive until then, and if you are able to contribute to this, please consider a donation direct to the Plc, or the purchase of shares in the company if you're an existing shareholder. And smaller, staged donations over the next nine months would be very welcome too.

A range of rewards are available to donors who give specific amounts of funding. Full details are given on the joint fundraising site at:

**<https://www.wsra.org.uk/fundraising>**

The Association and the Steam Trust are fundraising for heritage track components, heritage rolling stock and our historic buildings, but this has to be in line with the objects of the charity, and cannot go to the general support of the railway. If you donate through the support charities, however, they can generally reclaim gift aid on your donation.

PLC Donations: <https://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk/donations>  
PLC Share Purchases: <https://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk/shareholders>  
WSRA Donations: [https://www.wsra.org.uk/support\\_us/](https://www.wsra.org.uk/support_us/)  
WSSRT Donations: <http://www.wssrt.co.uk/>

## ***Photo credits***

Photos are (in order) by Steve Leek, Dave Fowler and DEPG (6) to all of whom we are very grateful. Tim Stanger kindly helped source the photographs.

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## ***Getting in Touch***

If you have any views, ideas or contributions please get in touch with the Editor, Frank Courtney, preferably by email [frank.courtney@wsrail.net](mailto:frank.courtney@wsrail.net)

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**<https://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk/sign-up-to-our-newsletter>**