

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail

Supporting Sustainable Tourism

Public Transport on Heritage railways



July 2021



Glorious Devon: a train from Bristol approaching Kingswear (for Dartmouth) with a locomotive equipped to run on the national network. This summer Sunday service has been running for many years

(Dartmouth Steam Railway)

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail



Foreword

On May 14 this year, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the first train run by volunteers on a preserved railway, the Talylyn. Its passengers were no longer workers in the slate quarries, but hikers and others in search of the beauty and tranquillity of this part of Wales. Today, heritage railways are predominantly part of the tourism sector and essential to support the local hospitality industry, providing skilled jobs and training in the rural economy and a worthwhile and rewarding activity for many thousands of volunteers with the wellbeing benefits that this brings.

The Talylyn is one of the 12 Great Little Trains of Wales, of which I am fortunate to have seven in my constituency of Dwyfor Meirionnydd, so I am keen to protect the value they bring. However, they are also a heritage means of transport and as the first steam locomotive in the World ran in Wales, and railways were Britain's gift to the World, I welcome the opportunity in this study to consider what public transport role heritage railways could play today.

I am grateful for the contributions made by a number of heritage railways, by the rail industry, the regulator and the Minister, and the quality of evidence put to us, which has helped guide our conclusions. My thanks also go to our Secretary, Chris Austin who arranged the evidence sessions, researched the issues raised and drafted the report

The areas of potential development that we have identified are largely around sustainable tourism, and focus inevitably on those railways that already have a main line connection or interchange station. There would seem to be many opportunities to replace car journeys to visit heritage railways and to link the rural areas they serve with those on the national network. We would endorse our findings to the future Great British Railways organisation when it is established, as well as to Scottish and Welsh Government and the five Whitehall departments whose policies are supported or enhanced by the contributions made by heritage railways.

The opportunities for business and commuter travel on heritage lines are fewer, but where the opportunities exist, we applaud the work of those railways that are seeking to develop them.

In an uncertain world, the existence of a rail link is potentially an economic bonus and we endorse the need to protect former railway routes where there is a realistic possibility of linking heritage railways again with the national network.

Rt Hon Liz Saville Roberts MP,

Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail

7 July 2021

List of Members taking part in Study

Rt Hon Liz Saville Roberts MP (Chair)

Martin Vickers MP	Simon Baynes MP	James Daly MP
Martyn Day MP	Tan Dhesi MP	Peter Gibson MP
Robert Goodwill MP	Kevin Hollinrake MP	Chris Loder MP
Karl McCartney MP	Julian Sturdy MP	Bob Seely MP
Craig Williams MP	Hywel Williams MP	
Lord Berkeley	Lord Davies of Brixton	Earl of Devon
Lord Faulkner of Worcester	Lord Grocott of Telford	
Baroness Morgan of Cotes	Baroness Scott of Needham Market	
Lord Shutt of Greetland*	Lord Snape of Wednesbury	

Secretary: Chris Austin

(* Sadly, Lord Shutt died on 30 October 2020, but had contributed extensively to the study before this and his wise counsel and strong interest in its work were much appreciated.)

Executive Summary

Heritage railways are a well established part of the tourism sector, and the original concept of a steam train ride has now become a full day of interest and activity, engaging with a new generation of younger visitors who never experienced steam on the main line. They also provide worthwhile volunteering opportunities with health and wellbeing benefits for 22,000 volunteers as well as the 13 million visitors they attract each year. This report sets out to see how far they can also provide public transport in addition to this important tourist role.

Standard gauge heritage railways run on the route of a railway that once formed part of the British Rail network and so it is understandable that questions are asked about the possibility of restoring a public transport service as well as providing a train ride for tourists. In some cases, only a section of the former line has been preserved, so the railway simply runs between remote rural stations for which conventional passenger demand would be low. In other cases, though, heritage railways serve major communities off the national network and a list of these is given in Annex Three, along with the populations served.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail has considered both the feasibility and the business case for providing a public transport service on heritage railways in the context of the Government's 'Restoring your Railway' initiative, and this report is designed to assist the continuing studies into the opportunities around Great Britain to reconnect communities to the national rail network.

The principal conclusions of the study are:

Scope:

- 1) Of the 156 heritage railways in the United Kingdom, 32 heritage lines are connected to the national network or have a reasonable interchange with it. 19 lines serve major tourist areas such as National Parks and are linked with the national network and 11 towns with a population of over 10,000 are on heritage railway lines connected to the national network.
- 2) From the evidence of the railways themselves, a number saw scope for providing 'public tourist transport,' leisure-based travel which people would enjoy both as an experience and as a way of accessing tourist destinations without using the car.
- 3) Our general conclusion from the study is that the main scope for future growth remains in tourism for the majority of heritage railways.
- 4) Heritage railways are alive to the opportunities offered by through running or good interchange with the main line network, but not all will be able to participate.

Commercial:

- 5) The business models of heritage railways and the national railway are quite different, and expanding existing services brings additional costs and responsibilities which may be beyond the resources and capability of the heritage railway to manage.
- 6) The new markets so far developed by through services have been tourist based, rather than providing an all-day, year round rail service for general travel needs. Post pandemic, both heritage and national railways see leisure travel as likely to grow strongly, so have a shared interest in co-operating to make this work as effectively as possible.
- 7) A major issue is the relatively high fares on heritage railways, geared to the price of other tourist attractions in the area, rather than to bus fares or to local fares on nearby national rail lines, which are significantly lower.
- 8) We found no evidence of major hindrances that would prevent heritage railways providing a public service as a matter of principle, but it was clear that there would not be a business case to do so for every heritage line. Opportunities could be quite limited as described below. In some cases the railways felt that an additional public transport requirement could be inimical to their interests as a tourist attraction.

Funding:

- 9) To overcome this, where the benefits to potential passengers would be significant, financial support will generally be needed from Government, and a mechanism for this together with a method of ensuring value for money would be needed in cases where additional and non-commercial services are requested by Government for public policy reasons.
- 10) In procuring, marketing and promoting services as well as on through ticketing, a national train operator might act as a 'foster TOC'¹ to its associated heritage railway to provide the logistical support to bridge the gap between the locally focussed heritage railway and the more disciplined administrative requirements of the national system.
- 11) Financial support could alternatively come from the local authority or sub-national transport body rather than from central Government, where services are provided for a specific purpose, such as school trains or to support a specific local economic activity.

Operational:

- 12) Evidence from the Office of Rail and Road made clear that the approach will be to examine each case on its merits and based on the assessment of risks and their mitigation in each particular case.
- 13) It is easier to run modern rolling stock on to a heritage railway than to run historic rolling stock onto the national network.
- 14) The costs of running the national network are an order of magnitude different from those of running a heritage line. Above 25 mph a number of additional safety requirements would be required which would increase costs considerably.
- 15) The views of volunteers and the circumstances of each railway need to be carefully considered, as changes of this magnitude may go well beyond the reasons that volunteers are prepared to offer their time and help, particularly as directors and trustees.
- 16) The rapid change from conventional railway signalling to the digital railway means an ever-closer relationship between track and train. It will continue to require innovative solutions to providing the on-train equipment in the difficult environment of a steam locomotive cab to deal with instructions received from lineside equipment and cab signalling on the national network.

Public Policy Issues:

- 17) The Group welcomed the 'Restoring your Railway' initiative as a positive step forward and were pleased to contribute to it by this thoughtful analysis of the role that heritage railways might play.
- 18) Public tourist transport has a particular role to play in providing car-free access to national parks and other sensitive areas such as seaside towns unable to cope with a huge influx of cars.

¹ Train Operating Company

- 19) The heritage 'offer' should not be compromised as it forms the *raison d'être* for most heritage railways and they in turn support many other tourist businesses in their area.

Study Remit

1. An examination of the scope for heritage railways to offer a public transport service as well as a heritage experience as part of the tourism sector.
2. The study will consider issues that restrict or prevent heritage railways providing a wider public transport service, identifying how these might be overcome.
3. Both cases of heritage railways running on to Network Rail tracks and national rail operators running on to heritage lines would be considered.

The study seeks to identify types of line that might be able to provide a public service with appropriate funding and to identify the benefits that might accrue to the local economy or in terms of mode shift from car, with practical examples where possible.

Methodology

The approach was to take evidence from a selection of heritage railways themselves, and in particular those that have some experience of operating through services to and from the national network. In addition, the views of the Heritage Railway Association were considered as well as those of the Rail Minister, a major national rail operator with many heritage railway links, and of the Office of Rail and Road (Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate.) Advice was also sought from the Rail Delivery Group. Members considered the emerging evidence and contributed their views prior to preparation of the report.

Evidence

The Group took oral evidence from ten witnesses and benefitted from written evidence from two railways, and advice from HRA and the Rail Delivery Group. The full list is set out in Annex One.

The Group was struck by the positive approach and attitude from all those participating, and supported the view of the Minister that *Restoring your Railway* was arguably the most popular railway policy ever.

The Chair of Network Rail, Sir Peter Hendy caught the mood nicely when he quoted the words of Sir Peter Parker, a former British Rail chairman, saying of railway heritage that "Steam warmed the market for railways generally..."² Sir Peter Hendy

² Sir Peter Parker, *For Starters*, Pan Books 1989

was also clear that the prime purpose of a railway (national or heritage) was to drive economic growth.

The Chief Inspector of Railways, Ian Prosser, made clear that ORR's approach was "never say never," but one of proportionality and risk management, identifying risks and removing or mitigating them.

Those railways that had achieved operation of through trains to and from the national network had shown considerable tenacity and commitment in overcoming all the obstacles that arose from such a new approach.



Approaching the level crossing linking the North Norfolk Railway with Network Rail at Sheringham in 2010

Photo: M&GN Joint Railway Society

Background

When the railway preservation movement started in the 1950s and 1960s the main objective was to provide a public transport service, similar to that run by BR, but operated by volunteers. In practice though, no railway could sustain such a level of service throughout the year. The Dart Valley Railway took over the line between Paignton and Kingswear (for Dartmouth) as a going concern from BR in 1972, but after the 1972/73 winter season moved to a seasonal operation and has been very successful ever since in moving large numbers of tourists in and out of these

sensitive riverside towns and reducing the level of cars on the narrow Devon lanes in summer, but a regular winter service proved unaffordable.

Initially, services attracted railway enthusiasts, but very quickly families were attracted to a train ride as the basis of a day out. As the railways extended and started to provide a wider range of attractions, including museums, catering and links to neighbouring tourist venues, they became an important part of the local tourist offer. From the 1970s onwards it was evident that the future of heritage railways as commercial companies running without public support lay in tourism rather than in public transport.

In 2013, the Group reported on the value of heritage railways and their contribution to the local economy in terms of tourism, employment, skills training and apprenticeships, as well as through local purchasing of supplies. We also considered the potential opportunities for the railways to fulfil a greater potential through providing 'public tourist transport.' This covered more than just a train ride, including the role of these railways in providing access to national parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty in a sustainable way, particularly for walkers and cyclists. This report goes beyond that and considers more widely the scope for public transport services on heritage railways.

Since the Beeching closures of the 1960s the demographics of Britain and the use of the railways has changed dramatically. Overall passenger kilometres travelled by all modes have tripled while rail travel has doubled. This growth was brought to a sudden halt on 23 March 2020 by the travel restrictions and the effects of lockdown as a result of the Covid pandemic. More recently, travel has resumed at a lower level, but it is clear that the demand for both commuting and business travel will not return to former patterns or continue the growth that they had displayed over the 20 previous years. Leisure travel, however, is widely expected within the rail sector to be likely to return to former levels and to continue to grow. This may be partly due to the changing patterns of work and leisure which may provide new leisure opportunities, or it may reflect the growth in 'staycations' rather than the previously insatiable demand for overseas holidays. It will also depend on the economy and the availability of disposable income to spend on leisure pursuits including travel.

All of this suggests a joint opportunity for the national rail network and heritage railways where the synergy of the two sectors working together is likely to produce greater growth than if they worked in isolation.

Most visitors to heritage railways come by car, with a significant minority coming by coach. A number of factors combine to mean that heritage railways want to encourage visitors by public transport. Increasingly, environmental concerns mean that railways wish to see more people visit using a sustainable means of transport. More cars mean a requirement for more car parking and laying tarmac on more land, which is now less acceptable in environmental terms, but also means the land is sterilised by parked cars rather than being used for more remunerative activities, such as retail, catering or for expanding rail facilities (all heritage railways need more land for their activities).



Car free access to the Isle of Purbeck by South Western and Swanage Railways. The train for Waterloo stands at Corfe Castle station, overlooked by the 11th century castle.

(Photo Peter Milford)

Railways can also provide transport to sensitive areas such as National Parks where the influx of cars threatens to damage the countryside or villages that visitors have come to see. Some railways already provide an opportunity for car-free access to these areas, but with connections to the national network, a much wider catchment can be served and more cars kept off the road. Annex Two lists 19 railways that serve major tourist attractions and are linked to the national network with a further two where extensions of the heritage railway are proposed to create that link.

There are 11 towns with a population in excess of 10,000 people which are served by stations on heritage railways that are linked to the national network, and a further two are proposed. These lines are listed in Annex Three. This is not to suggest that all can simply be enhanced to provide a full public transport service, but rather to indicate the numbers of people whose access to the national network by train might be improved, along with many other sizeable towns just under the 10,000 mark. They mark out a potential for expanded services which might justify future consideration.

Size and Scope of Heritage Railways (2016 figures from HRA)

- 156 heritage railways in the UK and Ireland
- 562 track miles
- 420 stations
- 13m visitors, 9.6m passengers carried (18.6m passenger journeys)
- 2,867 paid staff
- 21,659 volunteers
- 1.3m passenger train miles run



North Yorkshire Moors Railway train from Whitby leaving Network Rail and running on to the heritage line at Grosmont.

Links to the National Network

Of the 156 railways, 32 are connected to or provide interchange with the national network (see Table One below), while the remainder are physically separate, although there are currently plans for a further six to be linked in future.

20 heritage railways have a track link with the national network currently, and three more have plans to do so. 26 have reasonable interchange with a national rail station and a further six have plans to provide an interchange in the future.

The table below lists heritage lines (excluding museum sites and miniature railways) with existing or planned links to Network Rail over the next five years.

Table One – Links between heritage and national networks

	Linked to NR with scheduled through trains #	Running line connection to NR but no regular passenger services	Siding connection to NR.	Inter change station	Plans to link to NR	Plans for Inter change station
England	4	14	4	19	2	5
Wales	nil	Nil	Nil	6	nil	nil
Scotland	nil	1	1	1	1	1
Total GB	4	15	5	26	3	6

Notes:

Total numbers in each category are given, so that if a railway has both a connecting line and an interchange station, it is shown under both headings. The total number of railways with a track connection or an interchange station is 32 (with a further six planned).

pre-covid.

Issues Identified in the Study

Physical constraints. Standard gauge³ heritage railways are mostly those that previously formed part of the British Rail network so, in theory are capable of reconnection. However, some remain isolated because the trackbed that formerly linked them to the national network has been built on, or because the section of line preserved line serves no strong social or commercial objective (other than a steam train ride).

All heritage railways are vertically integrated and manage both infrastructure and operations, unlike the national network where these functions are split between Network Rail and train operator, although some of these functions are to be coordinated under Great British Railways.

Running through trains to the national network would require careful consideration of the availability of train paths on the main line, and the space at junction stations to accommodate the extra trains. Most of the passenger network is busier now than in the 1960s and capacity is tailored to the level of service provided.

Speed limit. Generally there is a speed restriction of 25 mph in force on heritage lines, deriving from the requirements of the Light Railway orders when they were

³ 1435mm (4'8½")

established, and reflected in current definitions of heritage railways in the secondary legislation made under the Railways Act, 1993 and subsequent railway legislation.

Some derogation has been given on speed limits, for example to the Great Central Railway in relation to testing rolling stock for main line operators or manufacturers up to 60 mph.

The 25 mph speed limit also provides the heritage railway with exemption from the Railway Safety Regulations, 1999, which require the provision of a train protection system, and the phasing out of mark I rolling stock, unless modified to prevent vehicles over-riding each other in the event of a collision, and provision of door locking of vehicles with slam doors. Exemption is also given from European train driver licence regulations.

Capacity. Many of the lines where there might be scope to expand to provide a more frequent public transport service are already at capacity in the summer peak period. Apart from a 5.25 mile section of double track on the Great Central Railway, all heritage railways are single track, with capacity constraints on expanding services. Expanded services would, in many cases require additional crossing loops or sections of double track at a cost that would not be met by the additional income generated, so a grant would be needed to enable such work to take place.



Creating capacity with an extra platform at Bodmin General to allow provision of more trains to the main line interchange. (Photo: Bodmin & Wenford Railway)

Regulation. Following the Railways Act, 1993, which set out the framework for the privatisation of British Rail, both rail networks and train operators have required licences to operate, issued by ORR. Heritage railways that were then in existence were granted a block exemption from the licensing requirement. Their rights and duties are generally set out in the terms of the Light Railway Orders that were made when they were purchased from British Rail. The Light Railways Act has now been repealed, and replaced by an order making procedure under the Transport & Works Act, 1992.

Safety. Whilst the safety framework has some differences between national and heritage rail lines, the approach to safety management is the same, requiring train and network operators to have in place a safety management system which identifies in detail the way in which safety is managed and in particular assesses risks and says how they will be mitigated or managed. Safety management on heritage railways is overseen by ORR railway inspectors and the normal accident and incident reporting system (RIDDOR) applies to both.

Safety requirements and the approach to safety management are defined in both the Health & Safety at Work Act, 1974 and the Railway & Other Guided Transport Systems (Safety) Regulations, 2006. Guidance from ORR issued in June 2021⁴ makes clear that these requirements also apply, even if the railway is wholly run by volunteers and so has no employees. In practice most heritage railways make no distinction between volunteer and paid staff and apply their rules and safety requirements to both.

Specific requirements for the operation of heritage rolling stock on the national network are:

- Fitting train protection and warning system on locomotives or multiple units
- Provision of national train radio and on-train monitoring recorders to driving cabs
- Controlled locking of slam door carriages
- Fitting retention tanks to toilets on passenger carriages
- Fitting restraints to prevent passengers leaning out of windows.

The Chief Inspector of Railways indicated that risks relating to through running were principally to do with the age of the rolling stock, the state of the infrastructure and the competence of people operating and maintaining both. Contractual relationships between the operators needed to be very clear.

The Risk Management Maturity Model has been produced by ORR to help railways identify their current status in terms of safety management and to improve steadily from 'ad hoc' to 'excellent' in the way they approach managing safety. The same principles apply to the planning of through service running or extensions of existing lines or services.

⁴ *Wholly volunteer railways and the law*, ORR, June 2021



At Taunton a WSR driver speaks to the signaller at Exeter Panel and withdraws the token for the single line section to the West Somerset Railway, which also releases the junction signal allowing the train to run onto the heritage railway

(Photo Chris Austin)

Costs. Generally costs are significantly higher on the national network than on heritage railways, partly as a result of the volunteer input and of lower overheads, and partly as a result of a simpler method of operation on heritage lines. In his estimation, the general manager of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway told us that costs had increased by 30% as a result of extending the service to Whitby and another 30 staff had been employed.

Insurance, for example is undertaken in line with the size and complexity of the company, but NYMR told us that as a licensed operator on the national network, their minimum cover rose to insure against liabilities of £155m, well above the norm for heritage railways.

Connection costs to the main line network vary between railways, but the Swanage Railway gave evidence that they were charged £16,000 for their main line connection at Worgret Junction. This may become an issue as connections need to be renewed or resignalling costs are increased by the need to provide a connection.

NYMR pays £40,000pa for access to the 6.5 mile section of line between Grosmont and Whiby and £60,000 is paid to Northern for shared use of Whitby station.

Benefits

The benefits to visitors of the existing through running and interchange arrangements are clear and where a more comprehensive service of passenger services can be offered, the benefits to passengers could also be significant.

Closer working might also lead to other forms of cooperation such as staff training and contracts for train cleaning, for example, or station management which might benefit both. We noted in our 2018 report on *Young People and Heritage Railways*, the role of heritage railways in encouraging young volunteers and as a recruiting ground for the national network. This is a virtuous circle capable of development.

For the Isle of Wight Steam Railway, another example of potential cooperation was given. A connection between the two lines at Smallbrook Junction near Ryde, would enable shared use of on-track maintenance machines, which for Island Line currently have to be brought over from the mainland by car ferry on each occasion.



Close Encounters. The Isle of Wight Steam Railway and Island Line come very close at Smallbrook Junction, but there is no physical connection.

(Photo: Stephen and Lucy Dawson)

On the West Somerset Railway, an agreement with Network Rail provides access to a rail triangle to turn the huge High Output Ballast Cleaning train near their Taunton depot, and a means of processing spent ballast to allow it to be re-used as aggregate instead of going to landfill. In previous years, the railway carried 100,000

tons of rock armour for Minehead's coastal defences, saving around 5,000 lorry movements.

On the Dartmouth Steam railway, coal for the paddle steamer *Kingswear Castle* is delivered by rail to Kingswear, avoiding HGVs in an environmentally sensitive area.

The *Royal Scotsman* and other excursions run onto the Strathspey Railway at Aviemore, and several other heritage railways see periodic through trains from the national network bringing hundreds of visitors and their spending power to the areas served.

Business Models

Heritage railways run a seasonal service, typically between 180 and 240 days a year and their hours of operation are tailored to the needs of tourists, typically between 10.00 and 17.00hrs. They charge high fares reflecting the costs of steam operation and the need to meet the substantial maintenance and renewal costs of heritage equipment. They are dependent on volunteers and some are almost exclusively run with unpaid staff whose contribution is huge, but who are generally prepared to work only the socially acceptable hours during which the trains run. Traditional methods of operation mean that staffing levels on trains and at stations are high. Heritage lines run without subsidy, and have to supplement fares income with profits from retail and catering activities to meet their costs. Most depend heavily on donations and legacies to meet the cost of projects or infrastructure renewal.

National Train Operators run a regular service on 364 days of the year, usually (for local services) between the hours of 06.00 and 23.00. They use paid staff and through automation and efficiencies run with few staff and most stations unstaffed. They require subsidy to operate and their fare levels are relatively low, with many local services as cheap as the bus.

There is no doubt that if heritage railways were to provide an enhanced public transport service, over and above that for which tourists are prepared to pay, then a subsidy would be required, particularly if lower fares were to be charged. However, the minister indicated that further powers might be needed to enable such payments, and this needs to be established or clarified in the forthcoming Railways Bill in the 2022-23 parliamentary session, to enable the establishment of Great British Railways.

Management. The other main issue is that heritage railways are largely dependent on volunteers and this includes their management, including trustees and directors who shoulder a heavy responsibility under current legislation without remuneration or acknowledgement of the value of the work they are doing. The Heritage Railway Association helps and supports the management of these railways through its training seminars and its hierarchy of guidance notes and formal advice. With this

and a lot of hard work, management of these railways is fit for purpose for the services they provide. However, few have the capability to take on the more demanding role of providing a wider range of public transport services and the disciplines of running through to the national network without expanding the management function and providing training and almost certainly, with the extended responsibilities and greater time involved, there would be a need to pay people to undertake these additional responsibilities.

Those railways that have developed closer working with the national network and even running through trains have all depended on the passion and commitment of one person or a small group, on both sides to overcome the many hurdles and see projects through to completion, dealing with many unforeseen obstacles on the way. A good project manager or project team is going to be required to take schemes forward.

Fares and Ticketing

Fares on heritage railways are high, reflecting the higher cost of steam traction and the use of heritage equipment, and the fact that the railways are seasonal and need to earn enough during the busy summer months to allow them to survive during the winter when high costs are involved in infrastructure renewal and rolling stock overhaul, at a time when little or no income is being earned. Heritage railways do not normally receive any grant from central or local government. In his evidence, the NYMR general manager estimated that his railway required a fare level of around six times the level on national rail services to cover the costs of operating it.

This high level of fare is designed for a day out with the heritage experience, and would deter passengers who want simply to travel. Similarly, those who are seeking the heritage experience and then are offered a trip on modern rolling stock will feel short changed. Differential pricing according to time of day (or by train) might be possible, but would result in a complicated fares structure.

A third problem arises from the distance taper on long distance fares. Whilst fares are market priced, rather than charged on a mileage tariff, in practice the rate per mile drops with distance, so that the amount left for the connecting heritage railway after the allocation for the trunk journey with the TOC has been made is too small to cover the costs on the heritage railway leg of the journey.

There are no easy answers to these problems but in principle it is going to be preferable to price the heritage railway journey as an add-on, in the same way as a connecting ferry or bus service would be charged, to ensure that adequate payment was made for this leg of the journey. Discounts could be made available through the mechanism of a railcard, in the same way that many heritage railways offer local residents reduced fares compared with visitors from further afield.

Where the journey over the national network is effectively an open access operation, as is the case with the North Yorkshire Moors Railway service between Grosmont and Whitby, then the operator can provide through tickets at a commercial price,

although this will mean that fares will be different between operators over the same section of route. The same is true of the Jacobite steam train experience running over the national network between Fort William and Mallaig.

In other cases, it would be possible to have two different pricing structures depending on whether travel is by heritage (steam) train or modern trains, with the TOC taking the fares in the latter case and paying an access charge to run over the heritage railway infrastructure.

Whichever approach is adopted, financial support is going to be required to keep fares at a lower level.



A West Somerset volunteer ticket inspector sells tickets on the GWR shuttle from Taunton in 2019. The GWR conductor is in charge of the train.

(Photo: Chris Austin)

Promotion and Marketing

Where heritage trains form an attractive day out, there is scope to encourage visits to them in the most sustainable way possible – by train. The majority of visitors to heritage railways come by car, but a growing number are looking to encourage visits by other modes for environmental reasons and to reduce pressure on building additional car parks. Walking, cycling, bus and train connections all feature in these plans.

Particular mention must be made here of Great Western Railway which has not only produced an excellent booklet describing the railways to which they provide access, and also a comprehensive list of the railways concerned and links to their websites, but have also introduced through ticketing from national rail stations to four heritage railways –

- Bodmin & Wenford
- Cholsey & Wallingford
- South Devon
- West Somerset

Overall, this is an excellent example for others to follow.

In the past, the problem has been the complexity of heritage railway timetables, which are mainly seasonal, running at different times and certain days of the week, according to demand. Most people access information on train services now via the National Rail Enquiry Service (NRES) which overcomes this problem by showing just the plan for the day when an inquiry is made.

Extending NRES to cover selected heritage railways would require the timetable data to be uploaded in a format compatible with that used by national train operators, and also station information pages to be provided too. Whilst this is not an expensive thing to do, it does require a level of commitment and engagement which, in the case of train operating companies is enforced by contract and licence condition. The process is perhaps too heavy handed for the requirements of heritage railways where the management of the company is likely to be by part time volunteers, and help with this will be needed, at least initially. The Group's proposal therefore is that this input should be provided by the 'foster' TOC in line with the role described below.

Accessibility. Heritage railways are covered by the Equality Act, 2010, and do their best to make their railways as accessible as possible. This is sometimes challenging as their stations and rolling stock were all built many years before the legislation and in an era where little thought was given to accessibility other than by able bodied travellers. Derogations can be granted where modification to carriages, for example, would either be physically impossible, or destroy the heritage value of the vehicle, but even here, most railways have been wonderfully innovative in providing access to smaller, narrow gauge carriages, for example. If an expanded public transport role were provided, there is the question of how the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations would be interpreted and applied. This might be overcome by the use of modern rolling stock running over heritage lines, but here too, the question of stepping distances (between train and platform) would arise as many heritage stations tend to have lower platform heights and clearances for the modern rolling stock may mean gaps between train and platform, particularly where the line is curved. Most of these issues can be resolved through a site specific examination of the circumstances at each station, but may involve cost to minimise any problems which would be a necessary part of the cost of upgrading lines for their new role.



Platform clearances. Checking the stepping distance between a class 150 train and a platform on the West Somerset Railway.

(Photo: Chris Austin)

Passenger Representation. On the national network, Passenger Focus has a supervisory role as well as carrying out much useful research on passenger patterns and preferences. PF is effectively an appeal body if the passenger is not satisfied with the response they receive from the TOC. It reports periodically on various aspects of passenger service delivery, with recommendations for improvement.

Their writ does not run on heritage railways, and, whilst complaints are few by comparison, they are dealt with by the operating company. The sanctions are similar however, as the passenger always has the choice to visit another heritage railway (or indeed another tourist attraction) if they are dissatisfied with their experience. Trip Advisor can be a strong determinant of the choice for future visits, so heritage railways try hard (and successfully) to give their passengers an enjoyable day out.

It is assumed for the purpose of this report, that this situation would not change if a heritage line were to offer a wider public transport service, but this would need to be tested with Government in specific cases, particularly if the service were to be provided with public subsidy. Again, responding to a professional statutory watchdog is a big ask of a body essentially run by volunteers in their own time and would certainly take time and money to undertake these additional responsibilities

properly. It is another piece of intervention that would discourage heritage railways from being involved in a wider role in public transport provision.

Contracting

If the Government or the local transport planning authority wanted to contract with a heritage railway to provide enhanced services, including through services to and from the national network, and these are not sustainable through fares revenue alone, there is no reason why they should not be provided under a Passenger Service Contract, along the lines of that to be used by GBR to secure services on the national network. Again, this may be a rather elaborate way of securing a modest enhancement, and if legislation were required to permit Government to do this, a simpler approach might be for the 'foster' TOC to provide this through a simplified contract to meet a general direction by the Minister set out in its own PSA.

Foster TOCs

Under the method proposed, the national train operating company most closely linked to the heritage railway concerned would become a surrogate support for the heritage line and would help with the provision of through ticketing, promotion and marketing, input to NRES and as an interface between the heritage railway, and other parts of the national rail network. It could also procure the additional services required by agreement with the heritage railway rather than this being the subject of a contract with Government or Great British Railways. The arrangements in respect of the provision of trains on the Stourbridge Town branch by the specialist class 139 units might provide some useful indicators for such an approach.

Expectations

Expectations are high on the scope for reopened railways, or for the greater use of heritage railways. Similarly, there is a strong sense of ownership by volunteers of 'their' railway, and some do not wish to see their nostalgic vision clouded by the arrival of modern rolling stock or other changes having a visual impact of the stations (for example, if CCTV cameras or platform mirrors were required for driver controlled operation.) Their views need to be taken into account, as without their involvement, and those of the earlier pioneers over a 50 year period, the railway would not be there at all, either for tourist or wider public transport use.

Sponsoring Department

Heritage railways deliver on so many aspects of Government policy, in which a number of departments have an interest, notably:

- DCMS – heritage, culture and tourism, car free access to the countryside

- DfT - sustainable transport, safety (ORR), links with Great British Railways, use of redundant railway formations, (Highways Agency), level crossings.
- DEFRA – environmental issues, sustainability, coal policy, access to the countryside
- DWP – employment, apprenticeships and skills training
- DHSC - healthy lifestyles through avoiding car dependency, mental wellbeing, particularly for volunteers

Uncertainties over responsibilities for heritage railways point to the need for a single point of contact on engaging with Government, and with safety of prime importance and links with Great British Railways being a key issue in developing leisure travel by rail (both heritage and national), the Department of Transport appears to be best placed to be effective here, recognising that as GBR develops, many of the issues may come within their powers to assist, as we recommended in our 2013 report on the *Value of Heritage Railways*.

Other points raised in evidence included:

- The West Somerset Railway made the important point that the railway was the catalyst for other tourist businesses within their area, so the importance of sustaining the attractiveness of the tourist offer had an economic importance well beyond the marginal additional transport benefits that it might provide.
- Important to consider the effect of providing a new service on heritage lines is the effect on the local bus service, if there was a risk that they might become unviable as a result.
- A more frequent service, or one extended into the evenings, may attract criticisms from neighbouring home owners and there have been past examples where local authorities have sought to restrict hours of operation through planning conditions.

Conclusions

1. Post pandemic, the principal opportunities for growth on rail is in the leisure market and this is an area where heritage railways and the national network share objectives. It is essential that Great British Railways, DfT and DCMS work closely together to ensure that this exciting opportunity is seized as tourism continues to grow and as GBR takes on its new responsibilities.
2. Demographic and social changes have brought new opportunities for many heritage railways since they were first established between 40 and 60 years ago. Further long run changes will also bring new opportunities, so that every effort should be made to keep options open for future extensions or links to the national network.
3. The business models of heritage and national rail services are quite different, and the provision of broader based public transport services on heritage railways will result in higher costs and require a greater input from railways

that are essentially run by volunteers who may require help to give them the capabilities they will require.

4. Of the 156 heritage railways in the United Kingdom, 32 are connected to the national network or have a reasonable interchange with it. However, relatively few will be in a position to offer a comprehensive public transport service to communities of significant size. Whilst 11 connect larger communities to the national network, with two more proposed, not all of these would be able to support a regular commuter service.
5. No fewer than 19 heritage railways however, serve important and sensitive tourist areas, including National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or small towns or other sensitive areas, where an alternative to car access will become increasingly important on environmental grounds. Two additional links are proposed.
6. Not every heritage railway will have a potential market to be served, and not every railway will want to be involved in expanding their services in this way. Some have concerns about volunteer reaction to such an expansion.
7. A limitation on the ability of heritage railways to offer an attractive alternative form of public transport is the 25 mph speed limit. However, planning to increase speeds above that brings with it a raft of additional safety requirements, significantly higher costs and complexity.
8. Improving bus information on access to heritage railways would help to encourage more visitors by public transport.
9. Inclusion of selected heritage railway information on the National Rail Enquiries website would make it easier for people to plan visits to heritage railways or the places they serve.
10. The national railway is a big and complex organisation. Most heritage railways will know their local train operator, but a single point of contact at DfT and Network Rail for an initial approach from individual heritage railways would be helpful in taking ideas forward.

Recommendations

1. Closer links with heritage railways connecting with main line train operators should be encouraged and incentivised through the Passenger Service Agreements, in much the same way as is done for Community Rail lines and services.
2. DfT and the new Great British Railways should encourage joint promotion and marketing with heritage railways to encourage leisure travel on both systems, by developing the synergy between them.
3. DfT and Great British Railways should develop the concept of 'foster TOCs' to work with heritage railways on their patch and assist in joint promotions, through ticketing and to procure additional services where agreed, to meet a greater public or tourist transport need.

4. Better recognition of the existence of heritage railways should be provided on the National Rail Enquiry System, and where regular trains run on to or make direct connection with heritage railways, information on the heritage rail service should be provided on NRES.
5. A wide range of benefits are brought by heritage railways, to tourism, employment, the local economy, skills training, wellbeing and mental health as well as transport benefits particularly for car-free journeys. With this in mind, any assessment of future wider public transport use would need to be designed to protect these benefits and in particular to take account of the views of the trustees and staff of the railways to avoid damage to the heritage features of the railway.
6. Heritage railways should, through the HRA and with the Department for Transport, identify those heritage railways where there is a prospect of extension to link with the national rail network, and to identify those sections of line that would need protection through local planning guidance, including those sections of former route now being managed by Highways England.
7. The Department for Transport should be the lead Government department for heritage railways, and the point of contact to put railways in touch with other Government departments, such as DCMS, where appropriate.



Interchange at Blaenau Ffestiniog links the narrow gauge line with the national network.

Photo: Ffestiniog Welsh Highland Railways

ANNEX ONE

List of Witnesses

Chris Heaton-Harris MP, Minister of State, Department for Transport

Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman, Network Rail

Mark Hopwood CBE, Managing Director, Great Western Railway

Ian Prosser CBE, Chief Inspector of Railways, ORR

Jonathan Jones-Pratt, Chairman, West Somerset Railway PLC

Paul Lewin, Director and General Manager, Ffestiniog/Welsh Highland Railways

Peter Milford, Company Secretary, Swanage Railway

Chris Price, General Manager, North Yorkshire Moors Railway

Steve Oates, Chief Executive Officer, Heritage Railway Association

Nick Wood, Director, Bodmin & Wenford Railway

Written evidence:

Isle of Wight Steam Railway

Weardale Railway

Thanks also to advice from:

Rail Delivery Group

Department for Transport

Lines serving tourist destinations with main line connections

Railway	Junction	Tourist destination
Bodmin & Wenford	Bodmin Parkway	Bodmin and Camel Trail
Bure Valley+	Hoveton & W'ham	Norfolk Broads
Dartmouth Steam	Paignton	River Dart and Greenway House
Dean Forest	Lydney	Forest of Dean
Ffestiniog+	Minffordd*	Snowdonia National Park
Keighley & Worth Valley	Keighley	Haworth, Brontë country
Keith & Dufftown	Keith	Speyside and distilleries
Mid Hants	Alton	South Downs National Park
North Yorkshire Moors	Grosmont	North Yorkshire Moors National Park
Peak Rail	Matlock	Peak District National Park
Ravenglass & Eskdale+	Ravenglass	Eskdale, Hardknott Pass, Harter Fell
South Devon	Totnes	Dartmoor National Park
Strathspey	Aviemore	Cairngorm National Park
Swanage	Wareham	Isle of Purbeck, Corfe Castle
Telford Steam	Telford Central#	Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site
Vale of Rheidol+	Aberystwyth	Devils Bridge
Welsh Highland Heritage+	Porthmadog	Snowdonia National Park
Wensleydale	Northallerton	Yorkshire Dales National Park
West Somerset	Taunton	Exmoor National Pk, Dunster Castle

With main line connections planned in future:

Embsay & Bolton Abbey	Skipton	Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire Dales NP
Kent & East Sussex	Robertsbridge	Bodiam Castle and Tenterden

Notes:

+ Narrow gauge railway, interchange only at junction station.

Madeley Junction

* Also at Blaenau Ffestiniog

ANNEX THREE

Communities of over 10,000 population served by heritage rail lines with national rail links

Town (Population)	Miles*	National Rail station	Railway
Bodmin (12,778)	3.5	Bodmin Parkway	Bodmin & Wenford
Bo'ness (14,604)	5.0	Linlithgow	Bo'ness & Kinneil
Bridgnorth (12,200)	15.5	Kidderminster	Severn Valley
Brixham# (17,457)	3.0	Paignton	Dartmouth Steam
Dereham (18,609)	11.5	Wymondham	Mid Norfolk
Heywood (28,205)	0.5	Castleton	East Lancashire
Minehead (12,000)	23.0	Taunton	West Somerset
Ramsbottom (17,872)	8.5	Castleton+	East Lancashire
Rawtenstall (22,000)	12.5	Castleton+	East Lancashire
Swanage (11,500)	11.0	Wareham	Swanage
Wallingford (11,600)	2.0	Cholsey	Cholsey & Wallingford

Proposed Future Extensions

Newport IOW (25,926)	8.0	Smallbrook Junction	IOW Steam Railway
Oswestry (17,400)	2.2	Gobowen	Cambrian Heritage Rly

Notes:

* Miles of heritage railway to junction point with Network Rail;

Served by Churston station

+ Accessible to Manchester via short walk to Bury Interchange (Metro link)
or by rail to Castleton.

Heritage railways in Great Britain with main line connections or interchanges

Railway	Connection	Interchange	Constituency
Bluebell	running line	yes ⁵	Mid Sussex
Bodmin & Wenford	siding	yes	North Cornwall
Bo'ness & Kinneil	siding	none	Falkirk East
Bure Valley	none (NG)	yes	Broadland
Chinnor & PR	siding	yes	Buckingham
Cholsey & W'ford	none	yes	Wantage
Dartmouth Steam	running line	yes	Torbay
Dean Forest	siding	yes	Forest of Dean
East Kent	none	yes	Dover
East Lancashire	running line	none ⁶	Heywood & Middleton
East Somerset	running line	none	Somerton & Frome
Ecclesbourne Valley	none	yes	Mid Derbyshire
Ffestiniog	none (NG)	yes (2)	Dwyfor Meirionnydd
Great Central (N)	running line ⁷	none	Loughborough
Isle of Wight	none	yes	Isle of Wight Keighley
Keighley & W V	siding	yes	East Hampshire
Mid Hants	running line	yes	Mid Norfolk
Mid Norfolk	running line	no	Peterborough
Nene Valley	siding	no	North Norfolk
North Norfolk	running line	yes ⁸	Scarborough & Whitby
North Yorks Moors	running line	yes	

⁵ 200m walk between stations

⁶ Short walk from Bolton Street to Interchange stations in Bury

⁷ Great Central (North) connected to Midland Main line, and connection with Great Central Railway is in progress.

⁸ 200 yards walk between North Norfolk and national rail stations

Peak Rail	running line	yes	Derbyshire Dales
Ravenglass & E	none (NG)	yes	Copeland
Severn Valley	running line	yes ⁹	Wyre Forest
South Devon	running line	no ¹⁰	Totnes
Spa Valley	none	yes	Wealden
Strathspey	running line	yes	¹¹
Swanage	running line	no	Mid Dorset & N Poole
Talyllyn	none (NG)	yes ¹²	Dwyfor Meirionnydd
Vale of Rheidol	none (NG)	yes	Ceredigion
Weardale	running line	yes	Bishop Auckland
Wensleydale	siding	no	Richmond (Yorks)
West Somerset	running line	no	Taunton Deane

Planned connections or interchanges

Aln Valley	none	yes	Berwick-upon-Tweed
Kent & E Sussex	siding	yes	Bexhill & Battle
Cambrian Railway	none	yes	North Shropshire
Embsay & B Abbey	running line	no ¹³	Skipton & Ripon
Epping & Ongar	none (LUL)	yes	Epping Forest
Keith & Dufftown	running line	yes	Moray

Notes:

NG narrow gauge line

⁹ Stations adjacent at Kidderminster

¹⁰ Ten minute walk between SDR and national rail stations

¹¹ Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey

¹² 300 yards walk between Talyllyn and National Rail stations

¹³ Skipton would be the interchange if the connection were made.



A train from Swanage, arrives at Wareham in 2017, the first year of scheduled through trains

(Photo: Peter Milford)