

Minutes of Committee Meeting Wednesday 29 July 2020 held on ZOOM on-line conference facility commencing at 18:00 hrs

- 1) Participating:** Keith Simpson, Dennis Fancett, Ian Walker, Tony Walker, Peter Wood, Peter Walker, Malcolm Chainey
- 2) Apologies:** None received before meeting although it was known that Damian Bell and Trevor Watson lacked the equipment to participate and Dave Shaw subsequently advised that technical difficulties had prevented him joining.
- 3) Notes of meeting on 26 March 2020:** These had previously been circulated and amended in accordance with comments by participants.
- 4) Matters arising:**
 - (i) Update on Branch Website:** Unfortunately, as DS was unable to join the meeting, there was little to discuss. It is known that he has updated it on several topics. Similarly, there was no information about Facebook, IW will see what he can find out.
 - (ii) Update from Tyne Valley:** MC reported that the Tyne Valley CRP was surprisingly busy. They were trying to understand peoples' concerns that might stop them getting back on the train. There are conflicting messages coming from the train operators and the DfT. They have a project underway with a singer-songwriter which involves consultation and they will try to establish concerns.
The CRP expect to soon restart promoting the railway again and are looking at policy initiatives on such topics as "connected places". Early work will centre on Haltwhistle. They have also been participating in DfT workshops involving decarbonisation and modal shift.
The timetable on the Tyne Valley is improving, there is currently an hourly service from Newcastle to Carlisle and that is now being supplemented with additional peak time services.
Tourism is now restarting, Hadrian's Wall sites e now open again and the connecting bus service is running with an extended season. TV RUG will be aiming to publicise this, but there is still an instruction from DfT not to promote rail travel, so such promotion will have to await approval from Northern.
Northern are running longer trains and counts show that passenger numbers are rising. There is still, however, around 18% staff absence due to self-isolating etc. and this has an impact on the number of trains that can be operated. TV CRP receive a fortnightly update on the situation from Tony Baxter.
The general instruction to Northern, and presumably, other train operating companies are similar, is to prioritise travel into and out of the 5 main cities, particularly for work related journeys, hence trains are not running through between the Tyne Valley and either Morpeth or the Durham Coast. Indeed the Timetable for December doesn't have such trains as they are now seen as importing delays across the network. This led to a further discussion about gaps in service, in particular, the service to Whitby, where the mid-morning departure from Middlesbrough and its return have been cancelled, making the train absolutely no use for day trips. *(Note: this train was reinstated w.e.f. 3 August, Whitby now has a 5 train service, with only the evening return trip still cancelled).*
Social distancing is still causing problems with driver training, but it is hoped that it can restart in September.
 - (iii) Update on A,B&T:**
DF reported that the name had been changed to "Northumberland Line" by the DfT, though some of the later messages include the old title, presumably to link with the Blyth Valley constituency, which has a conservative MP. While there has been no announcement on further funding, work is progressing and 2 stations which had been removed from the specification have now been put back in – Blyth Bebside and Seaton Delaval. Various things have recently been announced, but unless there is progress on funding

by Christmas, progress will slow. It is thought that there will be an announcement in not too distant future.

What has emerged is that the service on the line will not necessarily be included in the Northern franchise. Vivarail have expressed interest in entering into a partnership to run the service, that might require the provision of a light maintenance facility on the line.

(iv) SENRUG's other campaign is for a local service north of Morpeth on the ECML. There has been a feasibility study done which is positive and the submission to the "Reversing Beeching" fund will be by the Berwick MP. The report suggested that a new station at Belford should be provided, but not those proposed for Beal (technical difficulties) or Warkworth (abstraction of traffic from Acklington). Bizarrely the consultants had suggested that a car park extension at Alnmouth might be required, even though it was thought that some passengers currently using Alnmouth as a railhead might transfer to Acklington if it had a regular service. The report suggested that such a service was likely to cover its direct costs within 5 years. To get paths, the service will need to be operated by electric trains and DF has had discussions where he suggested linking the service with the proposed Team Valley station as that is on electrified line. There have also been suggestions of linking it to Metro Centre using electric/battery bi-mode trains. DF's preferred service would be an electric service from Team Valley to Newcastle to Berwick and a diesel service from Metro Centre to Morpeth with the ability to extend it to Bedlington, this between them would give Cramlington a half hourly service to Morpeth and Newcastle.

(v) Update from RUGs

Coastliners: PW advised that Horden station was now open and attracting more passengers than anticipated, despite the minimal publicity given during the Covid restrictions. There will be a formal opening when more normal circumstances permit.

Grand Central have resumed operations with 3 trains per day each way between Sunderland and Kings Croiss. Nothing has been heard recently of the suggestion in the Tees Valley STP that an hourly IC service should be diverted via the Durham Coast.

SLUG: KS advised that the Saltburn line service has been running hourly, with the through trains to Bishop Auckland running, but not those that terminate at Darlington. 2 out of the 3 diagrams are running as double sprinters with conductors using local opening on one of the central doors where platforms are too short. TPE are running hourly to Redcar again, with most trains being 6 coaches (2 x Class 185). Social distancing has so far precluded crew training on the new Nova 3 sets.

(vi) Leamside Facebook Group: No proper contact has been made. IW is monitoring it and it is obvious that they have been referring to the RF website. A community group at Ferryhill seeking to reopen the station also have a Facebook page. Their submission has gone in and has been listed by the government for further consideration. To some extent, Ferryhill people are interested in Leamside and the 2 might be seen in some way as linked. It was mentioned that the NE JTC had strongly supported the Leamside line to reduce congestion on the ECML at their June meeting. There is also a "Reopen Leamside" Facebook group but a distinction was drawn between the sort of group we are familiar with and a Facebook group which may be just a forum of like-minded individuals with no formal connection. IW will try and identify the administrator of the Leamside Facebook Group

(vii) Contact with CPRE re Leamside: CPRE had made contact with NECTAR and enquiry had been forwarded to AW & PW. They had replied with a summary of RF NE's aims and a brief bit of history. There had been further contact from a Richard Cowen, who seems to be well connected. CPRE are supportive of the aims and a proposal had been put forward under the "Reversing Beeching" scheme by Mary Foy MP (Durham) supported by Nexus. There was further discussion and AW will try to make direct contact with

Richard.

With regard to congestion on the ECML, DF commented that he had had some contact with the people at First Group about their Open Access service due to start in Dec 2021. The bodies for their trains are now at Newton Aycliffe and they will be electric only. This brought about some concern as the service is due to start some time ahead of the ECML Power Upgrade on the Borders area, already TPE are having to operate their bi-mode trains on diesel over that section. KS thought that LNER would be required to operate some services on diesel there until the power upgrade was completed.

(viii) Grant Schapps statement on 100 days since take-over of Northern Franchise (4 July): The statement contained little detail except that there was more work to do. The process had been delayed by the Covid-19 situation.

(ix) RF NE Submission to NIC Midlands and North: KS has circulated the committee with the document that had been submitted and asked for comments. PW said that it tied in with comments from the likes of CPRE and drew attention to the need for alternative routes e.g. Leamside, Stillington and, perhaps, Leeds – Harrogate – Northallerton.

5) Branch Matters:

- i) Review of “Zoom” meeting with Freight and Infrastructure and Network Group:** KS, IW, AW & PW had all taken part. The group were taking their meetings around the country and, because of the Covid restrictions held the meeting in an on line format; the original intention had been to ask NE group to book a venue, probably Newcastle Arts Centre for it. Various national topics were discussed and they had sent a spreadsheet for NE campaigns to be included. The group were generally supportive and asked for the detail on the spreadsheet to be expanded somewhat. As things progress, we were reminded that applications could be made to RF’s fighting fund for assistance.
- ii) Ramping up of rail services both nationally and locally:** This topic had largely been discussed earlier together with services on the Tyne Valley line.
- iii) Next branch meeting:** IW advised that nothing had been organised due to the uncertainties arising from the Covid pandemic. Vivarail had been due to speak at the AGM and he thought that they would still be a good main speaker.
KS advised that SLUG had a date for a visit to the Hitachi factory for 14 October, he did not know whether that would be likely to proceed, given the current situation, rather he felt it unlikely, but questioned whether any committee members would be interested if there were spare places. DF, PW and Peter Wood all expressed an interest. It was also questioned whether branch members would be interested in a Zoom format meeting. Given the demographic of the branch it was thought improbable.
- iv) Date and format of next committee meeting:** There was a short discussion on this, DF thought he would still have a Zoom account paid for during September. It was decided that the meeting should be held via Zoom on 30 September at 18:00 hrs. Note taker: AW.

6) Any other business: No further items were raised.

Meeting closed at 19:54