



SRC BOARD BRIEFING

July 2017

At a Board Meeting on Saturday 1st July 2017 the following items were discussed and action decided upon. The SRC Board considers that information on these items should be shared with Shareholders, Volunteers, Employees and SRA Members.

Special Announcement – Arthur D Lindsay

It is with great sadness that we record the passing of Arthur David Lindsay, our President who died last month after a short period of declining health. Representatives attended his funeral to pay their respects. He is fondly remembered by all those who knew him.

Finance & Related Matters

The Financial position was reported as improving and the delivery of service during our high season operating months would see early “on account” bookings invoiced and further improving the bank balance. Bob Anderson advised that the 2016 Accounts were now in preparation, with David Richards now asked to concentrate on this. John Yule now joins the Finance and Audit Group.

Staff Matters

The Board were advised that David Richard’s role would be reduced both in scope and hours worked. He would relinquish the positions of Finance Manager and Admin/Office Manager with immediate effect. Given the number of Office Staff had reduced, this was seen as fitting. Since focussing on this redefined role, the Accounting records have been migrated to the “Cloud Based Accounting” system as originally planned and early benefits including improved cost transparency were now being seen.

It was noted with regret that Calum Titley had tendered his resignation which had been accepted. The Board recognise Calum’s abilities and contribution to the Strathspey Railway which obviously helped him in securing a new job, irrespective of other rumours circulating regarding his reasons for leaving. The Board do wish him well in his new post and he is welcome at the Railway at any time, subject to his available spare time. A Staff Member’s oddly worded Facebook posting was discussed and the matter may be formally discussed with the person concerned. The phraseology used was regarded as inappropriate and open to misinterpretation leaving the Board wondering what was intended by its author.

Consequentially, as a result of this and previous instances experienced over the last 4 months, the nature and use of Social Media generally will be reviewed and it was agreed that a specific policy should be written and put into force. It will be based on the experiences of other Railways south of the Border, where the posting of material is subject to peer review and managerial approval and instances of the use of mobile devices whilst on specific duties has given cause for concern, particularly in terms of H&S and public relations generally.

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Stephen Wood has tendered his resignation as Director, largely because of what he considered as insufficient progress in respect of attitude to H&S matters amongst some Shed Staff; despite the recent reinforcing of the Company Policy. The Board acknowledged Stephen's contribution.

With this key position unfilled, post meeting, Doug Scott offered to take on the role and this has since been accepted by the Board. Now retired, he has considerable oil industry experience offshore, was the driving force behind the restoration of Locomotive 828, a regular member of the footplate staff and is also a member of the Engineering Committee.

Vanessa Evans has joined the Office/Catering Staff on a seasonal basis essentially taking on the role that Gill Kelly relinquished on emigration to Madeira.

Laurence Grant has now fully retired.

Engineering Committee

Members of the Engineering Committee, namely Alan French and Keith Holyland joined the meeting to discuss its aspirations and to foster common objectives. A "floor plan" for a safer layout for the Engine Shed, which had been circulated in advance was tabled, discussed and approved by the Board. The plan also featured relocation of the air compressor plant into the custom built wooden compressor house and along with development of distribution pipework was given immediate go-ahead for the procurement of materials. The acquisition of improved washing/rest facilities were discussed and Ken Donaldson agreed to make enquiries in Aberdeen for ex oil industry related modules so that this area could be remodelled in a further phased development.

The recent completion of the Machine Shop Emergency Exit was acknowledged as were the contributions of David Dow and Dave Grantham and for "just getting on with it".

The welcome addition of Dave Inglis, who was retiring later this month and who had intimated an interest in joining the Committee as a representative of the Electrical Dept., was noted. With many projects featuring renewal, rerouting and connection of power, this was seen as key. Dave Green is also joining the Committee.

Catering

This has had its teething problems, principally with staffing, but with the exception of three or four poor reviews is otherwise being well received. It is however a real strain on specific individuals and the Board acknowledged Ken Donaldson's relentless efforts to make the enterprise a success although it was telling on him somewhat. Ken had received a number of unsolicited testimonials offering high praise for the standard of service and quality of food and how staff, both catering and train/footplate, had added to the enjoyment of their visit. The Board are appreciative of the time taken by people to do this. The two minor complaints were dealt with on the spot and no further action was necessary. In one notable instance, and it has taken some time to investigate thoroughly and accurately, a customer made a complaint about specific locomotive haulage. Taking in account everything that was stated, it was found, without doubt, that there was no contemporaneous evidence to support their claims. In the balance of probability, and in consideration of our Terms and Conditions, no complaint would be upheld and that at best they had no more than a "gripe".

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Ken reported that there were on-going debates about switching the Saturday night service to Friday and as yet no conclusion/decision had been agreed.

August would see the last of the modest loan payments fulfilled on the Catering Set capital purchase and this would improve the overall costing model. A realistic operating cost breakdown is to be prepared and compared in consideration of the projections for the service made initially.

The Board are totally committed to making this enterprise work and to determine in the longer term, if in-house catering makes good business sense.

Marketing

The Marketing/ICT Team had managed to “dust-down” all Social Media accounts required going forward after effectively losing all Employees who managed this medium within a year. Colin Stirling pointed out that there was considerable interaction required at times with the public as regards Trip Advisor, Facebook and Twitter; ranging from complaints, general enquiries with people expecting immediate response to their communications to us. As many are aware, this is becoming “the big conversation” medium these days. Mike Inch and Graham Sutherland do their best in between everything else and at times Maureen is overwhelmed with requests/demands which can tend to come in swathes.

Caravans at Boat

The Board were advised that the power distribution in Boat Yard had been made safe through removal of clandestine additions and rationalised such that only the Dock Platform, South Signal Box and DMU Workshop were supplied.

The situation with the caravan occupiers was discussed, having come to Board notice on account of electrical safety concerns and consumption, potential need for the area used to accommodate a compound for a mobile communications mast and associated equipment and the untidy conditions that had been allowed to develop around the area. Over and above the safety concerns and the unauthorised extending of the use of unprotected power in the yard, notably into an unearthed steel hulled barge, the Board could not allow permanent residency as it contravened legislation and any pre-existing agreement over the siting and use of caravans.

The situation with one member of staff deciding to live on-site has to be dealt with sensitively, nevertheless, the Local Authority view had to be taken into consideration. The Board will provide letters of support to those requesting such to assist in application for housing, with one individual already having specifically approached a Director about this. It was noted that any agreements entered into by two caravan users had long since expired and were therefore no longer valid. Two of the four caravans have been identified for disposal and the future of the remaining two will be discussed with the owner in the autumn by which time they may require to be removed from the premises.

External Matters

As an alternative to the yard site previously considered, Contractors to the Mobile Phone Consultants/Customer have requested permission to conduct a radio field strength and propagation survey in and around Morley Mansions (old North Shed site). This activity was approved by the Board, subject to liaison with an SR nominated person in advance of the visit and declaring a Risk And Method Statement (RAMS). It has been pointed out we are currently operating a 7 day service. A drone aircraft may be used.

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Timetable 2018

The 2018 Timetable was discussed and of significance was the decision to maintain 2 train Sunday working.

A related discussion followed as regards the optimum time to launch the 2017 Christmas Service and it was agreed that tickets would be available, as last year, mid to late September after launching a Social Media Campaign. Colin Stirling advised the Board of the need to consider a "phased release" of the tickets to prevent a re-occurrence of the experience last year when our ticketing provider's server collapsed due to demand. Over 30% of tickets sold over an 8 hour period and saw over 180 users "checking out" concurrently.

Locomotive 5025 - Tender

The Board's attention was drawn to the needs of the Tender of Locomotive 5025. It had been damaged during lifting and/or transit whilst at the Contractors with a distorted plate requiring attention, addition of top edge beading and other incomplete fabrication work carried out and removal of accumulated surface rust prior to prime and painting. A local individual had quoted for the work prior to prime and painting and although it was acknowledged that this time of year was ideal to carry out such work, the expenditure was not approved at this juncture until all calls for cash are on the table and visible.

Organisation Chart

This has been updated during July when full details were made available to reflect changes over the last 3 months, most significantly, new Directors, the addition of the Catering Dept. and the reconstituted Engineering Committee.

*By order of the Board
Strathspey Railway Company
16th July 2017 (updated)*