

Sent on behalf of John Yule

The Company and therefore the Railway is going through a fundamental change in the way it is being managed and run on a day-to-day basis, with the introduction of our General Manager, Gordon Kirk. Now into his third month as GM, Gordon is really getting into his stride and our Staff are responding magnificently, with everyone pulling together as a Team to optimise the Visitor experience AND maximise our income.

Whilst external factors such as the English mid-term holiday will have had a bearing, it can be no coincidence that on Wednesday 29th May, we took in no less than £10,300 in a single day. Thanks to significant tweaks to the online ticket booking process, efforts to upscale walk-on tickets to the Beavertail, selling seats in the carriage on the first departure normally set-aside for afternoon light lunches and that all-important Team focus, we have achieved what we believe to be a record level of daily income for a standard (non-Xmas/Flying Scotsman) mid-season running day. Fantastic!

Incredibly, this record was overtaken the following day with a new record of £10,700!!! The demand for our Railway is clearly there and passenger numbers and overall income are on course to be higher than last year, but as always, there are major challenges to be overcome, simply to reach the financial targets required to meet this year's Budget and planned outgoings.

Before I write about these major challenges, let me bring you up to date with important personnel changes to the SRC Board.

Ian Stanworth, my Vice-Chair and Infrastructure Director has resigned from the SRC Board and also resigned as Chair of the SRA Board of Trustees. The pressures of holding down a demanding full-time occupation as a Consultant, whilst supporting the Railway in at least three important official capacities are clear. His commitment to the long-term success of the Railway is not in doubt, with Ian having acted as SRA Chair for well over a decade and as a P-Way volunteer for much longer, as well as his numerous well written and interesting contributions to the Express. Thank you, Ian for all this and for your invaluable support to me in helping to stabilise the Railway over the last very challenging six months and of particular note, in pulling together, with Departmental representative's input, an overall SRC annual budget, for the first time in many, many years.

With the GM managing the daily operational and financial, etc., aspects of the Railway, the SRC Board whilst providing direction and support to Gordon, must and is changing to a more strategic focus. As such we are still in an interim phase, whilst we continue to define the roles and requirements for the planned new strategic Board structure, ideally for implementation after this year's AGM. In the meantime, and to ensure we remain quorate, Aidan Bell has kindly agreed to rejoin the Board in an interim capacity. Aidan is already heavily involved with the Operations Committee headed up by Stephen Muirhead, providing invaluable input in to that area, but his clear thinking, forward looking and organisational ability will also help drive the Board forward. Many thanks Aidan.

Back to our major challenges: moving from 4-days to 6-days per week in our peak seasonal months of July and August will bring in an estimated additional c£150k. Royal Scotsman revenues attract a similar 6-figure amount not far below that. Steam Services and the RS are our two core revenue streams that we must deliver simply to survive. However, we are at times currently struggling to roster sufficient Steam Footplate and Guards to maintain a 4-day service and Air Braked Diesel Drivers to meet our current programme of RS haulage obligations.

Whilst the Seasonal Train Crew job advert has attracted both additional volunteers and prospective seasonal staff, we remain critically short of Drivers for 6-day running and this year's busy RS timetable. We are doing what we can to bring in and develop our own drivers, but time, process and procedures are against us.

For the moment may I simply ask that all existing volunteer Steam Drivers commit to fulfilling at least FOUR Driving turns each month in July and August (and ideally notify Gordon and Alan Coulson asap)?

Similarly, can all Air Braked Diesel Drivers please look again at the RS Roster and double check where they can or might be able to help out?

Guards are coming through, but we are still relying on a few to really pull us through the season - thank you gents, but again can the other Guards help further spread the burden?

Finally, the Board are in the process of reconfiguring our Carriage & Wagon department to ensure we continue to meet the safety critical and legislative standards required for our Heritage Railway operation in the most efficient and cost effective manner, both in the immediate and longer term.

Thanks again to everyone currently employed or volunteering on the Railway and for doing what you can to fulfil the financial potential that this season clearly has to see the Strathspey Railway through the winter of 2024/25 and set us up for the future.

All the best, John

JOHN YULE
Interim Chair



STRATHSPEY RAILWAY COMPANY LIMITED