

Please Reply To: Stephen Oates
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Heritage Railway Association

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8 March 2021

Timothy Pennock
Chairman
The Downs Light Railway Trust
Malvern
Worcestershire

By Email: timothy.pennock@DLRTrust.co.uk

Dear Tim,

Downs Light Railway – Centenary Development Programme

I write on behalf of the Heritage Railway Association to strongly support your Centenary Development Programme initiative.

The Heritage Railway Association is the national trade body for the heritage rail sector representing over 300 of the UK's heritage railways, tramways, museums and affiliated groups. It is terrific to have the Downs Light Railway within our membership and to support the excellent work and inspirational activities you provide for children and young people in the fields of engineering and heritage railway operations.

I have studied the documents you have provided to me as well as the relevant pages on your website and, in wholeheartedly supporting your Development Programme, make the following points:

The Project

This is an ambitious and well thought-out project with outcomes firmly focussed on improving the practical education and life chances of young people.

To flourish, any heritage railway needs good maintenance, repair and storage facilities for rolling stock and other assets. Adding dedicated learning and educational facilities for young people in a workshop adds a new level of complexity in terms of layout and safe working. It's therefore great to see that your development programme incorporates a new building specifically designed and fully equipped for indoor practical learning exercises which will support educational activities all year round. It was also welcome to note your proposals for track alterations plus the restoration and commissioning of a turntable which will create another new learning area.

It's clear that, by providing new buildings, facilities and equipment, your development programme will increase youth engagement and practical learning in STEM subjects and vital

life skills. I note that a further component of the project will ensure that the natural environment and amenity of the surroundings in which the railway sits is given suitable prominence – vitally important for any heritage railway seeking to attract visitors, as well as being a key contributor to instilling a sense of wellbeing among staff and volunteers.

Engagement with the Heritage Rail Sector

Heritage rail is an important component of the tourism industry, generating local, national and international value to the UK visitor economy. Across our member railways and tramways there are some 4,000 staff and over 22,000 volunteers. The sector protects, conserves and brings to life part of the nation's cultural heritage giving enjoyment and learning to many people; it provides social, community and wellbeing benefits to employees, volunteers and visitors; and it creates jobs and greatly supports local and regional supply economies.

All heritage railways find it a perpetual challenge to attract and engage young people to join-in and volunteer but, where it is achieved, the benefits to both the railway and the individual are immense. Your work does much to promote youth engagement in supporting heritage and leisure railways across the United Kingdom.

As an active member of the Heritage Railway Association you have access to fellow railway operators across the UK. Our members operate standard gauge, narrow gauge, 15-inch gauge and smaller railways.

I know that a number of heritage and minor railways have already offered you their support and wish to develop those links by providing volunteering and potentially career opportunities for those youngsters from the DLR who are ready for the next stage of their railway life.

The HRA will, where possible, help the DLR to network with other railways to set up partnership working – for example, where the DLR might provide youth engagement and training, while the heritage railway partner provides access to their professional engineering facilities. This will help young people associated with the DLR to experience larger heritage railways and, potentially, it will provide assistance to the DLR in servicing and maintaining its locomotives and rolling stock.

Community and Public Engagement

Intriguingly, your centenary coincides with the double centenary of the World's first passenger train which ran at the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in 1825.

The birth of railways 200 years ago triggered massive cultural, social, community, commercial and political change and had a profound effect on the growth and development of Britain and, indeed, the World. We are anticipating that national, regional and local activities and events across the heritage rail sector to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of modern railways will make 2025 a very significant year in recognising and promoting this important part of the nation's cultural and social heritage.

It will be very fitting to witness the opening of your new facilities in 2025, putting the DLR at the forefront of inspiring children and young people to pursue careers in engineering and railway operations to ensure our modern railways continue for the next 200 years.

Summary and Support

The importance of heritage railways to our cultural and industrial heritage, and their value to

the UK visitor economy, is well understood. However, to build their resilience and to continue the development of the heritage rail sector, I believe it is critical to engage young people in heritage railways and STEM subjects.

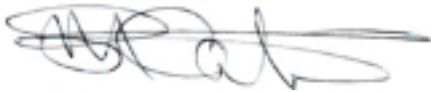
There is strong evidence of the power of projects of this nature to inspire and drive interest and engagement among children and young people. In turn this helps secure and preserve historical railway vehicles and artefacts for current and future generations to learn-from, experience and enjoy.

This becomes even more powerful when timed to link with such a prominent and important year as the 200th anniversary of the birth of the World's railways.

I'm a firm believer in providing education through practical learning and, as someone who first got involved in heritage railways as a young teenager, I know first-hand that giving children and young people the opportunity to learn and develop key skills, while building up their technical knowledge, has a greater success when they are able to work on real world projects. Importantly, the educational benefits also go beyond the immediate enjoyment of learning, helping to hone many soft skills needed in all walks of life.

Accordingly, the Heritage Railway Association strongly supports the Downs Light Railway's Centenary Development Programme, which will make a unique contribution to youth engagement and, in turn, support the whole of the heritage railway sector.

Yours sincerely



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