

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

REPORT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

YMCA, Belfast, Saturday 15th November 1980

Robert Edwards was in the chair, and 77 members attended. Opening the meeting, R.Edwards said the council had called the EGM to put two motions forward.

J.Richardson proposed. the first motion:

That the annual subscription be raised with effect from January 31, 1981, to £6 adult and £3 U16/65+.

He said costs were rising all round and gave the example of insurance which now cost the Society £3,000 per annum. Seconding the motion, Laurence Morrison said some English members were concerned over the delay in Five Foot Three No.25 appearing. Alan Edgar said the magazine was with the printers.

The motion was passed unanimously.

R.Edwards said the second motion was:

That the Society should undertake the opening of the Scarva - Banbridge branch line as a tourist attraction using RPSI locomotives and stock, provided the following criteria are met: 1, Finance; 2, Legislation; 3, Local Authority backing; 4, Volunteers.

Derek Henderson, Ian Wilson, Charles Friel and Peter Rigney questioned various aspects of the admissibility of proxy votes. The Chairman said the council had voted to allow proxies and that this was permitted under the Articles of Association. Irwin Pryce said a copy of the Articles should be made available for consultation by the members at Whitehead, and R.Edwards said a copy was available at the Treasurer's house in Carrickfergus.

P.Scott then proposed the branch line motion. He said he felt the Society should investigate the branch line option because:

1. The Society should be actively preserving the railway infrastructure.
2. Such a scheme would allow working members to participate in railway operation.
3. The long-term future of mainline railtours was under threat from the march of technology and the march of time.

The feasibility sub-committee set up by the council to investigate the possibilities recommended any such line should be between five and ten miles long, should be in a scenically attractive area, and should be interesting to operate. Various possibilities had been ruled out because of redevelopment, and the sub-committee's finding was that the only prospect was the Scarva - Banbridge line.

Seconding the motion, Denis Grimshaw said the long-term future of mainline operation was uncertain because of advancing technology and forthcoming retirement of former steam drivers. He said the sub-committee had laid down a number of provisos, each of which would have to be met.

Colin Holliday asked about the financial implications for the RPSI if the line failed. Ciaran McAtee replied, saying that a separate company would be formed to undertake the operation of the line and this would safeguard the Society's property.

Norman Johnston expressed reservations about the manpower side and asked how many workers there were at Whitehead. Paul Newell said there were 30 on the operating grades.

C.Friel queried the statement in the summary of the report which said the line's operation would be self-financing, and D.Grimshaw confirmed this was the sub-committee's finding.

Nevin Hamilton suggested some of the sub-committee's findings were at odds with the experience of most preserved lines in Britain. Few lines, he said, had succeeded in getting Government aid, and many relied on full-time staff. N.Hamilton contrasted the membership of the North York Moors Railway of 9,000 with the RPSI's 650. Peter Scott said some schemes in Britain had received aid and said the Banbridge proposal was very much in line with the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway where there was only one paid official.

D.Grimshaw told Bob Hunter that Whitehead would continue to be the RPSI's main base for the foreseeable future.

I.Pryce said the crucial question was whether the branch line would be viable, and expressed doubts about this. The consequences of failure could be dramatic and such failure could, he said, destroy what was left of the Society. He cited similar schemes in Northern Ireland which had either failed or were on the point of failure and said that those lines in Britain which had succeeded were either close to very large centres of population or were in tourist areas.

I.Pryce said he also doubted whether the additional manpower foreseen by the sub-committee would manifest itself. He queried the sub-committee figure of £7,000 per annum running costs for the line.

I.Pryce warned that the branch line project could fragment the Society, and pointed out that the council was itself fairly evenly divided on the issue. Such a scheme, he said, could only be undertaken with a strong and united council and membership.

P.Rigney queried the assumption that the trend of a decreasing workforce at Whitehead would be reversed by a branch line project. To rush into such a scheme, he said, could damage for ever the chance of a successful RPSI branch line. He criticised the wording of the motion before the meeting and asked who was to decide if and at what stage any of the criteria laid down would be deemed not to have been met. P.Rigney suggested that the membership was being asked by the council to sign a blank cheque.

R.Edwards said several provisos had been laid down which would act as safeguards. He said it was essential to proceed with the plan as soon as possible in order that the Society could be in a position to lodge objections to possible applications for planning permission on the Scarva - Banbridge track bed.

John Richardson said he had voted against the proposal at council on financial grounds. He contrasted the RPSI's fund-raising turnover of £22,000 with that of the Severn Valley Railway - £100,000. J.Richardson said he felt the line would not generate sufficient traffic because Scarva, unlike Whitehead, was not in a recognised tourist area.

Robin Morton also spoke against the proposal and suggested the sub-committee was being unnecessarily gloomy about prospects for continued mainline running. He said he feared a branch line scheme would be to the detriment of mainline tours and said he felt the Society was not big enough to embark on the project.

D.Grimshaw told Henry Beaumont that track costings were based on the use of second-hand materials.

P.Scott said that of 33 landowners affected by the scheme, 30 had given their approval. He said any money which went to the branch line would have to be raised separately and money would not be diverted from Society funds. He said a survey carried out at the Whitehead Sunday train rides had shown visitors were prepared to travel long distances to get there and that the vast majority made the trip purely to travel on the steam train. The question of additional volunteers coming forward could only be answered if the scheme was given a go.

W.Gillespie said he lived in the Scarva area where there was considerable interest in the idea. Eight of nine local councillors were sufficiently keen to vote money towards the scheme and local business interests would be prepared to offer financial support. He stressed that to be attractive the scheme would have to involve re-opening through to Banbridge, not stopping at Laurencetown.

Johnny Glendinning said few lines opened in England had had to contend with such daunting civil engineering difficulties as Scarva - Banbridge. He said the recession would mean a long wait for Government money and said the Society would be unwise to tie its hands by opting for Scarva - Banbridge at present. He said the Society should leave its options open by approving the branch line principle but not specifying any particular line.

R.Edwards said that because it was an EGM specifically called to discuss one motion, he was not in a position to accept any amendments.

R.Edwards said the motion would be put to the meeting but that if the result was considered inconclusive, the council would then meet to consider a revised motion which would then be put before another general meeting.

D.Henderson urged the council to circulate copies of the sub-committee report in the meantime.

Colin McLeod, Ronnie Dowds, John Lockett and Jim Mounstephen were appointed tellers and a card vote was held.

The result was:

	<u>FOR</u>	<u>AGAINST</u>	<u>ABSTENTION</u>
Proxies	59	34	
Members present	29	41	8
Total	88	75	8

R.Edwards said the result was inconclusive and that the council would meet to call another general meeting.

Signed: _____ *Chairman* *Date:* _____