

# ***Railway Preservation Society of Ireland***

## **REPORT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING**

**St Jude's Hall, Belfast, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> February 1981**

Lord O'Neill took the chair and 73 members were present. Apologies were received from Robin Morton, Denis Grimshaw, and Henry Jack.

Lord O'Neill said the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the branchline proposal, which had also been the subject of an EGM on November 15. He made some brief opening remarks, commenting that finance would be the ultimate factor, and recalling that experience on the Shanes Castle Railway showed costs had been underestimated and income overestimated. The desired 75% grant was not likely to be available until after 1982.

R.Edwards said the vote at the last EGM had been inconclusive. He proposed and John Friel seconded:

*That the Society should set aside the resolution passed at the November 15 EGM, which was: "That the Society should undertake the opening of the Scarva - Banbridge branchline as a tourist attraction using RPSI locomotives and stock provided the following criteria are met: a) Finance; b) Legislation; c) Local authority backing; 1) Volunteers."*

This was carried unanimously.

Peter Scott said the meeting provided a new start for the branchline proposal. He reiterated the reasons why the Society should aim at such a scheme - it would provide operating opportunities for members; it would provide a stable base for RPSI activities in the event of difficulties with mainline running. P.Scott said there was no likelihood of any NIR lines closing at present, and said that due to developments, Scarva – Banbridge was the only line available. Although bridgework was required, it was a very attractive line to operate. Assets would be protected by setting up a new company.

P.Scott said there was much local support and that the line should be viable. A NI Tourist Board grant of 75% was possible, leaving the RPSI to provide £12,000 to £25,000 per annum.

60 replies had been received, he said, to the questionnaire to RPSI members, and of those 41 were interested in trackwork.

P.Scott compared the SCR figure of 30,000 passengers per annum with the Keighly & Worth Valley Railway total of 140,000, and said the Scarva line target would be similar to SCR. He said Northern Ireland people did go out to tourist attractions.

Many active RPSI members were interested in the project, P.Scott said, and he suggested a motion from the meeting should allow the scheme to be pursued.

Paul Walsh suggested that the Society should increase mainline operation. But he said that if regular operation on a line was desired, Mullingar - Athlone would be suitable.

P Scott said that unless the Society had its own line, RPSI personnel could not become sufficiently involved in the operation. P.Walsh said No.184 was used only three times last year and said increased steam trips would help provide the necessary additional revenue.

John Harcourt asked if the Greenisland back line had been considered, linking in with Monkstown to Antrim. P.Scott said the back line would be too short, and that the Antrim section was NIR.

David Laing said a branchline was a logical progression for the Society. But he questioned how many of the 41 track-laying volunteers had ever actually laid any track before. He asked what the cost would be of keeping a section of line available for steam. Scarva - Banbridge, he suggested, was somewhat off the beaten track. D.Laing said some depreciation charge should be included for trackwork, asked whether it was envisaged having any full-time workers, and said the figure of £1,000 for advertising seemed on the low side. Most societies found that the active membership was about 10% of total. Experience showed the greatest interest in locomotives, coaches second and track third. However, in principle he felt the Society should proceed.

P.Scott said the advertising budget had been revised to £2,500. Locomotives and rolling stock were already maintained, and branchline operations would double the annual mileage. He cited the example of the Colne Valley Railway which had a ¾-mile line operated by 12 to 15 working members out of a total membership of 200. He denied that Banbridge was “off the beaten track”.

Roger Bromley felt the Newry Canal project might actually assist the branchline project and said up to now potential help from schoolchildren had not been tapped.

P.Scott told Paul Walsh that the timetable for the project depended upon the proponents starting hard work. But it was expected that over seven years the Society would have to raise £25,000 per annum.

Robert Edwards said the present operations, including work at Whitehead, would continue. The paperwork would take two years.

P.Walsh said more volunteers were needed immediately. Nevin Hamilton said the project had to be self-financing. R.Edwards said a second limited company would be set up to secure the stock.

Ian Wilson said that while Banbridge was convenient, Scarva was not from the public transport point of view. The branch would be car-dependent and he doubted whether the investment was wise. Will Glendinning said a change of attitude by the Government would not be enough to free funds. There were many other projects in the pipeline.

John Lockett replied, saying it was essential to get into the queue for grant aid. The NI Tourist Board considered each scheme on its merits. He disputed the suggestion that Scarva - Banbridge was not convenient. Public transport, he said, would expand if petrol shortages stopped people using their cars.

Much discussion then ensued on the framing of the motion to be put to the meeting.

Eventually the following motion was put forward, proposed by Ciaran McAteer and seconded by Ken Pullin:

*It is hereby resolved that the Society promotes the re-opening of the Scarva - Banbridge railway line and the council appoints a steering and investigatory committee to examine the financial and legal criteria, the establishment of a separate company and supporters' group, and to report progress within a year. The council, at its discretion, shall be authorised to finance the activities of the above mentioned committee up to the figure of 10% of the 1981 budget and the financial position is to be reviewed on a yearly basis.*

Bill Gillespie and David Laing were appointed tellers, proposed by R.Edwards and seconded by William Coates, and the motion was put forward.

Votes for: 50; votes against: 23. The motion was declared carried.

Lord O'Neill thanked members present for not having made it a divisive meeting. He said the motion which was agreed was another step on the way.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Chairman**      **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_