

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

REPORT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Belfast Rowing Club, Friday 10th September 1982

Robert Edwards took the chair and 29 members were present. Apologies were received from the Lords O'Neill and Dunleath, William Gillespie, Henry Beaumont, Leslie McAllister, Victor Corrie and Ian Henderson.

R. Edwards said the purpose of the meeting was to decide the future of the branchline scheme. He recalled that in February 1981 it had been resolved at an EGM that the Society should promote the re-opening of the Scarva - Banbridge line and that a steering committee be appointed. That committee, he said, was now ready to present its report.

Peter Scott presented the report, a summary of which had already been circulated to the membership. He enlarged on a number, of points:

Financial - The Northern Ireland Tourist Board had now indicated that it was extremely unlikely that large sums of money would be available at present for the scheme. However, the NITB had indicated that thousands rather than 10s of thousands would be available for the pilot scheme. The NITB, he added, now recognised that the RPSI was the only volunteer body with a proven track record of railway preservation in Northern Ireland.

Legislation - An Act of Parliament was not required until it was proposed that the line crossed a public road. There was no precedent for such an Act.

Engineering - Negotiations had started with the Department of the Environment over the requirements for the major road bridge and for level crossings. It was envisaged that a redundant railway bridge at Toomebridge could be acquired to provide for the river crossings on the scheme.

Land Negotiations - Laurencetown station site was now up for disposal by the DoE. The steering committee had asked the DoE to make the site available to Banbridge District Council, with a view to it being used for the pilot scheme. In addition, several landowners now had plans to develop the track formation, and if the Society was to prevent this, a decision would have to be taken to proceed.

Pilot Scheme - This was desirable because:

- a) It would prove to sceptical landowners the scheme could become a reality.
- b) It would show those in authority the Society meant business.
- c) It would demonstrate to the Society that it meant to go ahead.

The proposal was for a 'suitcase railway' comprising a small shunting locomotive, a six-wheeled carriage, and a section of track between a quarter and a half mile in length. The site at Laurencetown provided sufficient scope without crossing the public road. It was stressed, however, that the success of the pilot scheme would not guarantee the success of the whole

scheme.

P Scott, in summary, said the steering committee was making no recommendations. The options were:

- a) Agree to set up a separate company to administer the scheme and authorise the pilot scheme.
- b) Do nothing and risk being forced into some other scheme.
- c) Waive the original stipulation for a rail-connected line and cast around for other possibilities

R.Edwards warned that in eight or nine years' time the Society's mainline operations would face difficulties because of a shortage of steam drivers.

In reply to Robin Morton, David Trotter gave a breakdown of the attitudes of landowners.

Scarva - Laurencetown (four miles) was as follows:

Two miles - co-operative.

$\frac{3}{4}$ mile - unconvinced.

$1\frac{1}{4}$ miles - prepared to negotiate.

One landowner, he said, was wanting to develop his land by removing the track formation and would be prepared to make alternative arrangements provided the right financial deal came up. At Scarva station, the owner of the trackbed was un co-operative but it was possible the line could deviate to join the main-line direct.

William Scott warned that farmers would drive a hard deal, but D.Trotter said it was hoped to sign up as many as possible with legally binding contracts to put pressure on the others. Ultimately, he said, the District Council's powers of compulsory purchase could be used, but he said this would be very much a last resort.

Irwin Pryce expressed disappointment at the small attendance at the meeting and inquired about the cost of the pilot scheme. He warned of an overstretching of Society manpower, and said any division within RPSI ranks would have serious repercussions. He suggested the mainline outlook might not be as gloomy as it had been painted, and said BR were training firemen for their steam specials.

R.Edwards said it was proposed that the funding of the entire branchline scheme would be separate from the activities of the Society. P.Scott said the cost of setting up the pilot scheme would be between £14,000 and £15,000 and said it was envisaged locomotive No.3 or No.3BG would be used.

R.Edwards said the NITB were very keen on the scheme and would be prepared to finance the pilot scheme, either in one go or over two to three years.

In reply to William Coates, R.Edwards said it was essential that the branchline scheme would be self-financing because the Society could not afford much additional expenditure. Nevin Hamilton warned that the Society was already tapping almost every source of income on the fund-raising front. R.Edwards acknowledged that finance would be a major stumbling-block

and said if it was impossible, the scheme would be called off.

Robert Hunter expressed doubts about public support for the pilot scheme train rides, but P.Scott said a survey carried out at Whitehead underlined how far people would travel for such an attraction. D.Trotter said the pilot scheme was failsafe because the NITB was providing finance.

Ciaran McAteer estimated the cost to the Society of setting up the Banbridge Junction Railway Company as a limited liability company to be £300. The benefits were:

- a) The assets of the RPSI would be protected.
- b) It would not be a splinter group because the three directors would all be members of the RPSI Council, appointed by the council.

Concern was expressed that the company would be too remote from RPSI members but C.McAteer said the membership appointed members to the council. He said it was also desirable to have a buffer between the company and the Society to protect the Society's assets.

J Richardson said the BJR company could apply for charitable status like the RPSI, and that it would be able to borrow money.

Ciaran McAteer then proposed the following resolution, seconded by Colin Holliday:

- 1. That this meeting agrees to the formation of a limited liability company to construct and operate the Scarva - Banbridge branchline and that the company shall take all steps necessary to do so.*
- 2. That the company itself shall be responsible for the raising of all funds necessary for the construction and operation of the branchline.*

There being no amendments, the motion was put.

Voting was; In favour, 18; Against, 2; Abstentions, 3.

R.Edwards said the resolution was declared carried.

R.Edwards said the next business on the agenda was the question of the subscription increase. John Richardson said it had been intended to propose raising the sub. from 1983 but in view of the easing off of inflation, it was now proposed to put off the increase to 1984.

J.Richardson proposed and W.Coates seconded the following resolution:

"That at the AGM the subscription remains the same for 1983 but be raised to £7 adults and £3.50 U16/65+ with effect from January 31 1984."

There was no debate, and the motion was carried unanimously.

The meeting was declared closed.

Signed: _____ Chairman Date: _____