

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

REPORT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Belfast Rowing Club, Friday 7th October 1983

R.Edwards was in the chair, and 21 members attended. There were no apologies.

R.Edwards opened the meeting, by reading the report of the branchline sub-committee (already circulated), which concluded there was no prospect at present of further progress on the Scarva - Banbridge scheme. He also read the minutes of a special council meeting at which the sub-committee's report had been accepted. The RPSI council had noted that Banbridge District Council was willing to give moral support but no financial aid to the scheme. Things had come to a head over the site of Lawrencetown station, which had been earmarked as a possible location for the "suitcase railway" - a pilot scheme train ride operation. Banbridge Council had suggested members of the sub-committee should pay for the site themselves, a course of action rejected by the sub-committee. P.Scott reported that the land had now been sold by the DoE to a local landowner for £6,000. Those present agreed that the Scarva - Banbridge project could not be proceeded with at present.

R.Edwards told Derek Henderson that the Downpatrick and Ardglass Railway Society had approached the RPSI for backing for a project to re-open the Ardglass branch, but that no commitment had been entered into.

J.Glending said the scope of the sub-committee should be broadened as one never knew what lay over the horizon. John Harcourt urged that the Society should keep its options open until the Government decided whether the York Road - Central rail link was to be built. D.Henderson claimed there was a danger that the Society might be split if there was a move to a branchline. R.Edwards refuted this. He said the difference between Banbridge and Downpatrick was that in Downpatrick the local council, Down District Council, appeared to be prepared to finance the scheme. He said he thought the Society should discuss the proposal formally with Down Council.

D.Henderson and William Coates warned that the Society was already fully committed in keeping its mainline operations on the go. Peter Scott maintained that a large number of people within the Society were interested in the possibility of a preserved railway. The Society should now be examining the possibilities as mainline operation could run into severe problems within 10 years.

R.Edwards stressed that any recommendation from the branchline sub-committee would have to come back to the RPSI council and the issue be brought before the members at an EGM or AGM for their seal of approval.

Ernie Gilmore, paying tribute to the work of the sub-committee, said that while everyone wanted mainline steam to continue, there was no guarantee of this. There should be moves towards a preserved railway of some sort but now was not the time to take a decision. Too many things were going to happen within the next five years on NIR particularly in relation to the cross-city link in Belfast. The Society should keep its options open.

Bill Gillespie said that Down District Council was about to have to choose between the Downpatrick and Ardglass project and the BCDRMT proposal at Ballynahinch. The Down Council favoured the Ardglass scheme at present. He said it would be a mistake for the Society not to investigate the Ardglass project.

Robin Morton said there would be grant aid for just one preserved railway scheme and he believed it would be for whichever one the RPSI ultimately opted. He urged that the Society should not commit itself at this stage and should not be stampeded by fears that the BCDRMT might get cash aid. He said the RPSI enjoyed a monopoly of available working steam locomotives and should not rush its fences.

Brian Hill said all possible schemes should be probed. D.Henderson requested that DAARS representatives address the RPSI at its next AGM.

The following motion was then proposed by Nelson Poots, seconded by Johnny Glendinning:

That the Society takes note of the report of the branchline sub-committee, expresses its thanks for their efforts, decides that no further action can be taken at this stage on the Scarva - Banbridge scheme, and directs the sub-committee to explore any suitable preserved railway possibilities.

Voting was: For, 20; Against, nil; Abstentions, one.

The motion was declared carried.

R.Edwards also reported briefly on the fire at the Carrickfergus Borough Council-owned bus shed at Whitehead on October 1. He said the shed, which was used partly by the Society for storage, had been destroyed in the blaze. The Society had not insured the contents of the shed, pending the drawing up of an agreement with the Council. It was understood the fire had been caused by an electrical fault in the Carrickfergus Council portion of the shed. Carriage spares, including doors and batteries, had been destroyed. Also burnt out were two lorry cabs owned by the Society and a single-decker bus, owned privately by a member. Two diesel locomotives being stored for the DoE Conservation Branch had suffered scorch damage. Locomotive spares, including boiler tubes and superheater elements, had escaped unscathed. It was unlikely the shed would be rebuilt by the Council. R.Edwards thanked the various members who had turned up at Whitehead to help clear up the wreckage. That being all the business, the meeting was declared closed.

Signed: _____ *Chairman* *Date:* _____