

BRPS Van Train Strategy

The BRPS long-term plan (Objectives, Aims & Plans of the Society – 2013) sets out that one of the core aims of the C&W department is the preservation of a set of passenger-rated vans. This document sets out the detailed strategy to back up that aim.

The various pre-grouping passenger-rated vans are likely to be restored to their pre-grouping liveries, and as such are likely to run with appropriate sets of pre-grouping carriages, rather than as part of an SR van train, which is the main purpose of this strategy document, but they should be recorded here (Table 1) for completeness.

All are seen as contributing to the completeness of the collection, representing one van from each pre-grouping SR company, and one representing the prototype design for subsequent SR designs.

Origin, No.	Date built, type	Owner	Importance	Current condition
SECR 153	1922, PLV	Alf Brown Group	Several exist	Maintained by ABG
LBSC 270	1908, Milk & Fruit Van	Bluebell plc	Unique	Newly restored
SECR 719	1905, 6w Full Brake	Bluebell plc	Unique	Requires rebuild
LSWR 5498	1920, Ventilated Luggage Van	Bluebell plc	One of two	Requires rebuild

Table 1: Pre-grouping Vans

With the exception of a horsebox (and LCDR No.1 may be reconstructed to fill that gap), this collection might be considered well balanced and sufficient. However, if further pre-grouping vehicles were discovered or available to enhance the collection, they should be considered on their individual merits. We also have an original LSWR 24-ft van underframe. The Craven-era full brake is considered to be part of the Craven-era Train, so is not included here.

Whilst most of the above are expected to be accommodated under cover when the Horsted Keynes Works/Shed extension is completed (although ideally once restored, each should be on public display), there is as yet no plan formulated which could provide cover for our SR vans. Until overhead cover for them is achieved, to slow the rate of deterioration once restored, we will probably not be able to restore and maintain more than a small part of our van fleet. However, the inclusion of a van train in the long term strategy implies a commitment to provide the means to conserve these vehicles in the longer term.

The first attempt at formally defining our SR heritage van train was made as part of the HLF Bid for the Woodpax development. For this it was stated that the long-term aim was to retain two examples of each type of SR van (Van-U/CCT, PLV/PMV, Van-C/BY) plus those SR bogie vans already on the line (Elephant Van and GBL). That forms the core of this policy.

Table 2 lists those vehicles currently considered to meet that plan, and includes the SR 6-w Milk tanker which, although covered by the Wagon Policy, is actually passenger-rated. It also includes the MLS-owned PLV, and whilst it might indicate that we may have one more PLV than nominally required for

the SR van train, this enables 1184 (KDS164) to fulfil the proposal in the LTP to preserve one such van in BR Departmental Mess & Tool condition.

The plywood-sided variant of the Van U (CCT) may be considered either as a poor BR version of the SR design or as an interesting variant, but there is clearly a case for both vehicles to be included in this preservation list.

4922 is an interesting vehicle, with its passenger-carriage external profile, Post Office off-centre gangways and complete but now decayed interior. It was repainted and used occasionally in demonstration trains in the early 1980s. It has subsequently been uncared for, and now requires a complete structural rebuild for which no enthusiasm has been forthcoming over the last 30 years. It is not a vehicle hugely representative of Southern traffic, and little relevance to the Bluebell. If a good alternative home were forthcoming, this would probably give the vehicle a better future. Another example also exists in preservation, formerly belonging to the National Railway Museum, and a similar SR Post Office Tender vehicle also survives.

No.	Date built, description	Owner	Importance	Current condition
404	1937 Van C (BY)	Bluebell plc *	Several exist, but stove-fitted examples are rarer	Being made once more operational as filming support vehicle
419	1937 Van C (BY)	Bluebell plc	Several exist	Unrestored but nominally operational
1184	1935/36?, PLV, KDS164	Bluebell plc	Several exist	S&T Mess & Tool
1788	1942, PLV	Bluebell plc	Several exist	Extension Mess van
2186	1934, PLV	Maunsell LS	Several exist	Restored
2276	1929, Van U (CCT)	Bluebell plc	Several exist	S&T Store
2531	1955, Van U (CCT)	Camelot LS	Rarer plywood-sided example	Store
2462	1931, GBL	Bluebell plc	One of three	Well cared for
4601	1949, Bogie Scenery Van – Elephant Van	Bluebell plc	One of three, but unique as Elephant Van	Under restoration for static use as Play carriage
4430	1933, 6w milk tanker	Bluebell plc	One of two	Last restored 2004
4922	1939, P.O. Sorting Car	Bluebell plc	One of three	Very poor condition. Might be offered for disposal.
* Ownership of 404 was transferred from Southern Coaching Group to Bluebell plc in 2016				

Table 2: Existing SR-design Passenger-rated Vans

The one notable omission from the collection is a Van B, a bogie brake van. There are 15 elsewhere in preservation, so there is no particular preservation requirement for us to acquire one, and it would add to the maintenance burden. If in the future a Van B were to arrive on the Bluebell, it should replace one of the two Van Cs.

In the short term, an overhauled Van C would be a useful operational spare, both for use as a standby brake for engineering trains and potentially for passenger use if required, as has been proved in the past.

The remaining vans are of LMS and BR origin, and are listed in table 3. They are considered as individual vehicles, and there is no strategic overview concerning them, in the way there is for the SR Van Train.

No.	Date built, description	Owner	Importance	Current condition
6334	1957 BG - HST Barrier Vehicle (Gangwayed Full Brake 81478/92128)	Bluebell plc	Many exist and of no immediate importance	Repainted but otherwise in departmental condition
32975	1938 LMS BGZ (Stove R)	Bluebell plc	One of the best, but several exist	Operational as Arrow brake/service vehicle
86722	1959 BR bogie GUV (Post Office NJV 93722)	Bluebell Railway Trust	Many exist	Repainted and received some repairs
94181	1959 BR CCT	E.F. Howden Charitable Trust	Many exist	Body thoroughly overhauled with some new doors, before arrival on Bluebell.

Table 3: LMS and BR Passenger-rated Vans

The LMS BGZ has been well restored, and won a national award. It is considered a long-term part of our heritage fleet, due to the amount of care and effort which went into its restoration, although it has no specific relevance to the Bluebell line. For the present is also a very useful vehicle as the brake in the Pullman Train, and has a modified interior and carries two-tone Pullman livery, although as a service vehicle all-over umber might be more appropriate. In the longer term, it was stated at the time that the conversion was proposed that, when no longer required to act as a service vehicle in the Pullman train, the internal modifications will be removed and original features reinstated, and it was on that basis that the modifications were agreed. Thus the Bluebell Railway plc is committed to ensure the BGZ is returned to original interior condition and repainted when no longer needed for Pullman use. We would expect to see this work done within a year of it no longer being used in the Pullman train.

The BR Bogie GUV was obtained for temporary storage during the construction of the now completed new Museum. The BR 4-wheeled CCT was obtained by the Howden Trust to upgrade their own storage (in place of an SR van which left the Bluebell for restoration elsewhere) but with the intention that it might one day also be made operational for use on demonstration trains. The BG was similarly only obtained to provide storage. With many preserved elsewhere, these three vehicles are therefore not currently considered to be part of the Bluebell's heritage collection.

The BR Insulated Fish Van, although passenger rated, was included in the BRPS historic wagon strategy rather than here.

In addition, the following vans were purchased as potential donors of underframes for Victorian carriage bodies: 32' PMV BR No.S1455S, 32' PLV No. 177 (SR No. 2012) and 36' Van C, SR No. 405. The first of these is currently used as storage by S&T. The latter two are owned by The Bluebell Railway Trust, and are being used as temporary C&W storage until the material can be accommodated in the shed extension at Horsted Keynes.

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