



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 15th JULY 2023

Another busy week for the Railway and for me. Things are now rapidly gearing up for Flying Scotsman: it may seem a long way away, but it certainly isn't! Another important milestone is that all the sleeping accommodation at Sheffield Park will be available in time for this event (actually, I am hopeful it will be ready before 'Scotsman').

Saturday

An exceptionally busy day, especially as we just had a normal train service, plus a 'Rambler' and a Golden Arrow dining train - and no special event. This is encouraging, as it shows we are growing our customer base outside of special events, which is part of our multi-pronged growth strategy.

I was supposed to be at the railway but asked Neil Glaskin to cover for me as I needed to do all the chores I hadn't managed to get done at home.

Sunday

Another good day for visitor numbers, but unfortunately there was disruption to the train service caused by a large branch hanging dangerously low from a tree in the section between Kingscote and E Grinstead, and it was not safe to operate trains until this had been dealt with. Consequently, the Golden Arrow lunch train had to be terminated at Kingscote and there were other delays to service trains. Happily, by application of our usual Bluebell spirit, the issue was sorted-out and the inconvenience to our visitors was minimised.

Monday

No service today, just the usual wash-up from the weekend plus all the routine work happening across the railway.

I had a Zoom call in the evening to review Trust matters with Vernon Blackburn (who is chairman of the Bluebell Railway Trust). Apart from this - and dealing with about 30 emails - it was a quiet day for Bluebell work, so I was able to give some focus to the day job and get to the gym!

Tuesday

Trains were running again today, and we had a few groups in which is always welcomed as it boosts midweek visitor numbers. As I have mentioned before, the unsettled weather we are seeing does create higher visitor numbers fluctuation than expected, but the main thing is revenues are up on last year, but with fewer services, so this is definitely a good thing.

I want us to eventually record the load factors on our trains, which will yield a very quick key performance indicator ('KPI') to properly measure how we are performing. This is already being done at the Ffestiniog Railway.



Wednesday

Middle of the week blues! I had a very busy day and worked until the early hours of Thursday morning. Despite that, I still managed to squeeze in at least two phone calls and a few emails relating to Bluebell business.

At the railway it was busy once more. This was the last week of the once train/two departure service, and as the school holidays start next week, we will be running every day now, with a two train/five departures service.

Thursday

I'd managed about 3.5 hours sleep before getting up, taking my daughter to school, then heading to Horsted Keynes for my weekly 9am Carriage and Wagon dept meeting. Then it was off to Sheffield Park for a meeting with Chris Knibbs, followed by Lisa Boyle and Chris Barber. I stopped for lunch (steak and mushroom pie - delicious!), then over to Finance to meet with Steve Trigg to discuss year-end accounts, plus some changes to our financial and reporting systems. Then I was back to The Bessemer, as I had spotted apple and raisin crumble with custard on the menu, and I simply couldn't resist it. It was delicious, and I highly recommend you try it (it will become a regular feature from the autumn).

Back to Horsted for another C&W meeting, followed by a funding meeting at Sheffield Park with Roger Kelly and Roy Watts, where we discussed the longer-term funding strategy as well as some short term requirements.

The Society Board meeting took place at 6.30. It was a good meeting, and we readily dealt with all the business which was fairly routine, and so we were done by 8pm.

Overall, it had been a long day for me, but well worth it. I was home by 9 and decided I deserved a nice cold pint in the pub!

Friday

I was at work in the morning then had to be at Sheffield Park for 2pm for a Safety Review Group meeting. Owing to the day job I was 15 minutes late (which I hate to be), but we had productive meeting and the business was all done efficiently, so the session ended in good time.

Finally, I signed the contract with the National Railway Museum for Flying Scotsman to visit, including the changes we had agreed earlier in the morning – so it's all now signed and sealed!

Trains were busy again today, and we have had a really good week. Let's hope the weekend will be the same.



And finally...

I let you off last week! So, this week I have an appeal from the Commercial Team: We need a volunteer to help manage group bookings. This will involve admin, such as obtaining party details, taking deposits, arranging invoicing, etc. I know this doesn't sound like a terribly exciting role, but it is an essential one and will become vital as we proceed to grow our revenue from group bookings. The team in the commercial department are all great people and fun to work with.

Anyone who feels they can help please email me at <Paul.Churchman@bluebell-railway.com>.

Paul Churchman

Chairman

15th July 2023