



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING MONDAY 27th NOVEMBER 2023

I apologise for there being a two-week gap between updates, but I have had a lot going on in the day job as well as lots of Bluebell stuff as usual. And the time flies by.

We are now into full Christmas swing and it's going very well. OK, there have been a few small teething problems but nothing we can't cope with.

Monday

Nothing running today but time to reflect on the first weekend of Santa specials. They went well apart from the failure of Archie, only running-in issues though, and these will be fixed in time for the weekend.

Tuesday

Another quiet day operationally, but all the usual stuff going on behind the scenes in all departments – and its very cold which is *really* not nice!

Wednesday

Today there was a Golden Arrow lunch train. It was well-filled, and the customer feedback was excellent. It will be marvellous when the train is back to a complete set of Pullman carriages. Although to the novice visitor a Mk1 and a Pullman all look the same in the dark and from the outside, the interior is where the real difference can be found!

Thursday

I was at Carriage & Wagon for my usual weekly meeting, which went well with progress is being made on all projects. The former 'Alf Brown Gang' PMV is now in the workshops having its new canvas roof fitted and some other cosmetic works done. This work is being carried out by the Thumper gang as it will become their mess room and storage area. Work continues on BY419, albeit with a slight delay as we have had to have some asbestos dealt with.

Then it was off to Sheffield Park. Where a staff Golden Arrow lunch train was being prepared - and it was great to see it was fully-booked.

I attended a board meeting together with my director colleagues, followed by a budget review meeting. So, continuous meetings from 1pm, finishing about 5.30pm. It was a long haul, but I think we are within a stone's throw of having a sound forecast budget for next year which will show a break-even outcome. Of course the real challenge is always achieving it, when there are so many factors outside our control. We will be very focused on delivery.

SteamLights was also running today and was virtually sold out, which is great. The lights along the lineside do look amazing.



Friday

Another busy day with two SteamLights departures plus a Golden Arrow dining train, upon which I was joined by Neil Glaskin, Mrs C, Megan Laughlin and a very special guest: Martijn Gilbert, who is Managing Director of First Hull Trains, Lumo and Croydon Tramlink. The food and service was outstanding, all the passengers on board had a great time and it was great to have the carol singers back at Horsted Keynes to serenade our arrival there on the second trip. Truly a festive atmosphere!

Saturday

The start of a second weekend of Santa's, SteamLights and another Golden Arrow. The East Grinstead Santa set wasn't sold out which is disappointing which is something we will be reviewing for 2024. The Sheffield Park set was sold out. The day didn't start too well with a steam heat issue on the East Grinstead set, but we got it sorted and everyone soon thawed out!

The rest of the day went well. SteamLights was sold out and the Golden Arrow was well loaded. Again, the passengers were commenting on how good the food and service was. So very well done to the entire team on the Golden Arrow for keeping up the standard so impressively – it is a truly amazing job that you do – thank you.

I was at Sheffield Park from mid-morning as Mrs C had to take measurements of the Bessemer so that she can prepare drawings for a refresh which we will be doing early in 2024. I didn't have pie on this occasion as there wasn't any on the menu, but also as we had stayed at The Ashdown Park hotel and had enjoyed a lovely full English breakfast. Having completed all the measuring and after talking to Neil for a bit, we did go home and were swiftly off to the pub!

Sunday

Another busy day. Loadings were better on the East Grinstead set for Santas and SteamLights was again virtually sold out.

The day went well, and it was slightly warmer too - although damp and miserable instead of cold and crisp - but people all seemed to be enjoying themselves which was great to see and is why we do what we do.

And finally...

I just want to say thank you to everyone for all the efforts going into delivering this year's Christmas programme. Our products are really high quality, are professionally executed and represent good value for money. The feedback we are getting is excellent and we may all feel justifiably proud.

Paul Churchman

Chairman

4th December 2023