

Report on 'Heritage Rail' Conference Northallerton, July 2009

On behalf of TVLRUG, Robert Forsythe attended a one day conference in North Yorkshire County Hall Northallerton on Saturday 4th July. The theme of the event might be thought of as the interface between "heritage rail" and the national network and how this can be blurred beneficially.

Representatives spoke from the Wensleydale, North Yorkshire Moors, Yorkshire Dales, East Lancashire, and Welsh Highland Railways. And also from Grand Central and North Yorkshire County. It was all fascinating stuff. Volunteers clearly make the world of difference with figures varying from £1 spent and 8-60 back. Yes £60 back on the ELR. Dedication from individuals, a refusal to accept no, sheer blind obstinacy in the face of bureaucracy. All familiar threads. There were hopes that Wensleydale over 30 years could do for the dale what NYMR has done for its patch. Several of the speakers also had an inside view of Network Rail and had worked therein. The insight they gave into the cost and nature of the bureaucracy was fascinating. That lines like the NYMR had successfully won operating rights over Network Rail was hailed as a great precedent for all at Wensleydale, Yorkshire Dales (Skipton) and East Lancashire who to a greater or lesser degree wish to do the same.

For TVLRUG I think we should take heart that obstinacy pays. On the down side one learnt that these railways won through once they got politicians on their inside track campaigning for them. This TVLRUG has yet to achieve.

Another downside, from an attendance in excess of 50, barely a handful were female. There was no ethnic minority representation. It looked as if Britain was a nation of retired white males. I am aware that Railfuture is within itself aware of this imbalance and I think we in TVLRUG must also consider this. Thankfully though women are active in the TVLRUG and also as adopters of stations. In this vein one of the inspirational speakers was Ruth Annison of Wensleydale.

A report reflecting some of Ruth's statements can be found at http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/local/northyorks/4475739.Full_steam_ahed_for_community_railways/

In the open forum Robert brought up with Tom Clift from Grand Central the possibilities of connections and ticketing with the Tyne Valley Hexham Middlesbrough service at Sunderland. He responded by saying they were keen to develop connectional opportunities at this station. This should also include Nexus Metro. The intriguing idea of Grand Central calls at Heworth which the trains currently pass was mentioned.

yours sincerely Robert N Forsythe
www.forsythe.demon.co.uk