

Firm plan to standardise Heritage Rail safety

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The Heritage Railway Association (HRA) is another step nearer to launching its own safety and standards board.

This will build on many years of work by HRA's Operating and Safety committee and the association's Guidance Notes. However, as the industry has changed and progressed over the years, it now requires a more dedicated effort and new direction.

Plans for the new Heritage Rail Safety and Standards Board (HRSSB) have been formulated by a steering group of industry professionals from representative heritage railways, two HRA board members, and a senior advisor from the Office of Rail and Road.

Heritage rail is the only sector within the rail industry that does not have a specific safety and standards board and will be the first to set one up voluntarily. (Both the mainline and light transit sectors set up safety and standards boards in the wake of serious incidents.)

HRA CEO, Steve Oates said: “The HRA steering group members have done what we’ve been encouraged to do by the ORR, that was to scope out and plan an industry specific safety board. We are now looking to the ORR and the government to find the funding needed for us to go-ahead, something the ORR said should be possible.

“Safety is paramount for the trust of passengers, our volunteers and staff across the sector.”

The current mainline standards set by the Rail Safety and Standards Board for the national network are not always appropriate for use within the heritage sector as it operates in a less arduous environment and there is a predominance of volunteer personnel. The result is that organisations within heritage rail follow a variety of standards and guidance which can vary widely.

Hence the need for dedicated and consistent sector-wide standards and guidance which will set out the good practice, procedures, processes, competence, and governance in a proportionate manner, which the HRA hope the whole of the sector will support.

Once the HRSSB is formally established the new board will comprise a small staff team. They will be backed by around 50 subject matter experts, drawn predominantly from HRA members, who will be engaged to research, develop and draft the standards and guidance which will then be subject to sector-wide consultation prior to adoption by the Board.

Steering group and HRA board member, Steve Clews said: “Once in place, standards can be voluntarily adopted, although mandating could become an integral part of HRA membership through its code of conduct in a similar way that Railway Group Standards are mandated for the mainline by making them a condition of the Railway Act licence.

“We strongly encourage HRA members to come along with us on this journey and support our plans to raise safety standards for everyone, whether volunteers or employees working on heritage railways, or members of the public enjoying the railways as passengers.

“The HRSSB standards will be written by people we all respect across our industry and we see this as a way of widely sharing best practice and moving away from silo working.”

The project has initial seed funding from HRA member subscriptions and the proposal has been fully scoped with talks underway to secure government funding in the same way as other transport safety boards receive support.

The proposals are for the HRSSB to be set up as a limited company, a wholly owned subsidiary of the HRA, but other potential structures will be explored.

Photo credit: Heritage Railway Association