

Heritage Railway Association welcomes important proposals from Parliamentarians' supporting more integration of Heritage Railways with the national network

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The Heritage Railway Association (HRA) has warmly welcomed the report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail (APPGHR) into supporting sustainable tourism and the viability of expanding heritage rail's role in the public transport network.

The APPGHR, which is chaired by Rt Hon Liz Saville Roberts MP and includes HRA President Lord Faulkner and Baroness Nicky Morgan amongst its members, worked with witnesses and contributors to look into if and how heritage rail could be part of the daily commute, noting that 32 heritage railways are connected to the national network or have an effective passenger interchange with it, and 19 heritage railways already serve important and sensitive tourist areas including national parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Commenting on the Report's seven recommendations which include developing closer links with mainline

train operators, encouraging joint promotions, and working with the proposed new Great British Railways, HRA CEO, Steve Oates said: “We now have some really important proposals from the APPGHR to help support and develop heritage rail. The report recognises that a wide range of benefits are brought by heritage railways to tourism, employment, the local economy, skills training, wellbeing and mental health, as well as transport benefits particularly for car-free journeys.

“Some of our member lines are already connected up to Network Rail and offer a degree of local discount to the community who are able to use the route as a utility service. Along with the Department for Transport we now want to identify more of those heritage railways where there is a prospect of an extension link to the main line network.

“This may also help protect against Highways England demolishing infrastructure where they are currently managing sections of former routes.”

In the feedback from heritage railways contributing, one of the main concerns was the issue of cost where the business models of heritage and national rail services are quite different.

Heritage railways operate at speeds no higher than 25mph. Travelling above this would mean additional safety requirements which would increase costs considerably. Evidence from the ORR made clear that the approach would be to examine each case on its merits and assess risk looking at regulations which currently apply to train operating companies and main line rail networks.

The APPGHR say there were struck by the positive approach and attitudes from all of the those contributing, supporting the view of the Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris MP that Restoring Your Railway was arguably the most popular railway policy ever.

Photo credit: Heritage Railway Association