

K&ESR grant win puts historic GWR Railcar W20's restoration back on track

October 14, 2022



A protracted 25-year-old restoration and conservation project to bring a historic Diesel Railcar back into service at the **K&ESR** (Kent & East Sussex Railway) has been put back on track thanks to a £20K grant and the launch of a new appeal.

The K&ESR won the substantial grant from the Association for Industrial Archaeology (AIA)*, to help complete the complex restoration of GWR Diesel Railcar W20, after making a detailed written bid.

The AIA is a national society which has supported the study, preservation and presentation of industrial heritage in Britain since 1973.

W20 has major historical significance for both K&ESR and heritage rail as a whole. Firstly, it was one of only two, now the only, Diesel Railcars to be built in the 1940s with dual-range gearboxes which enabled them to run on both branch and mainline routes. Secondly, if all goes to plan with this final stage of restoration, W20's return could well take place in time for the K&ESR's 50th birthday in 2024. Thirdly, 2024 would be a double anniversary, as W20 formed the first public service passenger train to depart Tenterden Town Station on the K&ESR's official opening day in February 1974.

Last but by no means least, the final push to restore W20 brings the possibility of one day reuniting W20 with its sister W22, resident at Didcot Railway, a little closer.

The AIA's £20K grant is being matched by a pledge from the railway's own Board, but with the total budget required to complete the restoration and enable ongoing conservation now estimated at £60K, the K&ESR is also launching an appeal to raise a further £20K.

Launched today (14 October 2022) the '20 for 20' Appeal is being made in memory of Andrew Webb, the former K&ESR director who championed the vision of returning W20 to active service and personally led the restoration team right up until his illness and death in 2019.

Any amounts will be welcome but to fulfil the spirit of the Appeal's title, the K&ESR is encouraging giving in one of three ways: one-off donations of £20; any number of regular £20 donations via standing order through CAF Donate, or a commitment of any amount in regular donations for 20 months.

Single donations can be made via CAF which will ensure that K&ESR can claim Gift Aid if donors are current taxpayers. Donations of £20 can also be made by texting 'Railcar' to 70460.

Full details of how to donate are available via the Support Us/Donate section on the K&ESR website.

K&ESR General Manager Robin Coombes says: "Completing the restoration of W20 is not only important to the K&ESR but also for the whole preservation movement.

"Railcars don't get the profile they deserve yet they can provide a genuine heritage experience but at a lower running cost, which is even more important as we enter uncharted waters for our economy. In addition, as this Summer's high temperatures have shown, we can no longer rely solely on steam trains during our busiest season for visitors, as periods of drought become the rule rather than the exception.

"W20 is therefore integral to K&ESR's future and, as a lightweight railcar, it's aligned with Colonel Stephens' philosophy which sits at the heart of our railway."

All donations will be held in the Railcar's reserved funds account, to be used solely for the purpose of supporting the completion of W20's complex restoration and ongoing conservation.

*This project has been supported by a restoration grant from the Association for Industrial Archaeology, the national society for industrial heritage, which has supported the study, preservation and presentation of industrial heritage in Britain since 1973. More information can be found at

<https://industrial-archaeology.org>

Photo credit: Robin Coombes