

Taunton Deane MP Rebecca Pow pledges support for 'Love Your Railway Campaign' & West Somerset Railway

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Taunton Deane MP Rebecca Pow has lent her support to the national 'Love Your Railway' campaign. The campaign aims to shine a spotlight on the important work heritage railways do for historic conservation, education, and research. The campaign also highlights the detrimental impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the nation's heritage railways.

The 22-mile-long West Somerset Railway (WSR) starts in Bishops Lydeard in MP Rebecca Pow's constituency of Taunton Deane and runs through to Minehead and is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the area.

Taunton Deane MP Rebecca Pow said: "The 'Love Your Railway' campaign across the country is a great example of the nation's heritage railways working together to highlight what they do so well in conserving the past for current and future generations to enjoy, and it deserves support.

"The West Somerset Railway (WSR) is the longest heritage line in England and is one of our unique local

attractions; keeping it up and running is important to all those who love it as well as the local economy. Starting at Bishops Lydeard and finishing at Minehead, the heritage line passes through some of our most beautiful countryside, including the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty before passing along the Bristol Channel Coast.

"I welcome the substantial initial grant from DCMS of just under £865,000 (from the Cultural Recovery Fund), to help maintain the enterprise, however it was disappointing that the second application for funding has been unsuccessful. I am engaging with DCMS to seek clarification on this outcome and to explore potential other alternatives that will support WSR. In the meantime, WSR have launched their own funding appeal."

WSR Plc Chairman Jonathan Jones-Pratt said: "I'm very grateful to Rebecca Pow as one of our local MPs for both her support of the 'Love Your Railway' summer campaign and her understanding about what the railway does so well, plus awareness of the continuing financial predicament we still face after Covid.

"Sadly, the WSR is currently facing yet another financial mountain to climb without the anticipated CRFH Round 2 grant from Government to support our running costs and re-opening plans, but we will battle on as we have done in the past to succeed with our £1 million 'SOS' appeal.

"I'm pleased to report that we are still receiving donations money every week because people believe so strongly in our railway's future. It's worth noting that we have now raised or received a total in financial help of an amazing £1.4 million from all sources since last March, so this latest 'SOS' appeal target is achievable if everyone pulls together once more!

"We now know that we are going to face a trading revenue shortfall this year anyway due to it being an enforced shorter operating season for us with severe restrictions on the number of trains, plus COVID-19 capacity issues and delays on the new Seaward Way level crossing, so we expect that the trading loss could be high too.

"The WSR family is very grateful to everyone who has helped us raise money in whatever way they could in the last year, and hopefully they will help us again now.

"And some further good news is that we have had a fine start since the 22 May limited re-opening of the WSR, and our recently introduced summer timetable with a heritage bus-link between Dunster and Minehead — which allows full-line journeys again — is proving very popular with visitors.

"Once the brand new Seaward Way level crossing is completed, I'm optimistic we can achieve even more towards our recovery with trains running over the full length of the railway again soon this Autumn."

So far just over £36,000 has been raised as part of the 'SOS' appeal including a £20 donation from a nine-year-old girl who likes the WSR and asked her grandmother to donate some money to the appeal in lieu of her birthday present.

[Click here for more details.](#)

Photo credit: West Somerset Railway