

# UK's Heritage Railways ready to provide manpower for Network Rail

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Heritage railways across the UK are on standby to provide experienced staff to Network Rail, to fill key worker shortages expected to be caused by Covid-19 (Coronavirus).

In response to a call from Network Rail, the Heritage Railways Association is contacting its operating railway members, to assess the availability of suitably skilled and qualified people. The initial requirement is for signalling staff, followed by station staff. Drivers, guards and conductors are recruited separately by the train operating companies. Like the train operating companies, Network Rail is preparing for mass absences caused by the virus.

So far there has been offers from as far across the country as Yorkshire and Oxfordshire.

Heritage Railway Association Chief Executive Steve Oates said: "The proposal makes sense. Network Rail is expecting to suffer staff shortages, like many other organisations.

“Effectively all of the UK’s heritage railways have now closed until further notice – yet we have experienced and skilled people, available to help keep the nation’s vital railways working.”

Many of the volunteers and staff at Britain’s heritage railways are retired Network Rail people. Others are younger people, working full-time running heritage railways to the same standards of safety and proficiency – and sometimes over the same track – as Network Rail. Many heritage railway weekend volunteers are Network Rail people. The overlap between the nation’s rail network and commercial heritage railways means the recruitment plan is logical and less surprising than those outside the railways sector might think.

Mr Oates said: “The first step is to identify the staff and volunteers prepared to put themselves forward, establish their availability, and where they are willing to work.

“The second step is to match staff and volunteers to vacancies, and assess to determine appropriate training. Following that, individuals would be deployed to their workplaces for completion of training and induction, and starting work.”

Although rail services have been heavily cut across the UK, ministers and train operating companies have agreed the need to keep core services and freight service running. Network Rail is planning for all the measures necessary to enable those operators to function.

A Network Rail spokesperson said: “Our priority is to continue to operate the railway safely and reliably. We’re taking steps to ensure we have enough colleagues in the business to do that, including talking with the Heritage Railway Association to see how they could help fill any key worker shortages that arise as a result of Covid-19.”

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*Photo credit: Network Rail*