

WEARDALE RAILWAY TRUST COUNCIL (WRT) MEETING

Minutes of the management committee meeting held at Witton-le-Wear Community centre, on Monday 6th January 2020.

The meeting started at 1930hrs

Those present

Kevin Richardson
Mark Woodhams
Peter Kearsley
Richard Maughan
Paul Wilson –Secretary
Tony Slack
Steve Raine from 1933hrs
Bob Dingle
Jean Clarke
Mike Wood from 1950hrs

1 Apologies for absence

Gerry Mudd, Simon Adams,

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the 2 December 2019 meeting were approved by the Directors with the one correction.

Proposed: - Jean Clarke

Seconded: - Peter Kearsley

3 Matters arising from the last meeting not covered in the agenda

Nil

4 Identify any other business to be discussed in Item 22

Nil

5 Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

There are no new conflicts of interest.

6 Chairman's Report

I'd like to start this report on a positive note by extending our thanks to those hardy souls from the Trust who have given their time to support the TTCT. Also, to others, including the Sunday gang, who have continued their valiant efforts.

At this point I would like to apologise for my own absence from WRT activities over recent weeks. Medical and family matters have led me to concentrate on issues outside of the railway, however I intend becoming fully involved again going forward. Unfortunately, planned maintenance work has been affected, but I hope to be able to catch up soon.

It is now in the public domain that IPH in the USA is in financial difficulties, and that BARS UK is being offered for sale. We have been aware for some time that the UK business has been facing serious financial problems. This in turn puts the future of Weardale Railway in some doubt. We are hopeful that a prospective buyer may soon take over the railway, and we are well on the way in assisting them in carrying out the due diligence process. I want to especially thank our WRCIC representative directors Steve Raine and Tony Slack who have put in an inordinate number of hours in helping this work.

As matters develop, it is our duty as Trustees to always keep the Weardale Railway Trust first and foremost in our minds when considering any moves affecting the railway, and the way in which we continue to be involved. The uncertainty has affected our plans for the 2020 heritage service – we would by now have normally agreed a timetable and be in the process of arranging advertising. Due to the uncertainty over such issues as the WRCIC operating licence exemption from the ORR (which governs the running of trains) we have decided to postpone any plans.

I hope that the coming weeks see a resolution to the current difficulties. Meanwhile we should continue, as far as possible, to progress Number 40 and our other work.

Proposed: Mike Wood
Seconded: Mark Woodhams

7 Weardale Railway CIC Reports

WRCIC Directors, Steve Raine, Tony Slack and Kevin Richardson provided an update on the ongoing confidential discussions, not for publication.

Trustees discussed operator's licence railway experience within a potential buyer and how this could impact on future applications.

Trustees discussed and agreed wording of statement from the Trust on the situation with the CIC.

8 Treasurer's Report

The bank balance shown is up to date as of 3/1/2020 and excludes the balance contained in the Darlington Building Society account previously notified and currently unchanged.

The inclusion of the reports indicate that on line access to the accounts has now been restored after a break of nearly three months.

As indicated at the last meeting I undertook to approach Lucion asbestos removal through a contact in Witton. I approached them through the website as the contact suggested but received no interest. There is no shortage of removers locally but the suggestion is that we engage with a company known in the heritage railway community who already have experience with coach stock.

I have also attempted to get guidance from Louise about the production of the report and accounts for the AGM. I have received no response to date, but this is most likely due to the Christmas and New Year breaks. I will continue to follow this up.

Barclays	£63,778.15
Darlington Building Society	£18,027.10

Proposed: Mike Wood
Seconded: Steve Raine

9 Trust Shop

No report, no operating days.

10 Secretary's Report

With the AGM only a couple of months away, wanted to take this opportunity to remind Trustees of nominations for election will be accepted from 21 Jan until 8 Feb 2020. I have started to pull together reports for the TAR which will be due by the end of January, if anyone has any information, they wish to include please let me know. This will then be forwarded to our independent examiner along with meeting minutes. Contributions for BTL 106 will need to be timely in order that we meet our timescales for publication prior to AGM. If anyone would like to donate a prize towards the raffle, that will be gratefully received.

Contact to the Trust again has mainly been by email to info@ address, with 7 queries relating to Christmas trains, some were forwarded, others I was able to advise. One query related to purchasing a voucher for forthcoming year, two trains running over holiday period and two volunteer queries, one of which I forwarded to Bob.

We will need to advise VNMC contact, given they are expecting to use the station as a check point in May once we understand our position in 2020.

I updated Trustees on a conversation held with Kevin Richardson on Saturday prior to tonight's meeting. Family and work demands have continued to build over the last two years, with the additional demands of the role and after considerable thought given to the situation I reluctantly must resign as Trust Secretary and Director of the Trust. Formal resignation to follow, I have agreed to continue up until the Trust AGM in March.

11 Data Protection Legislation

Peter Kearsley provided a review of previous data retention policy for the Trust. Peter helpfully provided a written update of recent discussions.

Further consideration of Data Retention Policy for the Trust, with reference to the retention of medical records. At the meeting in October we considered the attached report & comments were made about the need for medical records to be retained by the Trust as opposed to the CIC. Our draft Retention Policy had omitted them because the CIC took the view that these were matters for the CIC. I have reviewed the position & it seems to me that medical records are not documents to be retained by the Trust, even where they are records relating to Trust volunteers, for the following reasons: A) The CIC take the view that such records are a matter for them & form part of their Safety Case. B) Although there is a distinction between 'Employees' & 'Volunteers' in the current Company Rule Book, all are 'Workers' as defined in Section A and as such are subject to appropriate Medical Assessment. DR. M Wood is retained by the CIC, not the Trust, to carry out medical examinations relating to employees and volunteers & the paperwork rightfully belongs to the CIC.

Updates to the policy were considered and discussed. Following this Trust Retention Policy was agreed, with minor amendments.

12 No 40 Report

Richard Maughan fed back recent contact with McEwen's, frustratingly nothing tangible at this time. Plan to pay McEwen's a visit.

13 Projects & Restoration Activities

108 – Kevin Richardson advised 4 metal owner's plaques have been fitted. Bob Dingle shared contact for dry blasting roof.

Kingfisher platform – Area for platform base has been cleared. Ready to go out to tender for frame costs. A cost has been received for Polydeck base, like what was used to cover Witton le Wear.

14 Trust Promotion Drive

Mark Woodhams advised of plans to attend history fun day 14 March @ Bowburn and latterly S&D anniversary festival in September.

Over the last month there has been little activity on social media or website. We've received a couple of queries regarding the diesel gala and heritage services timetable. It would be helpful if we can agree a position as a Trust of what we can say and when we share this.

Our website has had a couple of updates recently marking the end of heritage services, this is often the first place visitors look for information, if we have no clear information of whether we can run heritage services it's important we put a statement on our website.

15 Volunteer Liaison Officer's Report

Bob Dingle provided an update. A couple of new volunteers have been in touch.

Mike Wood reported the Sunday Gang have been busy at Kingfisher, clearing over hanging trees; unable to clear leaning trees due to size/ risk to Caravans, spending 2-3 weeks in area.

16 Membership Secretary's Report

Jean Clarke provided an update on the Membership which presently stands at 435, including 23 complimentary

191 concessionary
63 Life/Joint Life members
88 Full members
65 Joint members
4 Junior members
1 Student member

57 reminders sent out with BTL 105, to date, 12 renewals with 3 pending. Emails sent out to those who have already received 2 reminders and BTLs. One telephone call where email bounced back has resulted in 2 of the above pending renewals being actioned by BACS.

17 Heritage Services

Tony Slack provided a review of 2019 to the meeting.

The Weardale Railway Heritage in 2019 operated trains at weekends, Bank Holidays and selected Wednesdays between March and November. On timetabled running days three return rail services ran between Stanhope and Bishop Auckland West for a total of 85 operational days. This compared with 76 operational days in 2018 with services only extended to Bishop Auckland West from the 1st July 2018. Five operational days were lost in 2019 due to either; reliability issues with the principal traction unit (DMU Class 122) when mechanical failure occurred or staffing issues. This was partly relieved in October when the Trust DMU Class 108 entered service. In order to maintain the service when the 122 was unavailable, WRHSL hired the use of the Company Class 31 locomotives and Mk II carriages at additional expense. Group bookings held up well again in 2019 with repeat business from Gary Lintern (photographic), Bell Travel and the Oakley Cross School Wartime Evacuation Day. Where possible groups were booked on to timetabled services, but specials were operated on nine non timetabled days. Two group bookings were cancelled during the season, one due to non-availability of traction and the second due to not being able to roster a driver.

Financial Performance

The heritage service cumulative daily takings for the year are shown in Figure 1, together with similar data from 2018. The graph appears to show that 2018 and 2019 receipts were equivalent to each other with 2019 running an additional 9 days. However, the data for 2018 in the graph are for actual heritage timetabled ticket sales and do not include receipts from group bookings. These were an additional sum of £5534.90 making the 2018 total £41222.85 compared with £40148.30 in 2019. Operating expenses in 2019 were also higher than 2018 due to all services operating to Bishop Auckland.

Average Daily takings were £466.84 with an average daily single passenger fare of £5.91. Daily operating costs at £2/mile Hire Charge plus £0.67/mile Fuel Charge were £254.18 giving a daily operating margin* of £212.66. The service failed to cover costs on 10 days, four Saturdays, five Sundays and one Wednesday. Some of these were due to failures of the 122 Bubble car whilst in traffic.

*Note: -These figures do not include expenses for lubricants, antifreeze and promotional exercises etc.

Monthly Gross takings are shown in Figure 2 and show the peak months being July, August and September. The service operated for only half of March and one weekend in November hence added to October's figures.

The sales of tickets by Bishop Trains generated £3258.25 of revenue, after commission, which is marginally over 8% of total sales

Fig 1. Comparative Cumulative Daily Takings for WRHSL 2018 & 2019 Seasons

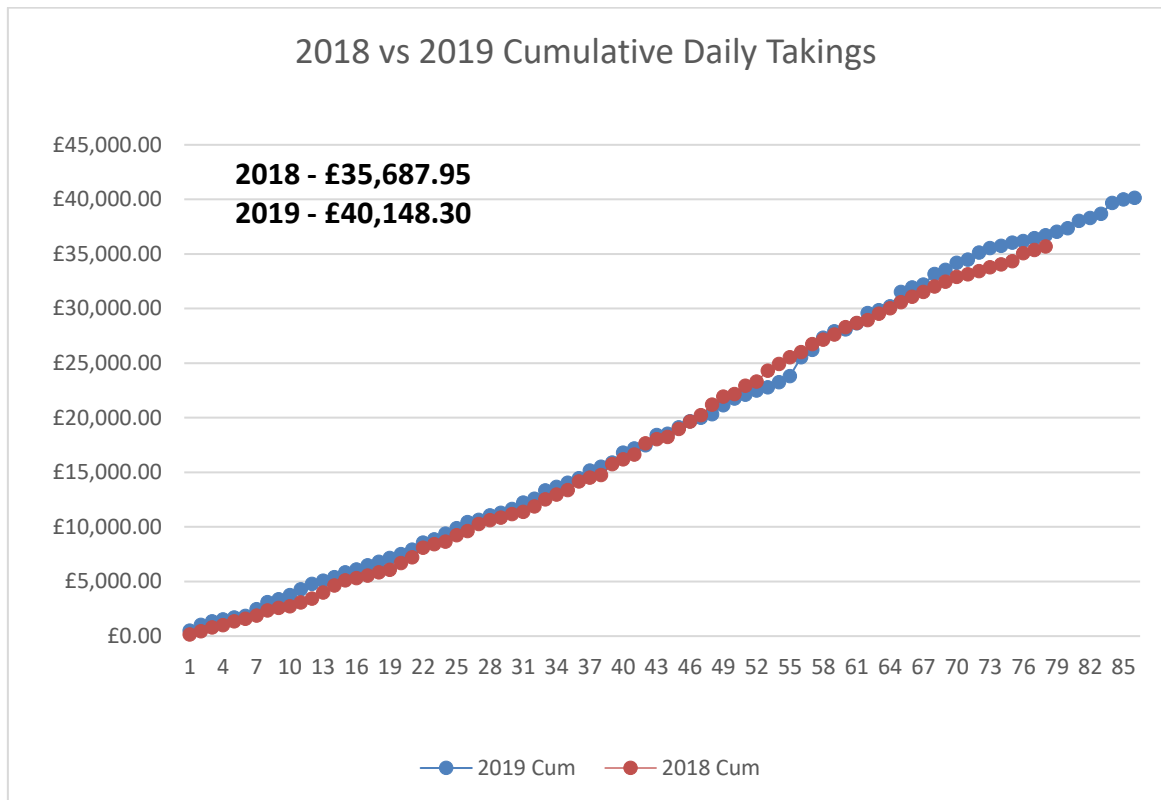
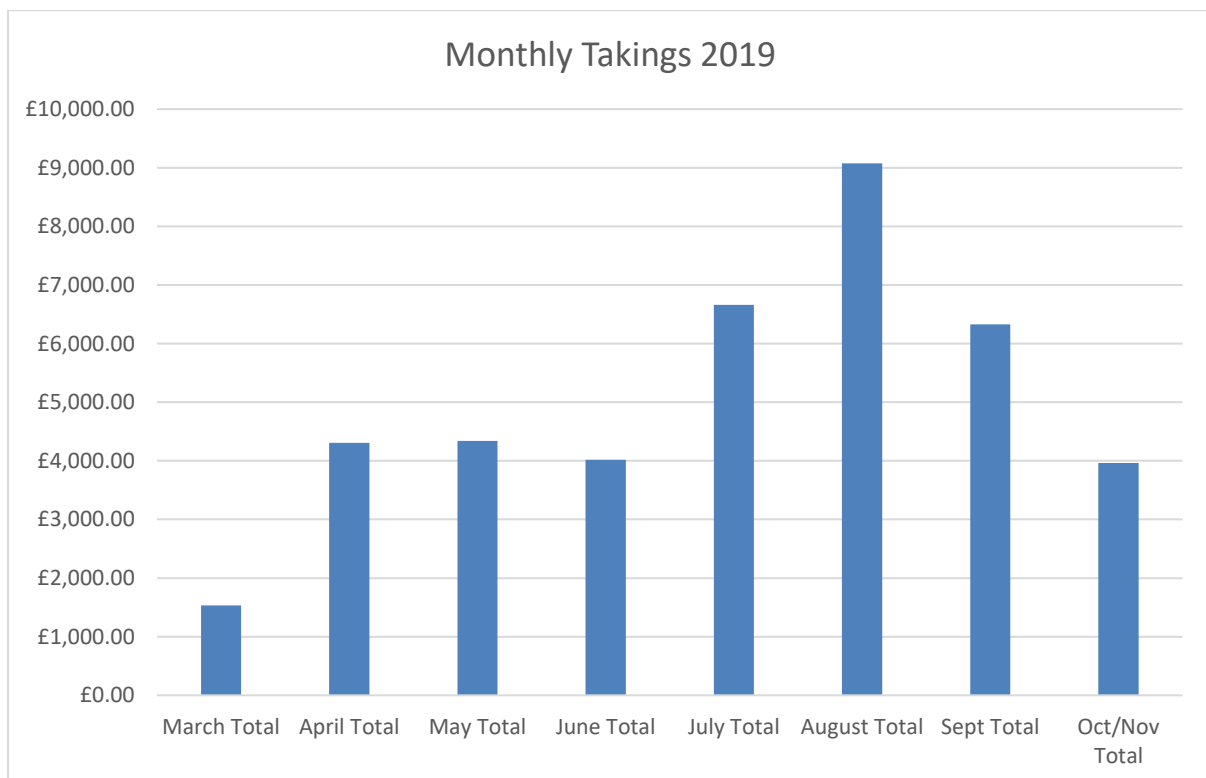


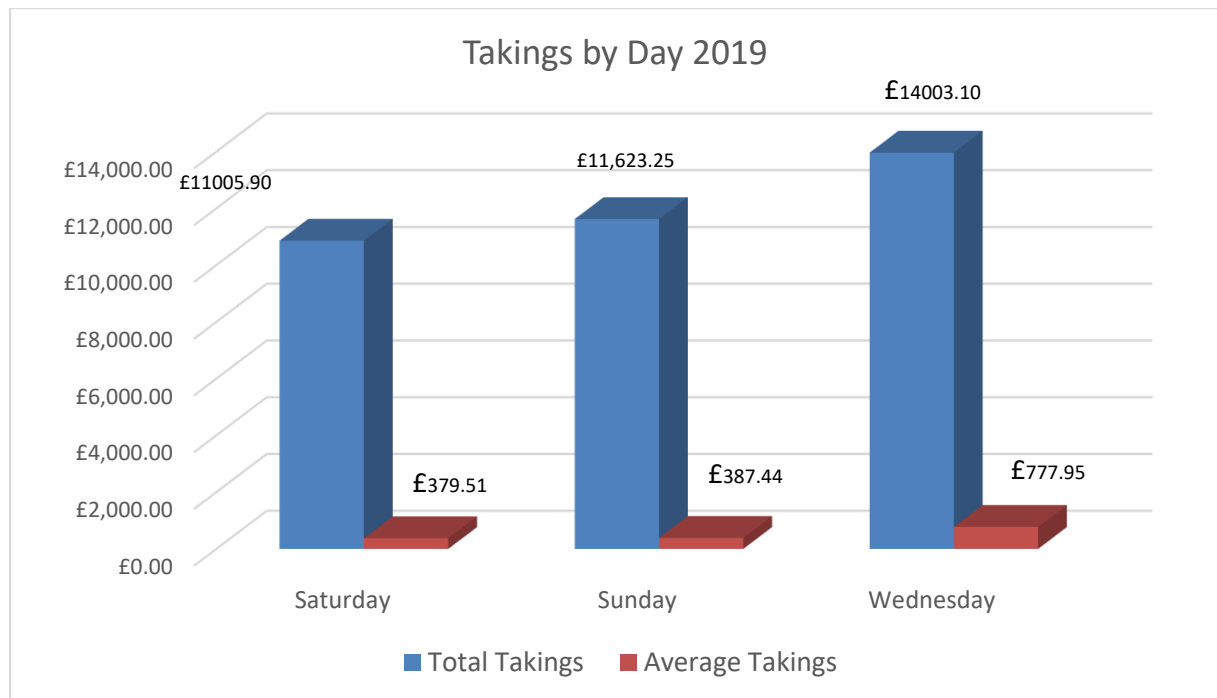
Fig 2. Monthly Gross Takings for WRHSL in 2019



Daily Average Takings for the three principal operating days are shown in Fig 3.

Despite some initial impression that Saturday takings were significantly lower than Sundays in practice there is very little difference in the takings on the two days. Wednesdays are however stand out at almost double the other days. Wednesday the 14th August taking a record £1714.20.

Fig 3. Average and Total takings per Day for WRHSL in 2019



Passenger Analysis

Comparison of Annual passenger numbers carried since the start of Heritage Services are shown in Table 1. As can be seen following increases in passenger numbers each year between 2014 and 2017 the trend for 2018 and 2019 shows decreasing passengers from the peak of 2017. It must be borne in mind that 2014 was a short season with the service not starting until June, operating between Stanhope and Wolsingham.

Landmarks

- 2024 – Partial season Stanhope to Wolsingham
- 2015 – Full season Stanhope to Wolsingham
- 2016 – Pilot service to Witton-le-Wear.
- 2017 – Full season operations to Witton-le-Wear
- 2018 – Service extended to Bishop Auckland West from 1st July.
- 2019 – Full season of operation to Bishop Auckland West

Table 1. Summary of Passenger Numbers per Year

2014	4200	
2015	5956	+42%
2016	6552	+10%
2017	7837	+20%
2018	7445	-5%
2019	6795	-10%

This data in Table 1 is represented graphically in Fig 4.
Fig 4. Trend Analysis of Passenger Numbers

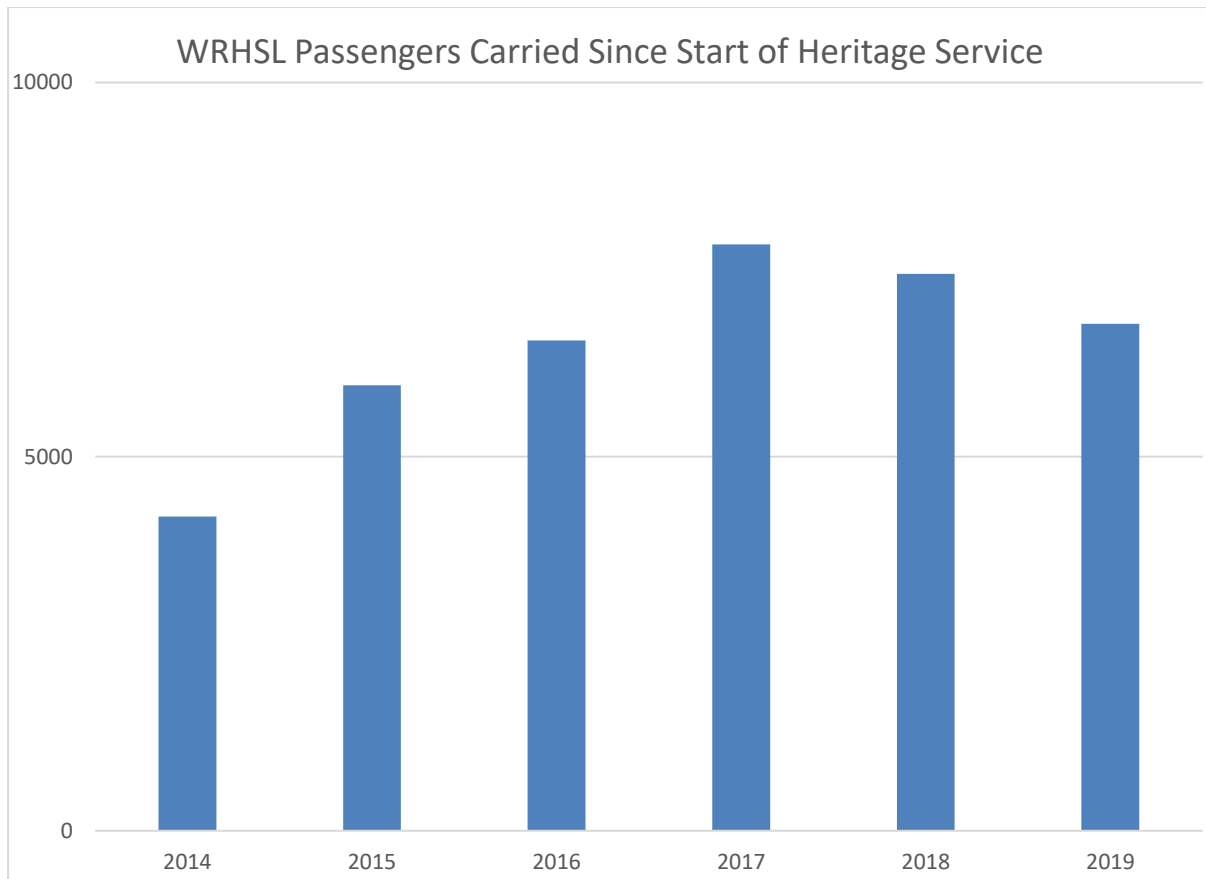
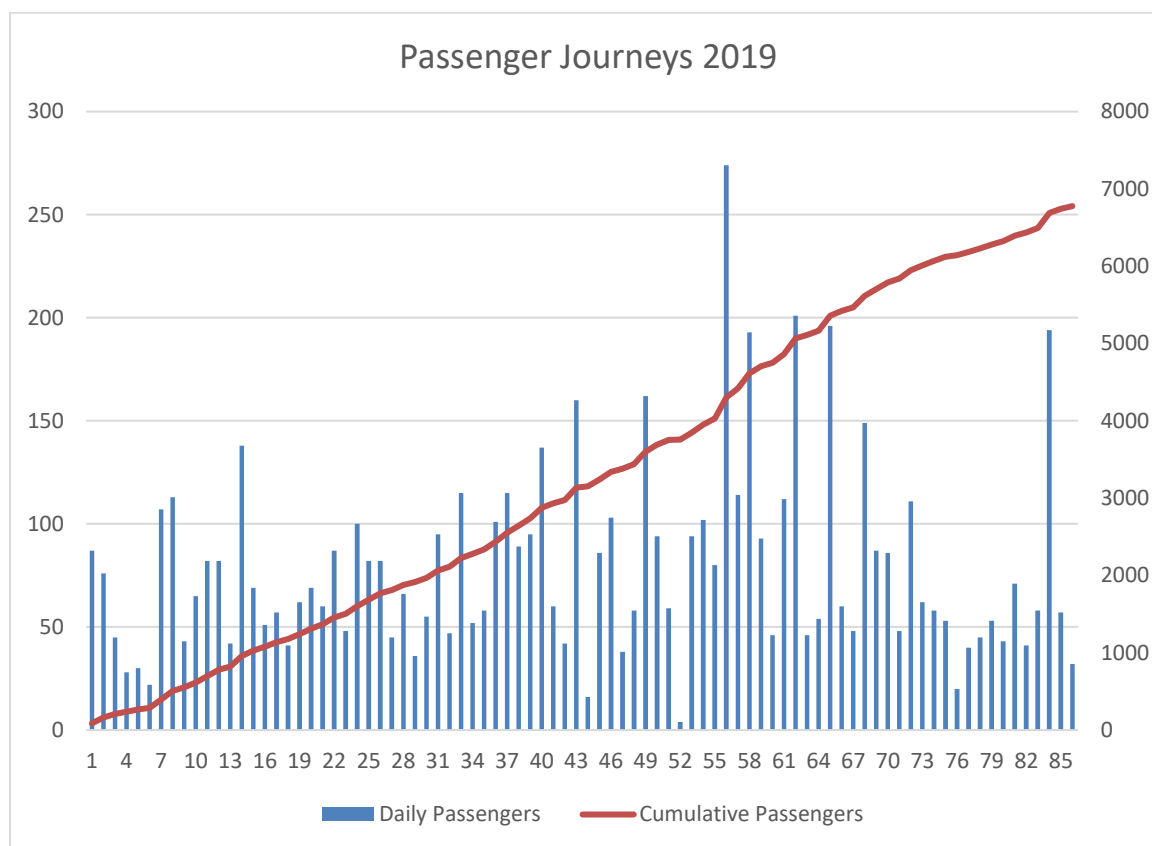


Fig 5 shows the passenger analysis for the 2019 operating season. There were five days that had significant numbers of passengers above average that travelled. These were Wednesdays the 14th and 21st August and Wednesdays the 4th and 25th September and Wednesday 30th of October. Wednesday the 4th September was well populated because of three groups booked for that day. The first trip of the day using the company Class 31 and 2 Mk II carriages as numbers booked would have exceeded the seating on the 122 Bubble car. Unfortunately, there was still standing room only on the first departure from Bishop Auckland West.

Fig 5. Passenger Journeys Daily and Cumulative for 2019.



The average number passengers per day throughout the season was 79, equivalent to 26% loading of the 122 Bubble car or 11% of the Class 108 available seating. On the five Wednesdays described above loading levels were around 200 for each day equivalent to 66% of the available seating in the 122 or 28% of the 108 DMU's.

Summary

The trend of declining passenger numbers over the last two years is of concern but has not resulted in an overall financial loss. However, the contribution that WRHSL will be able to transfer to the Trusts accounts will be much reduced next year.

The days where low passenger numbers were experienced were on weekends at the start and end of the season. Midweek Wednesdays were by far the most popular, possibly due to holiday changeovers occurring at weekends. Any timetabled heritage services for 2020 should consider shortening the season at each end.

The introduction of the Class 108 DMU eased the traction situation in two ways. Providing an alternative to the 122 which was troublesome throughout the year and providing the additional seating capacity for the more loaded days.

Depending on what service is agreed for next year higher profile marketing should be considered, perhaps including local press advertising to increase the loading levels significantly. If passenger numbers averaged at 200/day at an average fare of £5.91/passenger average daily takes would be £1182.

Although sales at Bishop Trains were modest it's probably worth continuing, if only as another point of contact with the public and source of information.

Due to the time slippage in a decision from the owners of the railway, Trustees discussed and agreed to postpone operation of Heritage Service in 2020 for now.

18a Weekly Lottery/Fund Raising

A new participant has commenced the lottery.

18b Educational Activities

Talks:

Bishop Auckland Civic Society JA 28 January. Assisted by reps from Bishop Line CRP and S&DR HAZ.
Locomotion as part of the talks programme JA 28 March 2020

Publications:

BTL 106 – deadline for reports 6 February 2020

19 Any Other Business

Nil

The meeting closed at 2145hrs

20 Date of next meeting

Next WRT Council meeting: - Monday 3 February 2020 at 7:30PM at Witton-le-Wear Community Centre.