

# **RAILWAY HERITAGE COMMITTEE**

Summary of the responses to the consultation  
on the proposed abolition of the Railway  
Heritage Committee and transfer of its  
designation function to the Board of Trustees  
of the Science Museum

Department for Transport  
May 2012

## **RAILWAY HERITAGE COMMITTEE**

As part of the Cabinet Office's review of public bodies in 2010, the Government decided that the Railway Heritage Committee (RHC) should be abolished. However, during the passage of the Public Bodies Act 2011 (the Act) through parliament, the Government was persuaded that there was merit in retaining the designation powers and transferring the exercise of those powers to the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum is responsible for the whole of the National Museum of Science and Industry (NMSI). The NMSI incorporates the National Railway Museum (NRM). Section 1 of the Act permits a Minister to abolish a body or office specified in Schedule 1 and the RHC is one of the bodies specified in that Schedule.

The Act includes a requirement in Section 10 of the Act for consultation in relation to all proposals which require an order to be made under Sections 1 to 5. As the impact of the proposed reform is neutral we have undertaken a targeted 6 week informal consultation. This meets consultation requirements for a body with specialised functions and a limited user group.

The consultation sought views on both the proposed abolition of the RHC and on the transfer of its designation function to the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum.

There were 32 responses to the consultation. Respondents included a number of organisations from the museum, archive and heritage sectors as well from the rail industry and rail passenger organisations. Responses were also received from a variety of other sources such as a parliamentary group representing the interests of heritage rail, a devolved administration and a number of private individuals.

This document deals with each of the five questions raised in the consultation document together with other responses which fall outside of these specific areas. It sets out a summary of the responses to each of the five questions together with a summary of the other issues raised and the next steps which we propose to take.

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## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

### ***We asked:***

Do you agree that the RHC should be abolished?

### ***Consultees responded:***

The majority of respondents were in favour of abolition, particularly on condition that the RHC's designation function is maintained and transferred elsewhere. Those opposed to abolition argued that the existing arrangements had worked well and claimed that abolition would only achieve a trivial cost saving at the loss of a well respected body. Some respondents argued that the RHC has carried out its functions in an efficient and cost effective manner although others raised concerns about the cost effectiveness of the RHC, particularly in terms of travel & subsistence for four committees which meet quarterly at great distances. Most respondents acknowledged the reasons for abolition and recognised the need for the rationalisation of functions or expressed the view that the exercise of the designation function is more important than the vehicle through which it is delivered.

### ***We asked:***

Do you agree that the RHC's designation function should be retained and, if so, transferred to the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum?

### ***Consultees responded:***

There was overwhelming support both for retaining the RHC's designation function and for transferring it to the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. A strong theme that emerged was the importance of retaining the function to ensure the continued protection of railway heritage both in terms of what has already been designated in the past and for those records and artefacts that might be identified as worthy of protection in the future. There was consistent support for the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum being ideally placed to take on this role with the idea being variously described as an elegant, practical and pragmatic solution. Some respondents were a bit more qualified describing the idea as the best course of action in the circumstances. One individual withheld support without assurances as to how the responsibilities would be discharged in future as well the constitution of any committee that might be set up.

***We asked:***

Do you think that the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum (who are also the governing body for the National Railway Museum) has sufficient expertise and knowledge to ensure that historically significant railway records and artefacts are identified and protected?

***Consultees responded:***

The vast majority of respondents were confident that the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum has sufficient expertise and knowledge to ensure that historical railway records and artefacts will be preserved for future generations. A number of respondents assumed that the Board of Trustees will delegate the actual duties with some referring to the large network of professional staff and colleagues that it can call upon to support this work as well as the number of Trustees who have long personal experience of involvement with the railway industry and railway heritage. A concern was expressed that the broader remit combined with the absence of specific administrative support may result with less focus on railway heritage than at present thereby increasing the risk of losing items of interest. One respondent thought that the Board of Trustees did not have sufficient expertise and knowledge, although they thought that it would be able to access the disciplines and knowledge it lacks by including representatives from other organisations with an interest.

***We asked:***

Do you think there is any other organisation that would be able to carry out the designation function better than the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum (without any additional funding)?

***Consultees responded:***

Almost all respondents thought that the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum are best placed to carry out the designation function. Even those who were more in favour of the RHC maintaining its role tended to agree that in its absence there was not any other organisation that could carry out this function better.

***We asked:***

Do you agree that the appointment of external panel members will ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum carrying out the designation function and its role as the governing body of the National Railway Museum?

***Consultees responded:***

Although a small number of respondents thought it unlikely that a conflict of interest would arise, there was a large degree of agreement that the appointment of external panel members should help to ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum carrying out the designation function and its role as the governing body of the National Railway Museum. A number of respondents emphasised the importance of ensuring there are sufficient external members so that decisions are seen to be independent. There were also a number of comments about the need to include input from various interests and sectors (including representatives from Scotland and Wales) to ensure that the NMSI Railway Designation Panel has a broad and balanced representation of members from the operating railway industry, heritage railways and railway museums.

***Other issues raised by consultees:***

A number of respondents said that they would like to be included within the scope of the designation powers in the future and to participate in the new designation arrangements by providing external members and expertise to the Board of Trustees / the Designation Panel and/or any sub-committees. One respondent suggested extending the scope of the Board of Trustees to all modes of transport, and another argued that the Railway Heritage Act 1996 should be amended as part of any transfer in order to give the successor body the flexibility it needs. Another respondent suggested that the successor body should re-issue its live list of designations to avoid any ambiguity about what is and what is not designated. A number of bodies would also welcome confirmation that they will continue to be eligible to receive material under the scheme. Assurances were also sought that the management of railway heritage archives will be administered appropriately across England, Scotland and Wales and that communication between all geographic areas will be effective and transparent.

***Next steps:***

As a result of the consultation, the Government has decided to implement its proposal to abolish the RHC and transfer its designation function to the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. It is anticipated that a draft order and Explanatory Document will be laid before Parliament later in the year. Subject to Parliamentary and legal processes, it is currently anticipated that the RHC will be abolished and its designation function transferred by April 2013.

In the meantime, both the Department for Transport and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will encourage greater dialogue and communication between the RHC and the NMSI to ensure as smooth a handover as possible.

Issues that were raised in the consultation about extending the scope and coverage of the designation powers will be matters to be considered by DCMS and NMSI after the RHC has been abolished and the designation function transferred. However, it should be noted that until then there is nothing to prevent interested parties from reaching voluntary agreements.

Similarly, it will be a matter for the Board of Trustees to decide the make up of the new panel, including the extent to which it includes regional representation, after the powers have been transferred.