

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail

Media Release from Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP, Chairman

For release at 00.01 on Thursday 18 July 2019

Parliamentary Group calls for action to keep steam trains running

Today's railway children may be denied the experience of a steam train ride as an unintended consequence of Government action to tackle climate change.

In their third report *Steaming Ahead?* on heritage railways, coal and the future of the steam locomotives in the United Kingdom, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail reports that British coal supplies are only expected to be available for some two years. After that, imported coal will be more expensive and involve higher greenhouse gas emissions in transporting it to the UK, threatening the viability of 158 steam railways around the country.

The Parliamentary Group has taken evidence over the last seven months from heritage railways, also drawing on experience from those in other countries, as well as from coal suppliers and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Members of the cross-party group include MPs from the main political parties as well as members of the House of Lords. The conclusions underlined the importance of heritage railways to the local economy and to employment, and the report lists good practice in steam locomotive management to minimise emissions. The railways are important for the environment as they form 'green corridors' along the line, which are home to rare flora and fauna and they often provide car free access to national parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty.

The principal problem for the future is the risk to British mined coal, which is of good quality and for which the grates of preserved steam locomotives were designed. This risk stems from Government plans to reduce domestic coal burning and, while suitable coal can be imported, the greenhouse gas emissions from transporting it over such long distances are up to seven times greater than those from indigenous coal. There is also doubt about the future distribution network within Britain for 158 railways spread throughout the country whose requirements are quite small. Costs will increase, threatening the viability of lines that already depend heavily (in some cases exclusively) on volunteers both to run the railway and to raise funds for its maintenance. Unlike the national network, heritage railways are not in receipt of Government subsidy.

Chairman of the Group, Nicky Morgan, whose Loughborough constituency includes the popular Great Central Railway, said:

“The conclusions from the evidence are very clear. The United Kingdom, its regional economies, its tourism industry and the future skills base of the mainline rail sector need their heritage railways, and the core requirement for most of the railways is the steam locomotive, which in turn require good quality coal. The best type of coal for these locomotives is that mined in Britain and these mines do not have a medium or long term future, so how do we ensure the future of this thriving and important sector?”

She concluded:

“Concerns about climate change have rightly led to moves to reduce the burning of fossil fuel, but the intention of Government was not to stop people enjoying the experience of seeing and riding behind a working steam locomotive. In this classic case of the law of unintended consequences, we need to find a way to enable heritage railways to continue steaming into the future. We intend to pursue this with the Government departments and ministers involved over the next few months.”

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors:

Copies of the report are available from the Group’s secretary, Chris Austin at austinca2@googlemail.com or from Nicky Morgan’s office.

The report will be published at a press briefing at 16.00 on Thursday 18 July, in Room Q, Portcullis House, Westminster, introduced by Nicky Morgan.

Nicky Morgan is available for comment on the report by contacting 020 7219 7224

For further information please contact Chris Austin on 07913 653594

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail is a focus for discussion by parliamentarians about heritage railways, the contribution they make to their local and regional economies and the skills training opportunities involved. The Group reported on the economic value of heritage railways in 2013, and on heritage railways and young people in 2018.

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