



Rheilffyrdd Ffestiniog ac Eryri Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways

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24th March 2020

Coronavirus

A joint letter from John Prideaux, Howard Wilson and Dafydd Thomas

Coronavirus is having an enormous impact on the whole world. Your railway is part of that world.

Things are changing so rapidly that whatever we say will probably look dated within 24 hours. So, we are using this letter to reassure you that we are doing everything we can to look after your railway, to seek your help and cooperation and to let you know how we are approaching the crisis in broad terms. If you want to keep right up to date please go to the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railway website: www.festrail.co.uk

The Company has focused on just two key objectives in this crisis:

- The welfare of our people (staff, volunteers, supporters, customers)
- Survival

Last week we stopped the limited early Spring service when Government advice changed. We reduced hours. The Board has met online and will continue to do so at frequent intervals.

The first major matter to report is that the railway will not operate a train service until after Easter. That is the earliest time we think we could possibly open. We are looking at the impact of more prolonged shutdowns. Opening the shops and cafes will follow Government guidelines. The Government advice on limiting social contact has unfortunately placed severe limits on volunteering.

The virus has hit at a particularly difficult time for us. It has hit just as we were about to open the railways for daily service. In basic terms, the money we take in the next six or seven months would normally be expected to pay our costs for the whole year.

Although we cannot run trains, there are tasks that we reasonably and safely can work on – particularly where these are jobs like new carriages which have been funded separately by generous donations. We will carry on with those. And of course, we have stopped all unnecessary expenditure. We will earn money where we can. The shops are open for internet sales, so please do support them. And if you are planning a trip after all this is over please do not forget Ffestiniog travel.

But however hard we try there is going to be a big gap. The railway has £6.5m turnover and a £2.5m wage bill.

The Trust and both Societies have agreed to make loans to the Company to ensure that it remains solvent in the short term, but those are loans. Loans have to be repaid. There may be some help from Government. We are working with them to see what might be possible. However, it seems pretty clear that we will need substantial donations to help make up for the loss of the revenue from our trains, cafes and normal retail activities.

So, we are asking all of you to consider giving a donation to help your railway through this most challenging time. The donations can be given through leaflets attached or by following the advice on our website.

And please, do remain in contact with your Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland friends online, by phone or by other safe means. We all need our friends in such difficult times.

John Prideaux

Chairman, The Festiniog Railway Company
Chairman, The Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways Trust

Howard Wilson

Chairman, The Ffestiniog Railway Society

Dafydd Thomas

Chairman, Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Eryri