

OPERATIONS REPORT: COMINGS & GOINGS

The Operations Department has been very busy in the opening part of the year with preparations for the Diesel Gala, and, during January and February especially, with getting No. 592 and a train off the Railway for filming at Kings Cross. We are now facing the start of daily running in the wake of the Easter Holidays, and among other things, we are looking forward to the Bluebell Specials using the Observation Car and—we expect—“Bluebell” herself.

Arrangements for the Diesel Gala are being overseen by Paul Russell, the Diesel Traction Coordinator for the Loco Works. He has lead a team, comprising all the various stakeholders, that is pulling together the threads to make sure that everything goes smoothly. In particular, he has been liaising with GBRf, the operator whose motive power will feature over the weekend, and with London Underground, which is providing the 4TC set to work with the air-braked-only engines.

For our part we are providing all the timetabling, which reveals an event essentially centred on Horsted Keynes with engine changes and lots of activity there. The Locomotive Operating Department is providing conductors for the motive power and staff to work on the ground, helping with coupling and uncoupling as engines are rotated around sets for the sake or variety. Signal boxes will be double-staffed for at least part of the day each day, station masters have been recruiting platform staff, and the guard’s Roster Clerk has been busy finding people for guarding duties.

So we are set for a busy weekend, and all that is needed is for enthusiasts and visitors to show up in numbers to help create that buzz that will help ensure a successful event!

The other operations highlight was the despatch of No. 592 and a train to Kings Cross in February to assist in the filming of a Hollywood “blockbuster”. Everyone has seen the footage on YouTube and pictures in the press. Our contractual arrangements prevent any more detail being given about what we were filming, but suffice to say that pictures appeared in the national papers of activity in Trafalgar Square and other locations for the same film.

There was perhaps even more preparation behind the scenes for this job than for a special event. For one thing, we had stock out on the mainline, and the questions to be answered would out-do *War and Peace* if they were all bound into one volume! They revolved around the issues of “will the train fit?” and “will the wheels fall off?” This last question prevented the “birdcage brake” No. 3363 from going because there is no method of certifying to the Network that wooden wheels are no cause for concern when off premises. But there were sleepless nights after we supplied the information required to see whether the train would indeed fit through platforms and under bridges, and waited for the computers to compare the information we provided with its vast store of knowledge.

In the end, and with the help of the train operator and staff at Network Rail, the operation passed off well enough, and the staff who went out with train and brought it back again were very happy with the way our loco and carriages performed. The whole affair was sent “top and tail” with a pair of CI 20s, and it was described as a class 8 goods train. No. 592 had to go in light steam to ensure adequate lubrication, and the driver and firemen reported that despite the cold (especially on the return journey), it was an unforgettable experience. The delayed return did cause us some additional thinking about how to close the motive power

and rolling stock gaps, but we coped, and the end results should make the bank manager very happy!

Thanks to all concerned for their efforts in both these events.

By Russell Pearce, Operations Director