

Wattrain

The World Alliance of
Tourist Trams & Trains



WATTRAIN Newsletter October 2020 Special Edition

WATTRAIN Zoom Global Meeting(20th October 2020)

The WATTRAIN Board were delighted to welcome over 40 representatives of various heritage and preservation groups from around the world to discuss how to meet the operational challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

What follows is a summary of the key points discussed.

Below.. a snapshot of (nearly) all participants....



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The meeting was hosted by Courtney Wilson (WATTRAIN Patron) and moderated by Stefano Benazzo(WATTRAIN President).

(Note: If a speaker/or group members made one or more comments, these are aggregated into one entry.)

The theme of the meeting was to concentrate on Operational Matters, on how different railways/museums were coping with the pandemic issues.

The following is an edited version of the meeting, and the key points are highlighted for ease of reference.

Jaap Nieweg(Fedecrail) commented on the varied approaches to dealing with the current pandemic throughout Europe..and the differing levels of support given to culture, industrial and mobile heritage. We can't say at this moment in Europe, what the exact financial problem for those short term and long term will be because there is no formal end date of COVID-19. And that makes the problem extra complex. If you could say the end of it is solved at, let's say, April 15 2021, or 2022, you can make a plan, but we are not able to have any idea about reinstalling tourism from outside Europe to Europe, international tourism inside Europe and the local tourism quality as well. .

I know the best of my own line, where we are doing about 75% of last year, but we stopped during the autumn because of the new regulations. So that is difficult.. Everybody is trying to get to survive.



Jaap Nieweg: Last week, the European Parliament decided that **2021 as the European Year Of The Railway** and I think that is a good moment, not only for the Commercial railways but also for the Heritage Railways to be in contact with the European Parliament to look

into the current problems.

Fedecrail is active in 27 European countries, and there are 653 members under the umbrella offFedecrail. So I think it's good that we present represent all those members in the parliament and going on to the European Commission as well. And we are, of course, a representative body for the European rail agent. So that is very much official contact. But especially with the parliament, I think this is the moment.



Christopher Le Marshall(WATTRAIN Director-Australia) The key problem has been clearly maintaining social distance during operations- and jurisdictions such as Western Australia have been assisted because the government have said that heritage railways come up with a classification of commuter railways to maintain the **social distancing** rules in place. In other states, there is a requirement to maintain the four square meters -this has meant that if operating with cars where there are compartments then you can put a family in each compartment and still **maintain social distancing** rules.

But I know one of the issues is whilst you are catering for a public, most of the public realize that there is a requirement to maintain **social distance**. But in any cohort, any group of people, you do get those who don't maintain their social distance and put other people in danger. So I know that Queensland pioneer steam railway very politely inform people of the requirement to maintain social distancing. So that's really a snapshot of some of the issues we've had. It's **social distancing, basically**, it's maintaining that discipline, and it's also **catering with different state regulations**. But you can do it quite successfully.

On a note of hope. Victoria now, which has been the basket case for Australia, where they had some bad administration and they had a breakout of COVID. There are now very few cases and it looks like Victoria is now coming out and live as a nation successfully tackled, and we will, we are going to be probably were Europe will be, I think in about three to six months. So it's a long haul. But the key as colleagues from Europe are saying is surviving. So there is hope.



Domingo Kauak-Tren del Recuerdo. (Chile) We had a very good summer season on summer in the southern hemisphere from January to March. And we had to suspend services on the 15th of march around that date, because of the Covid 19 pandemic and we haven't had the chance to return yet. So the landscape for tourism right now in Chile is not very good. And it's just starting to open back

again although we still don't have a date of when we will be able to restart our services. But we are having discussions to restart our long distance services like trains. And then after that maybe a day service- purely touristic service to the coast close to Santiago, because there is still **some resistance from the coastal communities to receive tourism from the Capitol** considering that we are still fresh out of quarantine in some parts of the country. So it's still a work in progress for us to know where are we going,. So we expect to have at least some kind of summer starting by the end of December to try to recover some of the lost revenue that we didn't earn this year in order for us to survive.

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G Mark Ray (US). We've been dealing with a myriad of complex situations vary from state to state, the federal government early on yielded basically reopening guidelines to each of the individual states. Some of those states then delegated down to local health organizations, depending upon where you are. So it's been a really a mixed bag of guidelines.

Early on the Heritage Rail Alliance issued some general guidelines on how to basically plan your operations, and basically some health protocols. And we put those up on our website.

And that was another thing we did early on is we established a COVID-19 web page, where we could put the latest and greatest information out there for our members and non members to see, anytime someone had a fundraising idea, they shared it with us, we put it up on the website -anything that they did that could help with COVID-19. As far as health and safety, we shared that.

So I would encourage everyone, if you've never been to our website, go to at [Heritage rail.org](#) and then go to our there's a link that will take you to our COVID-19 page. We've also been sharing data once a week from one of the United States premier attraction consultants [pgavplanners](#). They've been tracking data all summer long, really all year long about what they're seeing in terms of attendance trends. And we've been sharing that data so people could do marketing, or any adjustments they need to make.

Probably the biggest thing to share is that we recently had our first successful large format event, the Colorado River museum was able to put on a Day with Thomas event. They had a great event, they put a lot of planning into it. And essentially had operated half capacity, but it was better than zero capacity. So with masks and social distancing, which primarily here in the States has been six feet. It was successfully from both a community and also financial standpoint.

So there's been a lot of organizations that have done some creative things, such as actually putting physical barriers made of Plexiglas in between seats, to create physical isolation. There's been technology with car cleaning involving fogging systems that use a special chemical and they can they can cleanse a car in 10 minutes.

The federal government here did offer some finances that a lot of people applied for (payroll protection program). And so a lot of people were able to get that and it has helped us survive. I've heard of a couple of places that have basically had to shut their doors. But overall, the big groups been able to withstand this so far... both tourist railroads and static museums.

Tourist railroads have been focused on Christmas events, because that's where a lot of us make our money now -in the fourth quarter of the calendar year. So we had a webinar about three weeks ago on preparations and how we can run successful Christmas trains. And we focus a lot on the same things about social distancing, and how to keep the cars WATTRAIN-Supporting and promoting heritage rail worldwide by anticipating and responding appropriately to challenges and developments.

clean and basically **adjusting schedules** so we can run more movements for less people **adding capacity with longer trains**. So all those kind of things basically try to get the numbers up.



Robert Shearer(Queensland Pioneer Steam Railway) However, the social distancing measures were very important here in Queensland. A key thing we've discovered is being **flexible with the booking system**. And actually **booking families into a specific coach**, keeping them as a micro group. And we've been tending to finally get back up to **75% capacity** on that, we've been going

through a bit of a reinvention of what we're considering to be a tourist. So we've gone back to a wholly local system. So most of the passengers are coming from within a 50 kilometer radius. But we're seeing a very decent pickup on that. So what we found is post-lockdown scenario, people really do want to discover their own backyard again. And we've been finding that **having flexibility**, so we haven't been announcing train trips until probably a week and a half before the trip runs, and the trip sold out by about three days before the trip. If we open things any earlier than that people are too scared to walk in.

And we're finding it's really an **instant gratification market**, but we're now grabbing hold of people **impulse buying** to get out the door. From a COVID-19 scenario, one of the hottest things we found the restart operation is the claiming of carriages. It's um, because, you know, a situation where Holly volunteer operation, we're now finding that every carriage has at least one if not two, onboard staff who are in between passengers in between passenger trips, I'm having to clean down every surface of every coach. So that's taking a huge toll on the Human Resources -it is a lot more labour intensive than what came before. So that's pretty much what we've had from our side of things. From an international tourism perspective, we've been told not to expect borders to reopen for at least two years, if not three.

Bob La Prelle: (Director of the Museum of the American Railroad in Frisco, Texas.)



It's a large suburb about 25 miles north of Dallas in Texas. It's the fastest growing suburb in the United States. It has over 215,000 people in 42 schools, which we serve with our educational programs. So we have a fabulous quite a presence in one of the suburban communities of North Texas. But we have also suffered

quite a bit from the onset of COVID. we closed our doors on March 17, and remain closed. For several months, we reopened our outdoor operations with guided tours of the rolling stock collection in the structures of which we have 65 cars and locomotives and three historic structures. We open that on June 15. With a modest response, and it has grown somewhat since since then, we reopened our indoor operations, including our large model

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train operation called **Train Topia**, and then our indoor exhibits. We reopened those on October 2. And again, a modest response we're doing about **10 to 12% in attendance as compared** with the same period last year.

One of the nice aspects of the Cares Act, which was the federal response to small businesses is that nonprofits were able to apply for this **paycheck protection funding**. It's been a bridge funding for us, although it ran out and expired a couple of months ago. But we were able to offset about three months of loss income and continue paying our full time paid staff. When the Paycheck Protection Program ran out, we ended up literally burning cash since then. We did furlough one part time hourly employee, but we've managed to date to keep our three full time employees together in intact, which includes myself, or operating Chief Operating Officer and our public programs person. And we folded our educational programs into those two titles. Ironically, our educator took another job right before COVID hits, so we didn't have to worry about furloughing that position because that's probably what would have happened.

Going into this back in March, we had about 16 months of cash reserves. And obviously we're burning that as I spoke earlier. We got about four months into that. So we're watching that level go down. It looks as though the Congress here in the US is going to pass another paycheck protection program. So we are really hurting on operating income right now. We pride ourselves on being self sufficient in our operations. But right now it is a real challenge. I've been here 30 years. And this is the biggest challenge of everything.

Ironically, we are able to continue to receive grants for capital projects, we're still under construction, we moved to this new 15 acre facility about nine years ago, we're still building it out. And we've had quite a bit of interest on the part of local Foundation's to continue to fund that project. We have a sizable request in right now that looks very favorable for us, at the end of the year, to receive those funds. But again, those are capital grants, not operating grants, that's harder to receive money for. We are still under construction. Our hope is that we're going to have a slow climb back to normalcy at some point next year. If our cache holds out, obviously. And we have curtailed a lot of discretionary prod projects.

We're getting good response from our visitors, we just need more of them. We are following all the protocols. Masks are mandatory on all indoor activities that are museum and are highly suggested on outdoor activities. We have about 45 volunteers, and about half of those folks are continuing to come out the others are up in years and don't want to take any chances. But we are still getting a good volunteer turnout. That's kind of a snapshot of what we're doing. Just wanted to mention that I participated in a survey just yesterday of the American alliance of museums, of which HRA is an affiliate. This is the second such survey related to COVID. And there were **three very interesting questions** among all of the questions that they included.

- **The first one was, are you having discussions with your board about reallocating capital dollars that you already have on hand and that are restricted to specific projects? Are you having discussions about reallocating those to cover operating losses? And how are you informing your donors?**

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- The second question of interest was, how much in the way of cash reserves do you have left? How many months worth of cash reserves you have on hand?
- And the third question that really got my attention , how many of the participants in this survey expect to be in business 12 months from now.

The guidelines setup for localities to decide how to respond to this, both financially and from the standpoint of preventing the spread of the virus. So I would be curious to know how some of you have reacted to the government mandates and how you're how you're complying with that.

Vicki Ducrow(Safety Manager-Puffing Billy Railway)



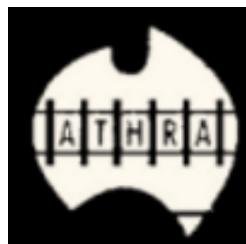
We have been currently closed since 23rd March. We're hoping that we might be able to reopen hopefully, in late November or early December. And we spent a lot of time obviously getting ready for that reopening, and rewriting Covid safe rules. We've still got paid employees, and they've been working from home. So we've been able to have that resource to write all those plans

It's about the **cleaning of the carriages** and the **social distancing**, and making sure that when our volunteers do return, that they understand the requirements that the government is putting on us at the moment. I suppose one of the other things that we've been having issues with is **keeping our volunteers engaged**. While they haven't been out today at the railway, especially with the recommendations around restrictions with high

risk workers. So currently, Puffing Billy, is saying that if you're a high risk volunteer at this stage, until things settle down a little bit, that you're not going to be able to come back to the railway, which obviously has upset quite a lot of volunteers. But we've needed to do that for the health and safety of all.

And that's all been around the four square meter or whether 1.5 distance because it makes a huge difference for us. If we have to have a five square meter rule, and four square meter rule versus 1.5 distance, it's a difference between us being viable or not. And we're having a lot of issues, trying to get those answers from our state government, saying that about a state government, they have been very financially supportive of us, and have kept us afloat. But we're looking at that we won't be actually actually commercial, commercially sustainable for at least two to three years. So we've got a long road of recovery ahead of us.

Steve Strangward (Victoria Goldfields Railway & Chairman ATHRA)



It is very difficult here in Australia- different jurisdictions interpret the rules differently....

And on top of that, then the restrictions are changing rapidly in some areas. So that's made it difficult from a railway body's perspective to provide support for our membership.

(With funding)we have had to step into that area and divert some of our capital worked funding to basically keep the lights on. And we do have government support for some of the employee wages. However we've focused on even though we're not turning a passenger, we'll be bringing in advance bookings. So we've provided a reasonable amount of revenue through **selling discounted advanced bookings**, people are buying a lot of vouchers.

We are **running some driver experience trying to keep some revenue coming in**.

The key issues have been mentioned previously about **cleaning** and on train social distancing by putting people in compartments. The other issue we're trying to grapple with is **restricting access to platforms**, which is a little bit difficult in some environments. we're **minimizing the contact point volunteers**. We've moved to a **prepaid ticket system only**. So there are no walk up tickets...we've removed any cash handling. So where possible self service. With seat allocation, instructions are given, and people find their own seats. And the idea of volunteers driving a lot of that. So we're removing conductors as well, and in general public understanding and have supported that.

The only other issue i would comment on is that the **demand** and not so much in Victoria, because we're still just opening up or about to open up but across Australia has generally been really strong for domestic travel. I think the railways that have opened have actually been able to run somewhere between **50 and 70% capacity**. And they are doing very well.

One other issue, you might think about **operational staff qualifications**, so where you've got time, and issues on your qualification renewals, re exams, we've had to review all of that and come away, come away with some alternatives to temporarily give people extension to the qualifications of drivers, firemen, guards, etc. I think they're the key issues that I want to talk about, but they're the key ones that we've had to address. It's very difficult. ..we've got a long road ahead to get financially stable.



Vanessa Perez(UIC) The UIC (International Union of Railways) has an MoU(Memorandum of Understanding) with WATTRAIN signed three years ago. I know a lot about the touristic trends, because in my previous life, I was working at the New Spain for Renfe. as a project manager of touristic trains and Quality

Manager. So, I understand very well what you are dealing with now. So inside UIC, we have a project called [Top Rail](#), where we talk about all these issues relating to rail tourism and leisure and Stefano is your representative in these a group. So, during the last month, we have exchanged with the members about all these topics that you are talking about. And at the same time we have the [task force COVID-19](#), where we have produced some guidelines



Rajesh Agrawal: ..India has been on virtual lockdown since March of this year. And this has very seriously endangered heritage operations, the heritage engines and the Kolkata Trams situation. So what we find now is that what was already intended, even more is that India has the oldest railway system anywhere in the Asia Pacific, we have steam engines dating back from 1855. Still in working out whether we'll be able to run the steam engine now. Or maybe ever again, though it is in restored working condition. We have our [world heritage sites, the mountain railways](#), which are shut down: after they resume operations (when is not sure) and how much they will receive. post COVID era to be able to sustain these operations effectively, as well as and also preserve the oldest railway system.

WATTRAIN needs to get together to see how we can assist in the formulation of policy conditions, and presenting these to relevant government officials, as COVID is already endangering the existence of the heritage sector in India.

Casas Esplugas Carles (Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya)



The UIC COVID-19 page is gathering data on what's happening in the real world, all over the world with ongoing questionnaires , and how real companies are approaching and dealing with a situation.

We are a small regional company based in Barcelona - small but diverse. So besides creating, urban train services, and Metro services within the city of Barcelona, very intense, with over 32 trains per hour in our main section, so it's quite, quite dense and intense as a suburban rail service. We also operate there only to record within Spain, which are part of altruistic business, which also includes ski stations.

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So we had the complete lockdown in March. And what that included Easter. ..so we had zero income. But then during the summer we had very different circumstances. One of our railways which is in goes up to a valley 2000 meter high, which is called Valley Nuria had one of the best seasons ever. Because as it was focused mainly on local tourism. There was a huge demand for the cable cars up a mountain called Montserrat which is our best business, we had a critical season because it's mainly based on foreign tourists, in cases when we're applying the same safety procedures that we apply to the main lines. So that includes in **increased cleaning and disinfection**. And also all **the ticketing was to make contactless by QR codes.**

And finally, in our original line we had full occupation on booking, it was fully booked for the whole season and it was already going very well. So it turns only the weekend. So we had all the weekends fully booked. But the problem is that we are not only suffering the pandemic and its consequences, but let's say the improvisation of authorities that some point it makes it very difficult to plan the business. This last weekend, it was all booked on Thursday, then it was announced a higher degree of confinement and mainly because, they could not eat any restaurants at destination, so they cancelled.. more than 75% of the bookings. So that's the situation that we have in Spain.

Nakajima Yasunari(JR East)



JR East operate a high speed rail and inter city trains in metropolitan areas, and steam locomotive. Normally we operate 12,000 trains a day back during the COVID-19, we kept the original timetable in May, we had a big vacation, but normally we got a lot of money.

But in this year because some less 5% demand and so, and then summer, we expected increasing passenger 20% customer returned to our service. In the last year 2019 we got 1.7 billion euro profit. So, now, we estimate 3.3 billion (losses)in this fiscal year. So we have very big damage, including for commuter long distance train and the tourist train.

Now, in case of commuter train 70 to 80% customers have returned to the service, but for long distance train and tourist train is maybe around 30% to 40%. So that's why we have to shorten our schedule. We don't change the strategy, our long term strategy. We don't change approach, but we have to show them our schedule and create some new idea for the new business.

Sergio Zubieta: Well, the COVID has impacted a lot in this country in Argentina. We have been locked down for seven months. So we have the pandemic pressure and also we have an economic crisis. So things are not looking very well. So far. 15% of the hotels have been closing forever. And 46% are expected to close if things do not change during the summer. Regarding the threat to The End of the World Railway (FCAF) Well, they did a repairs in all **WATTRAIN-Supporting and promoting heritage rail worldwide by anticipating and responding appropriately to challenges and developments.**

hundred percent of their earnings stock. They did the maintainers of everything because the company was closed. They do run services. My question is and of course there has been a good summer until March and since then, there was no money, no income, so the employees accepted to reduce their salaries for 40% and half of the salary is paid by the company and the other half of the salaries .

A question: It is recommended not to travel in public transportation. So how do you encourage your visitors to take train if trains are close?

Sergio Zubietta sent this summary of the South American situation:

ARGENTINA:

Tren del Fin del Mundo: The train stopped running on March 20th and has been out of service since then. All the employees have been lockdown at home ever since. The employees agreed to have a 40% reduction in their monthly salary, the company pays half, and the state subsidizes the other half. The workshops took the opportunity to carry out a complete maintenance review of 100% of the rolling stock and locomotives. Something that in normal days would have been impossible. The tracks have been unattended during the winter, so some ice has formed. Now, during November, they hope to work on the track maintenance. They would like to be ready for the summer season, but there are doubts if there will be a season at all. The main concern is that public transport is the main source of contagion of this pandemic, and that is why it is recommended that people do not travel on buses, subways and railways. How to handle this issue on tourist trains if, despite all the care and protocols, the fear is that the train is a source of contagion? its recovery will depend on the return of normality in relation to tourism, and if they miss the summer season, the next winter will be too long.

Ayacucho: They have also had to suspend all activities due to the quarantine. In the case of this association, the terrible impact they had from the great fire that destroyed the railway sheds it is very strong. They hope the Municipality would build the future workshops in a new 700 m² shed. In the meantime, the students have been drawing the locomotive technical drawings base on the originals recovered from the Ferroclub Argentino.

Ferroclub Argentino:



November 2019 Gabriel Asenjo was elected President of the Ferroclub Argentino. He is trying hard to recover national recognition from the national government. During the Lockdown, all the clubs have been closed to the public since march, but the volunteers of Remedios Escalada worked hard in several internal repairs of two large old steam locomotives, nr. 39 & 33. Please write directly to Gabriel Asenjo for more

detailed information gabriel_asenjo@yahoo.com.ar He did alone the repair of a steam tractor used for powering a farm, he did it in his workshops (he would love to be in touch with Wattrain).

Rio Turbio: Mitsubishi locomotives. Nothing happened. The works on the train were stagnated in 2016 with the change of the government and a judicial case of corruption was presented. The state company paid only half of the budget for the repair of the locomotive, but they received and handle 50 times more money that went exclusive to the pockets of the project authorities. Now that the old government is back, the new administration is looking at when to renew the activities and complete the original project, while closing the corruption complaints.

URUGUAY: 3 years ago, the Círculo de Estudios Ferroviarios del Uruguay (CEFU) and the Uruguayan Association of Friends of the Rail will put to work an old locomotive built by the English company Beyer Peacock & Co. in 1910, between Montevideo and Florida a 50 km road. Now with the new government on place, open to private investment, both associations are looking for private finance that, something that doesn't look very difficult with the increasing amount of Argentinians willing to leave the country and start business in the neighbor country.

PARAGUAY:

#TrenDelLago | La locomotora 60 estará lista en marzo y tendrá una capacidad para 300 personas con tres vagones, uno grande y dos pequeños. Los técnicos se encuentran realizando el mantenimiento de las vías Areguá - Ypacaraí, explicó Lauro Ramírez de @ferrocarrilespy. #650AM



With an investment of 60.000 USD the Paraguay Public Railway Company repaired partly a locomotive built in 1910 by North British Locomotive Company, for the centenary of its independence. Together with the Secretary of Tourism and the local Municipality, they want to run a steam train "Tren del Lago", between the Ypacaraí and Areguá stations. Running with fire made with wood from certified reforestation, it will carry two coaches of 100 passengers. Everything was ready by May, but because the Covid-19, works stopped, and still did.

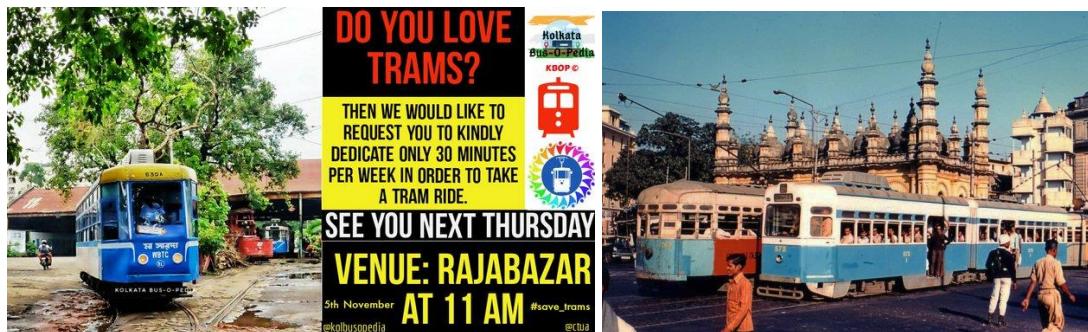
Andrew Gill(UK-WATTRAIN Director). In the UK, we have problems using the public transport, not so much the public transport itself, but **public confidence** in using the transport. And I think this is something not just heritage railways, but the tourist industry as a whole. **The public at the moment lack the confidence to go anywhere.** We have got to somehow give people the confidence to come to our location, and either use their own transport or public transport. There is a system in the UK, where companies can get **a Covid safe registration.** And they display a certificate, which helps to give public confidence.

Vanessa Perez(UIC). UIC has a task force COVID-19. We're working on that now to collect as much information from the scientific side on Covid-19. ..just for your information, less than **WATTRAIN-Supporting and promoting heritage rail worldwide by anticipating and responding appropriately to challenges and developments.**

1% of the contamination takes place on public transport. So it's very, very important to let customers know that there's not a big risk and that you are working very hard for the safety of the people taking the train.

Casas Esplugas Carles: On the **confidence** issue..here in Barcelona, car ridership has increased and it's up to 90%. Now was the 95. It was this week was on public transport, it's stable at 55- 60%. So people are avoiding public transport. There is hundred percent occupancy levels from local tourism. So people locals, they are willing to do whatever they can. But that's not market enough in general. And we also obtain the certification, which is reliable. And now we are posting this label everywhere to try to make people more confident.

The meeting was also attended by representatives **KTUA (Calcutta Tram Users Association)** who are passionate about the city's trams, both from current usage and preservation of historic stock. Assistance to make the right approaches to the relevant authorities is uppermost in their minds, and KTUA are enlisting support from WATTRAIN....



This is a full summary of an historic meeting, and the hope is that regular meetings will serve to help keep heritage and preservation rolling stock, trams, locomotives and tourist trains functioning well into the future.

You can help WATTRAIN in its endeavours by joining [HERE](#).

The meeting concluded with a desire to meet regularly for the duration of the pandemic, with a view to sharing information and ideas to keep the world's tourist trams and trains rolling.

The next date will be advised to all attendees shortly.

Peter S Lewis

WATTRAIN Newsletter Editor & Webmaster.

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