



## Heritage and steam trains keeping SA's rail tourism dream alive – for how much longer?

Almost exactly six years ago, on Father's Day, June 20, 2009, the Pretoria-based heritage steam train operator *Friends of the Rail* suffered a major derailment of one of its class 15F locomotives on the Rayton to Cullinan branch line close to Cullinan. The cause was the theft of a number of wooden sleepers (ties) from under the track on a curve in a cutting. Fortunately, although the train came to a sudden halt and some serious damage was sustained by the locomotive, the 550 passengers and crew were not injured.

As bad luck or rather the criminals would have it, this event was not to become just a one-off, however. Almost the same thing happened two and half years later when, despite measures taken to avoid a repetition, FOTR's 19D was derailed at the same spot and for the same reason, luckily because of an enforced speed restriction, with much less damage and again no injuries.

Since then, like much of the country's rural railway network, this branch line has been relentlessly attacked by thieves who have now moved up to find more value in metal than in wood. On a number of occasions, steel sleepers have been stolen, resulting in at least two major derailments of TFR diesel locomotives and a near-derailment of an FOTR steam train that stopped short, just meters from a section with missing sleepers.

Foiled by the wholesale replacement of steel sleepers with concrete ones on this line, recently the thieves have turned their attention to the rails themselves. On four occasions thieves have cut and removed long sections of rail, generally about 50 to 70 meters at a time. Each occasion has forced FOTR to terminate its train at Rayton and to charter busses to transport passengers the 9 kilometers to Cullinan at huge cost to itself.

Whilst Umgeni Steam Railway has not yet been halted by similar incidents of theft, the old Natal main line, from Kloof to Inchanga, is similarly vulnerable. Ashley Peter of USR says that they have been lucky. Although concrete culverts have been attacked for their reinforcing steel and fishplates have been stolen off the Inchanga to Cato Ridge section, closing it and cutting them off, USR has not yet been forced to cancel a train. One feels that this is just a matter of time.

I use this introduction as an example of just what problems the heritage railway operators in South Africa are facing today. The costs of maintaining and running heritage trains are rising at a prodigious rate, not helped by recent hefty increases in access fees payable to TFR and Metrorail. If one adds to that the current squeeze in discretionary spending by the South African public, the costs of dealing with crime and providing security, one has a recipe which says that for several heritage operators, their finances are being squeezed alarmingly.

We all know that South Africa is pinning much of its economic growth hope on tourism. It has been calculated by the tourism industry that each international visitor spends around R2,800 per day whilst in the country. If just once 250 international tourists were to stay on one extra day to ride a steam train somewhere in this vast country, the extra income for South Africa for that day would be at least R700 000! What if that happened once a month? At least R8 million would be

added to the nation's tourism income every year. Now think, what if that happened weekly? What if that happened daily? R250 million per annum added to the tourism income would not be unachievable by the heritage rail industry.

In another example, each local tourist group travelling on an FOTR train spends about R200 per person during their day in Cullinan. Given FOTR's current train schedule, that equates to an income for the little town of Cullinan of around R2 million per annum! These figures do not include the purchase of train tickets. What would the total be if we included Atlantic Rail's passengers' expenditure in Simon's Town, Ceres or Stellenbosch? What if we added in Reefsteamers' passenger expenditure in Magaliesburg; then add Apple Express and USR too?

South Africa once had the very good tourism slogan "*a world in one country*". That neatly illustrates the diversity of facilities, cultures and activities available here. Aimed at individuals spending "spare" income, tourism is by its nature competitive. Tourists seek value for money, but for many that value must include interesting, different and unusual things to do. We have to compete on the world's stage for the tourist dollar and one effective way to do that is to expand the variety of unique activities available at every possible opportunity. The heritage steam railway experience is one such unique opportunity. Yet all heritage railway operators are battling to survive, getting by on the smell of a literal oil rag. Our industry gets almost no recognition from the authorities, receives no subsidies or official assistance. Isn't it time that the powers-that-be sit up and take notice? To realise what an opportunity heritage railway operators are offering and grasp it with both hands?

Perhaps the problem lies in part with the heritage operators themselves, with their structures. Most, if not all of them, operate as non-profit, part-time volunteer-run "clubs" using rolling stock on generous loan from Transnet Foundation. Most are not structured as proper businesses with professional management and full-time dedicated employees. Most own no assets of their own to speak of and thus have no real "balance sheet" to show potential investors and financiers. Most have by professional business standards weak marketing and administration. Many could not stretch to run their trains more than once or twice a month even if they wanted to. They simply do not have sufficient dedicated manpower.

It is probably the time for our heritage railway industry to look towards becoming more professional and much more tourist-oriented and to reconsider the "club-like" business model that has been used to date. There are those who have made that transition – Rovos Rail – albeit at a significant cost. There are challenges to doing this. Adopting a new business model that attracts capital and business expertise is among the first of those challenges. Changing the mind-set of the very dedicated heritage railway enthusiasts that run them may be another.

Certainly, publically acknowledging and applauding the huge contribution made by those who worked long and hard at the outset to preserve our railway assets against all odds and get this industry off the ground to where it is now will be in order.

**HRASA Board of Directors**

## HRASA purpose and status clarified

There seems to be considerable misunderstanding amongst HRASA's members as to the purpose and status of HRASA. In particular HRASA's efforts to bring the matter of heritage training under its wing has brought considerable criticism from some of its members. Some members see this as attempt by HRASA to hijack and control some of their own affairs or to limit their choices.

HRASA is not in charge of any of its other member operators, nor does it want to be. HRASA is not telling its members what to do, but is providing necessary services designed to raise the standards and credibility of the heritage rail industry. For HRASA to expect its members to make use of those common services is not unreasonable.

HRASA is here to assist and help its member operators, not to hinder them. HRASA is a body that represents its members and theoretically does its members' common bidding. The member operators' inputs and requirements should drive HRASA but member apathy is such that the board of HRASA decided to take the initiative and has had to deal with known pressing problems of which the members either were unaware or more likely did not care. Which is not to say that these were not serious problems and issues – not caring does not make important issues go away. This decision has proved somewhat unpopular in some quarters. But, to avoid the possibility of the industry being sanctioned or even closed down due to the non-compliance and ignorance should a possible incident occur within even just one operator, HRASA simply had to act in the interests of the majority of its members (and that is what HRASA is there for).

Training and safety are two very serious areas that cannot be short-cut. Poor or lax training impacts directly upon safety. Poor or lax training can also impact directly on a member operator's public liability should there be an occurrence happen that affects a member of public or even a worker. We owe it to ourselves as members to be as professional and as safe as possible at all times. That means professional training conducted to the best standards and with a solid paper-trail to accompany it.

At a workshop held immediately after the last HRASA AGM, the representatives present from the various HRASA member organisations addressed the problematic training issues, then deemed a priority. It was accepted and agreed that training and certification in the heritage rail industry was "in a shambles" or at best disorganised and unsatisfactory. It was accepted that there was no standardisation and that some operators were not compliant in that many critical grade personnel certifications were invalid or had expired, yet they were still operating. It was also accepted that there was only one certified steam assessor in the whole country and that, for a while, even he was not registered with TETA, regrettably making the assessments he had done during that period invalid – this would create a serious public liability nightmare if an incident had occurred whilst such person was driving. It was accepted that there was a potential continuity problem should the assessor become permanently unavailable for any reason. Nobody to do the assessments would mean no certified drivers, for example.

Furthermore, it was a fact that at least TFR was seriously considering pulling the plug on all heritage operators because of the perceived poor compliance and training issues – they (TFR) recognised that they were also being exposed to these risks. HRASA's timely intervention and actions have prevented that.

I am sure you are all aware that the railway operating environment and the bureaucracy surrounding it are becoming ever more convoluted and ever more strict. With the RSR's plans for licensing safety critical personnel and with TFR's proposal for annual refreshers (if we let them), there is a need for a common "certification issuing institution" in the heritage rail industry and a sane, common, defined set of "rules".

In terms of the current TETA regulation, an individual (even if registered as an assessor) cannot issue certificates on his own cognisance. This must be done under the auspices of a training institution registered with TETA. That institution in effect takes responsibility for the assessor's credentials and his assessments. HRASA also deems it is necessary to ensure that more than one assessor is available and is certified and registered with TETA for continuity.

With a gap that needed to be filled to meet the onerous requirements for certification, HRASA has taken on the role of becoming a registered training institution and to create and "manage" a pool of registered trainers and assessors and to adopt, maintain and develop the unit standards as applicable to our industry. HRASA itself will not do the actual training: the operators are free to use whoever they wish, so long as they are registered trainers and are approved. Qualified and registered assessors will still do assessments and will certify the person as competent. HRASA in recognising the competence of the assessor and trainers involved, will then issue the certificate of competence to the person under its registered authority. It is regarded as bad practice, even if it was permitted, for each operator to certificate itself. Besides, that would mean that each operator would then also have to register with TETA as a training institution, another thorn in each operator's side.

HRASA is in the process of registering with TETA, but this is a lengthy and complex process, which is why HRASA is not formally registered at present.

For this all to work, it is essential that the heritage rail operators buy into the process, which is what we thought had happened when we got the mandate after the AGM. Because no operator volunteered or seemed to have the capacity, this project was handed over to two board members to manage and implement, which they have been doing, but getting there is not an overnight process.

That is where we are, except that a lack of understanding and a lack of communication within some of the member operators from their own designated HRASA reps seem to have created unease and ill-feeling about what HRASA is doing. I for one will push for HRASA to workshop this with all concerned to resolve this problem. Furthermore, the fact that HRASA was made aware of alleged non-compliances and acted upon that possibility for the good sake of the industry seems to have generated more grievances and a backlash. This should not be so. The non-compliances detected affect not only that operator but reflect upon the industry as a whole.

Believe me, behind the scenes HRASA is working with various organisations like the RSR, etc on common heritage rail issues. HRASA is dealing with much of the "politics" affecting the industry and saving a lot of grief for its members. HRASA's members might not see any visible or immediate benefits because HRASA does not interfere in its members' day-to-day operations. But if that was not happening, member operators would definitely see the negative side and their volunteers personnel would all have a lot less time to spend with their families.

I myself have been spending 3 to 4 mornings each week for several months now (with more to come) at the RSR giving input and oversight on behalf of HRASA and its members into new RSR Standards Technical Committee and into several new RSR standards being developed (yes, more bureau-crazy if you like!). That HRASA (through me) is doing that on behalf of everybody and for free (oh well, for the paltry annual HRASA subs fee which goes to HRASA, not me!). Consider this: If each operator that decided to resign from HRASA needed to do just that one thing on its own behalf, consider the duplicated man-hours that would collectively demand. Do HRASA's members have that capacity? And so it goes.

HRASA does believe in member discipline. This is necessary to ensure that we act responsibly and present a professional and competent face not only to the media and public whose lives we take in our hands, but also to the organisations we interact and have memoranda with, such as the RSR, TETA, PRASA, and others. I am sure that as professionals, we all must accept that.

I believe that HRASA members really do need HRASA and would be absolutely foolish to consider resigning. HRASA's members must not blindly follow what lemmings may do! HRASA's members must be active in determining what HRASA does, must participate and must take an active role in HRASA processes to achieve maximum benefit. HRASA is not a spewing-out organisation, spoon-feeding passive members, but should be an active, participative association working for mutual benefit. That's how I see it and that's why members must take an active role in its affairs and contribute positively – to create a strong representative body.

## **New Railway Safety Standards are to be issued as “Regulator Standards”**

Work at the Railway Safety Regulator continues unabated on creating new standards covering areas of railway safety systems that are not yet addressed.

HRASA, represented by Stephen Appleton (Rail Safety Director), is a full member of the RSR’s Standards Technical Committee. HRASA is also participating actively in each of the individual Standards Working Groups to ensure that the new standards when published are not in conflict the needs and requirements of its members, the heritage railway operators.

There is to be a major shift in the way that RSR standards are to be published and regulated. Until now, the RSR’s standards have been published by the SABS through its TC 1066 committee as joint RSR and SANS (national) standards. The RSR has made the observance of those SANS standards compulsory by regulation.

New standards in preparation will, henceforth, be published by the RSR as “Regulator Standards”. The first reason for this change is the fact that the railway industry environment in South Africa is evolving rapidly. In the opinion of the RSR, the SABS editing and publishing process is too lengthy (up to two years to publish a standard). The RSR believes therefore that it is simply unable to publish new or updated standards quickly enough to meet industry changes. The second reason is that by its nature, not being a regulatory body, the SABS can only publish “voluntary” standards. As a consequence, a question has been raised by at least one major operator about the legal enforceability of the present SANS 3000 series of standards deemed compulsory by the RSR.

New standards which will become Regulator Standards in preparation by the RSR are:

RSR 002-3-1: “Railway safety management, Technical requirements for engineering and operational standards — Rolling stock; Part 2-3-1: Rolling Stock Wheels, Axles and Bearings” which seeks to extend the technical standard relating to rolling stock.

RSR 003: “Railway safety management, Part 3: Railway Occurrence Management” in which operators will be required to create, implement

and integrate an Occurrence Management System into their safety systems and operations.

RSR 004-1: “Railway safety management, Part 4-1: Human factors management; Fatigue Management” in which operators will be required to ensure that safety-related workers do not carry out their work while impaired by fatigue, assess risks relating to fatigue and include a fatigue risk management system as an element of their SIPs.

The technical standard that was slated to become SANS 3000-2-7: “Railway safety management – Part 2-7: Technical requirements for engineering and operational standards - Railway Stations” is very new and has not yet been edited by the SABS. It is now proposed to publish it as a regulator standard, RSR 002-7.

In addition to the above, three other standards are in editing at the SABS. They are:

SANS 3000-1: “Railway safety management Part 1: General.” This will replace the present 2009 version of this standard.

SANS 3000-2-1 Railway safety management Part 2-1: Technical requirements for engineering and operational standards - Electrical infrastructure and SANS 3000-2-3 “Railway safety management, Part 2-3: Technical requirements for engineering and operational standards - Rolling stock.”

All of these are well progressed and, for the moment, are likely to remain with the SABS.

It remains to be seen how the new publishing regime of Regulator Standards works out, how they integrate into the existing SANS standards and how well these are accepted by the industry at large. Certainly the RSR is doing all it can to ensure maximum industry consultation and involvement by adopting and using similar technical committee structures as in place at the SABS and ISO, and in accepting public comment before final publication.

On the face of it, these new standards should be well crafted and become an asset to the industry rather than a hindrance even if they are not “national” standards.