



22 July 2022

Dear fellow RSSA members –

DISPOSAL OF LOCOMOTIVES

As you are no doubt aware, the Umgeni Steam Railway NPC preservation group has been particularly hard hit by the recent devastating floods in KZN. It has already spent in excess of R850 000 on repairs to the Old Main Line, without any assistance from Transnet or any other government agency. An appeal for donations from Society members and the public has realised a fair amount, but this has only covered a small part of the shortfall. The short-term plan is to try and reinstate part of the line – the 12km section from Inchanga to Botha's Hill – so that reasonable length public train trips can be run to generate income to at least cover fixed expenses, but the challenge remains how to fund the repair of the rest of the line as the available funds are rapidly running out – in fact most of the money spent thus far has had to be borrowed. Estimates on the total repair cost of the 34 areas of damage on the 30km section of track are in the region of R2,5 million. Unless other income can be generated to help keep USR afloat, it faces the unimaginable threat of liquidation in its 40th year of existence.

One reluctant suggestion in terms of raising emergency funds involves the disposal of a number of the steam locomotives currently stranded at Mason's Mill in Pietermaritzburg. The background to these locomotives is that they were part of Umgeni Steam Railway's erstwhile Mason's Mill depot, but USR was evicted from the premises many years ago when Transnet Property decided to lease it out to a private tenant at a market-related rental. The locomotives could not be relocated as Transnet Freight Rail had imposed a rigid ban on the operation or haulage of steam locomotives on core freight routes such as the Natal Main Line. USR initially managed to persuade the new tenant of the depot to store the locomotives within its fenced security area, but some years ago they reneged on this agreement and summarily pushed the engines out onto an unsecured siding outside their depot, citing health and safety audit issues.

As USR is highly unlikely to be able to rescue and/or make use of these locomotives, which have been systematically stripped of non-ferrous metals by informal scrap collectors, after much soul-searching, it has reluctantly been proposed that they be disposed of. Two of the locos technically belong to the Railway Society of Southern Africa, having originally been donated to the RSSA, who then loaned them to USR to use as they saw fit. These locos are:

Class 15F no. 3149, previously donated to the now defunct RSSA Cape Northern Branch by SA Transport Services,
Class S2 no. 3778, previously donated to the RSSA Natal Branch by SA Transport Services.

Ideally, if members have any knowledge of individual/s and/or organisation/s that would be prepared to purchase the locomotives at the equivalent of their scrap value, this would of course be the preferred option. Anyone taking the locomotives over would however need to be prepared to remove them from site in their current condition and at their own expense. Should there be no-one prepared to purchase the locos under these conditions, the only workable solution would appear to be to offer them for sale as scrap – failure to do this will in all likelihood result in them eventually being informally cut up by the local populace, as happened to the SANRASM locomotives at Chamdor, with no financial benefit to the railway preservation fraternity.

We would like to urgently hear from the RSSA membership about their thoughts on the proposals listed above. As mentioned, the current USR financial situation is dire and a decision about the future of these locomotives needs to be made sooner rather than later. Please contact either the Chairman or Treasurer of Umgeni Steam Railway, or the National Chairman of the RSSA, whose contact details appear below, with any comments or suggestions that you may have.

Kind regards

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