



# GWR Steam Railmotor and Trailer Project

Great Western Society, Didcot Railway Centre, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 7NJ. Registered Charity No 272616

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## Heritage Lottery Fund awards £768,500 towards restoration of historic GWR Steam Railmotor and Trailer combination



A GWR railmotor and trailer combination, photographed before World War I. These vehicles are almost identical to those being restored by the Great Western Society.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £768,500 to the Great Western Society's Steam Railmotor and Trailer Project for the restoration of the original timber bodies and steel underframes of 1908-built GWR steam railmotor No. 93 and 1912-built trailer No. 92. The award, which was made following a visit by senior HLF personnel to Didcot Railway Centre in June, has provided an enormous boost to the project, which has already completed much of the design and construction work needed to create a new power bogie with vertical boiler to replace the original that was scrapped when the railmotor was converted to a trailer in 1934.

Great Western Society Chairman, Richard Croucher, said: "We are absolutely delighted about this award. We always felt that we had a strong case for restoring these unique vehicles and the level of support and interest shown by HLF in what we are doing has been extremely encouraging. I am certain that our success is largely due to the highly detailed application compiled by Graham Drew – project manager for the body and underframe restoration of the vehicles – which addressed not only the areas of engineering and restoration, but also focused on the historic interpretation and educational aspects of the project."

Railmotor No. 93 is the sole survivor of the 99 Edwardian railmotors operated by the Great Western Railway. The railmotor and 'matching' 70ft trailer No. 92 occupy a seminal place in railway history,

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representing the very beginnings of ‘multiple unit’ operation, now of course the mainstay of passenger rolling stock on the modern railway.

Sheena Vick, Heritage Lottery Fund Manager for the South East, said: “The age of steam is one of this country’s greatest gifts to the world. These vehicles stand today as a visible reminder of our proud industrial past and as the link to modern travel. We are proud to help restore them to their former glory for a whole new generation to enjoy.”

As the Heritage Lottery Fund is unable to provide financial support for the construction of replicas, the grant will be applied purely to the restoration and conservation of the original timber bodies of the two vehicles, as well as the refurbishment of the surviving underframes – including return of the steam railmotor’s underframe to the original design to accept the power bogie. Other running gear and original fittings will also be refurbished.

The replica engine unit or ‘power bogie’ for the railmotor – an essential part of the project – is already at an advanced stage of construction, having been built from scratch funded by donations from Great Western Society members and the public. The frames, wheelsets, springs, cylinders and valve chests have been assembled at Tyseley Locomotive Works in Birmingham and a new vertical boiler has been manufactured and steam tested at the Bradford works of Israel Newton & Son.

Dennis Howells, engineering leader for the power bogie, said: “We knew from the start that if the project was to stand a chance of success we had to build the power bogie first. We also knew that there could be no Lottery funding for that part of the project, so we just had to get on and do it. Working from original drawings, supplemented by detailed research, we have reached the point where we almost have a complete and accurate reproduction of a GWR railmotor engine. The fact that so much has already been achieved is a strong indication of the Society’s determination to complete this landmark project and was undoubtedly a very positive factor in our bid to the HLF.”

The railmotor and trailer vehicles are now being prepared for a move from Didcot to Llangollen, where the extensive and skilled task of restoring the coach bodies will be undertaken in partnership with the award-winning carriage workshops of the Llangollen Railway. It is anticipated that the contract will enable an apprenticeship to be offered at Llangollen, helping to keep coachbuilding skills alive.

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Both the railmotor and trailer spent their last active days as departmental vehicles with British Railways serving as mobile offices. As a result, all the original seats and many internal fittings were missing when the GWS acquired the vehicles. However, by an incredible stroke of luck, a batch of the exact type of 'walkover' seats used by the GWR was found in Australia, being disposed of from old tramcars. These were made in the *same* factory in Slough, and are complete with *original* makers plates. These seats, sufficient for both railmotor No. 93 and Trailer No. 92, have already been purchased and shipped back to the UK ready for the day they are needed.

The Heritage Lottery Fund grant has dramatically brought forward the day when the railmotor and trailer will be fully restored. When the work is complete the two vehicles will operate initially at Didcot Railway Centre, taking their place at the starting point in the evolutionary line-up that culminated in the diesel railcar. Additionally it is planned that the railmotor and trailer pairing will travel to preserved heritage railways around the UK to bring this unique travel experience from the Edwardian era back to life for as many people as possible. Interestingly, several of the preserved railways on former GWR territory are routes on which the steam railmotors once worked, so there will be many opportunities to see and experience the vehicles in an absolutely authentic context.

Meanwhile, fund-raising is currently in progress for the final phase of the construction of the power bogie, comprising manufacture and machining of the valve gear and motion, as well as construction of the braking system. If you would like to make a contribution, please send a cheque, made out to *Great Western Society Ltd., Steam Railmotor Project* to Richard Croucher, Great Western Society Limited, Didcot Railway Centre, Didcot OX11 7NJ.

The first livery to be carried by the restored railmotor and trailer will be lined crimson lake as used between 1912 and 1922, with other authentic GWR liveries to be applied thereafter.

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