

# Bluebell Railway Pullmans Strategy Update

11 October, 2015

The withdrawal from service of Lilian has left the Golden Arrow train significantly short of seating capacity. Recent proposals for dealing with this have included overhauling Lilian or Carina, and as a short term measure hiring a Pullman car. The short term hire option has so far come to nothing, a quote for the repair of Lilian's body structure is prohibitively expensive, and Carina is not necessarily the ideal vehicle. So the board recently established a Pullmans Working Group to evaluate the best way forward for the Golden Arrow train.

At its first meeting the group reviewed from scratch the requirements for this train, and came up with this set of criteria:

- Passenger accommodation formed exclusively of Pullman cars – experience has shown that providing accommodation in a non-Pullman carriage, even a nice first-class vehicle, is not really good enough for a top-rank service.
- Sufficient seats to ensure commercial viability – the formation with Lilian had provided 104 seats, and frequently all were occupied. With some of the operating costs being fixed irrespective of the number of carriages, the present shorter train is less viable.
- Strong preference for 1920s/1930s cars – our previous experience with the 1960s car Eagle showed that a modern Pullman car just does not provide the right experience. Carina, a 1950s car, is not as ornate inside as the older cars, not having the fancy marquetry panels.
- Ability to accommodate wheelchair users – we have not so far been able to provide wheelchair-accessible accommodation in Pullman cars, their mode of construction and interior layout preventing the sort of conversions which have been done on our Mk1s. Only a car with double doors, such as a brake vehicle, will be suitable for this.
- Redundancy of provision of all essential facilities to allow for failures, repairs and overhauls – The previous formation of Christine, Lilian, Fingall and the BGZ just provided the required facilities, so every vehicle was critical to the service, and any unplanned repairs or planned overhauls were a severe problem. Additional vehicles are needed so that every required facility can be provided by more than one vehicle.
- A mix of first-class and third-class seating to cater for various customer demand – Whilst the third-class seating is generally more in demand, there is also demand for the first-class seating, and in particular the coupé, which varies slightly according to season.

Lilian, Carina, and Car No 54, along with Fingall and Christine, will all be required to fulfil this set of requirements. With Lilian overhauled, the best use for Carina is to fit it with first-

class seating and a coupé, as it originally was, so it becomes functionally equivalent to Fingall. The brake vehicle Car No 54 can be adapted for wheelchair access by using the luggage doors, and the luggage space can be used for servicing facilities.

The group's initial analysis of funding possibilities has identified Car No 54 as the vehicle for which funding would most easily be obtained, so the schedule of overhauls is proposed to be in the order Car No 54, Lilian, Carina. The former Gilbert car Constance is not being considered at this stage, partly owing to the unknown issues dealing with its sawn-in-half underframe, but also it is a much smaller vehicle, however in the fullness of time it could have a useful role in supplementing the formation.

Work will commence with planning the way in which Car No 54 can be adapted for wheelchair access and to provide the service facilities currently in the BGZ. This was converted to a brake from a kitchen-third, and has closer window spacing than the other cars, resulting in a seating layout with two rows of seats facing the backs of the next seats, which is unsuitable for our purposes. This can be remedied by altering the window spacing to match the other cars. Note that this follows the Pullman Car Co's practice of altering its cars to suit changing commercial needs. As yet we do not have a plan for the layout of the non-seating areas, and it will be a challenge to fit in all the facilities currently provided in the BGZ.

Investigation will also take place into possible ways of carrying out the body structure overhaul of Lilian as an alternative to the contractor job for which we already have a quotation which would make its overhaul twice as expensive as either of the other two. (The issue with Lilian is the different design and construction, with a minimal underframe and a steel body structure which gives it the strength, and which is now severely corroded. The Pullman Car Co would very likely have scrapped it.)

In the meantime the exchange of ownership of Doris and Carina with the 5Bel Trust is now taking place, with Doris shortly to be leaving the railway for its new main-line career.

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