Construction Work Starts at Downpatrick and Co Down Railway

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The gallery will house the collection of unique and historic railway carriages, which come from all over Ireland as well as the local Belfast and County Down Railway line.

Attending the event, South Down MP Margaret Ritchie, commented: “I strongly welcome the commencement of work on this exciting new project, part of which will provide interpretative displays to explain the heritage and history of each carriage to visitors. No doubt this will provide improved access and enjoyment of the museum for all.

This grant of £450,000 will preserve this important railway heritage for years to come, and through the enhanced visitor experience, a greater number of people will have the chance to learn about the social and economic significance of the railways, and I am delighted that this grant was awarded to such a worthwhile project.”

Railway Chairman, Michael Collins, added: "After nearly five years of planning and application process it is immensely gratifying to see the first pile being driven into the ground.

"It is great to see the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Northern Ireland Tourist board not only investing in the Downpatrick & Co. Down Railway, but also the heritage railway sector in general, helping to make Northern Ireland the premier steam and heritage railway destination in Ireland," he said.

Mr. Collins, continues: "This is especially true in these tough economic times, and the heritage railway sector is a perfect example of local people helping make a difference in the community, as well as helping provide work for local construction firms."

The construction work is being carried out by Annalong firm Glasgiven Contracts Ltd, and Armstrong Taylor, Consulting Civil & Structural Engineers. Work is expected to be completed at the end of 2011. The new Gallery will allow visitors unhindered access to the DCDR's unique carriage collection outside of operating days.