Heritage Railway Development on Track

02/08/2010

The funding was awarded to the volunteer-run heritage railway museum and will be used to construct a Carriage Viewing Gallery that will allow visitors to learn more about Ireland's important railway heritage during their visit.

Railway Chairman, Michael Collins, said: "We are absolutely delighted by this award. Our collection contains items of national importance, for example, we have one of only two Irish Royal Saloon carriages still in existence, one item in our unique collection of railway carriages from all parts of Ireland."

He continues: "Most of these carriages are either safely locked away in sheds or under tarpaulins to protect them from the weather – meaning we cannot show them to the public, and many people who ask if it possible to see them have to be disappointed.

"This grant will change all that, and provide all-year round access to our vintage carriage collection".

Mr. Collins also added: "The award will also bring in much needed construction sector jobs to the local economy."

As well as giving visitors access to the carriages, the 'Downpatrick Carriage Viewing Gallery' project will highlight the important contribution made by the railways to the social and economic development of Ireland in general and Northern Ireland in particular.

Commenting on the announcement, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: "This exciting project will highlight the important link between our transport heritage and the development and advancement of our society."

He continues: "Each carriage is important to this history and the project will illustrate the connection between the railway and developments in County Down and other parts of the railway system in Ireland.

"The gallery will provide safe access to these historic vehicles for the public to learn from and enjoy, and will enable them to benefit from a greater involvement in Ireland's transport heritage. We are delighted to be involved in this project".

A range of interpretation features, including displays, signage and audio/visual aids, will be designed to explain the heritage and history of the various carriages to increase learning opportunities and provide an enhanced visitor experience.

In addition to the improvements on site, a programme of outreach and educational activities will be developed to further open up this collection to a wide range of groups. This work will include the development of an education pack for use in local schools.

Funding for the project was awarded through HLF's main funding programme, 'Heritage Grants'. The programme provides grants of over £50,000 for projects that allow people to explore, preserve and celebrate the wide range of heritage, from their cultural and industrial past to green spaces and natural environment.

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage.

Since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £135 million to projects across Northern Ireland.

The first railway in Ireland was opened in 1834 and covered a route of only six miles. By its peak in 1920, Ireland as a whole had 3,400 miles of railway, of which less than half remains today.

Downpatrick and Co Down Railway is an accredited museum which is dedicated to preserving and enhancing our local railway heritage. Staffed entirely by volunteers it is Northern Ireland's only working heritage railway, offering a passenger service between Downpatrick and Inch Abbey.

Further information

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