



NEWS VIEW

An Operator's View

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My interest in signalling started at an early age. I joined the LMS railway as a junior booking clerk and became friends with a signaller who was happy to teach me the rudiments of signalling, and in due course to ring the bells and pull the levers. I expect many of us started that way. When I returned from HM Forces I followed the usual promotion ladder, through the grades of stationmaster and yard master, into divisional management at Nottingham, which is when I came into regular contact with signal engineers. This was the post-Beeching era, when there were many signalling schemes, mainly rationalisation, being developed, but it was also the time of the lead up to Derby and Trent power signalboxes. Cab riding in diesels opened up a new world, and I began to appreciate more clearly the importance of the driver/signal interface and the need to get it right.

The signal engineer has three customers to consider – the operator, the signaller and the driver. By now I had moved to Birmingham as Superintendent and soon met Fred Kerr, the DS&TE, who invited me to join the IRSE as an associate. It was a turning point in my life. I began to attend IRSE meetings and conventions, and saw the importance of having an efficient interface between the provider and the end user. How did the signal engineer know exactly what the signaller and the driver needed to do their job safely and efficiently? Was there an adequate operating input? How did the operator know what was available? My membership of the IRSE was becoming invaluable.

In 1977 I went to BRHQ as Signalling Officer in the Operations Department, but much of my time was spent in the S&T Department with Ken Hodgson, Viv Brown and Co. Level crossings began to take up a lot of our time, and brought contact with the Inspecting Officers of the Railway Inspectorate, especially Tony Townsend Rose and Kit Holden. It was an exciting time, with the development of solid state interlocking, computerised route setting, and VDUs. We also developed RETB during this period to save a number of lines from closure, which involved the BR Research Department, and created some interesting new contacts.

I retired in 1982, but continued to follow my lifelong interest in signalling and accident investigation, almost as a hobby. Then in 2000 the IRSE did me the great honour of electing me an Honorary Fellow for my support of the Institution as an operator.

In today's fragmented railway who is to represent the operator, the driver and the signaller? The need for a forum of producers and end-users is so important, yet how is it to be provided? I suggest that the IRSE could provide that forum, but needs to attract more end-users, especially drivers, as associates. The Institution of Railway Operators, worthy as it is in other directions, does not really provide that specialised forum.

Stan Hall MBE, Honorary Fellow IRSE

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