

ELGIN COUNTY RAILWAY MUSEUM PUBLIC SUPPORT ANALYSIS

**Presentation for –
Open House and Public Meeting
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OBJECTIVES OF THE PUBLIC SUPPORT ANALYSIS:

- Gain awareness/perceptions of the existing rail heritage programs
- Determine participation\satisfaction with ECRM programs
- Identify and gather visitor expectations
- Obtain suggestions for improved programs, services and facilities
- Collect suggestions for improved perceptions
- Solicit reaction to the planned capital/program improvements contained in the strategic plan
- Identify levels of financial support that can be expected in the short term future

PUBLIC SUPPORT ANALYSIS PHASES

Five Phases:

- Phase One: Study Initiation and Planning Activities
- Phase Two: Survey Instrument Design and Communications
- Phase Three: Data Collection and Content Review
- Phase Four: Data Consolidation and Analysis
- Phase Five: Reporting and Recommendations

STUDY METHODOLOGY

- Letter of Introduction
- Survey Instruments (7 Questionnaires)
 - Face-to-face interviews
 - Self-administered survey completion
 - Electronic survey completion
- Open House and Public Meeting
- Meetings with Strategic Planning Committee
- ECRM Brochure
- Report Preparation
- Other Communications

RESPONDENT GROUPS

- ECRM Board of Directors and members - 49
- Heritage rail community (NARHF, Southwestern Ontario Locomotive Restoration Society, Canada Southern Distribution List) - 50
- Governing Bodies (City of St. Thomas, Aldermen, Elgin County Administration, Councilors) - 11
- Elgin County Staff and Museum Advisory Board - 8
- Funding Bodies (Trillium, Ministry of Culture) - 3
- Educators - 5
- ECRM Visitors - 18
- Day out with Thomas Participants - 35

MISSION STATEMENT

To preserve, teach and display to the public the rich heritage of the railroads and their role in the development of St. Thomas and Elgin County, through the operation of a museum that meets Ministry of Culture Standards.

- The majority of respondents (75%) reported that the Mission Statement reflects the future vision of the ECRM

MISSION STATEMENT

Several reasons provided:

- Projects future of museum
- Very basic premise - covers reason for being
- Good attempt at promoting, educating and explaining what the museum is, its history, value to the community in preserving artifacts
- Direct and to the point
- Covers nature of the programs, intended audience, subject matter, geographic scope, standard of presentation concisely/completely
- Embraces all ideology

OBJECTS OF THE CORPORATION

1. *To encourage research into the history of railways servicing the people of Elgin County and the City of St. Thomas.*
 2. *To secure and preserve an accurate account of the progress and development of railways in the said County and City.*
 3. *To promote public interest in the history of railways in the said area.*
 4. *To maintain a Museum as a repository for railway equipment, relics and artefacts.*
- The very high majority of respondents (86%) believe that the Objects of the ECRM Corporation are still relevant

PARTICIPATION/SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS OF ECRM PROGRAMS

- Most respondents (79%) are satisfied with ECRM programs, services and events (45% very satisfied and 34% somewhat satisfied)
- Fairly significant number of respondents (21%) are in the middle or are somewhat dissatisfied
- No respondents reported “very dissatisfied”
- The respondents mentioned a variety of reasons why they are satisfied, not fully satisfied or dissatisfied
- Responses are mixed regarding the tours, Nostalgia and Heritage Days; however, comments on DOWT are all positive

PARTICIPATION/SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS OF ECRM PROGRAMS

What Respondents Like about ECRM Programs/Services/Events:

- Educational and nostalgic value
- Knowledgeable tour guides
- Dedication of volunteers and self-less efforts
- Historic railway shop building; authentic atmosphere
- Rolling stock display is excellent
- Trains and equipment up close are impressive
- Restoration program
- Very interesting, organized, creative, consistent

PARTICIPATION/SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS OF ECRM PROGRAMS

What Respondents Do Not Like about ECRM Programs/Services/Events:

- Little change in displays; generally very static & lack professionalism; no self-guided tour available
- Education function is not well developed
- Nostalgia & Heritage weekends need to be revamped
- Centers on model railway
- Difficulty in finding the entrance
- Major portion of the back shop is closed off to the public
- Events seem to be limited to show and sale type events which are not the best way to communicate aspects of rail history
- Artifacts have to be put away to give vendors space
- Not enough public involvement

PARTICIPATION/SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS OF ECRM PROGRAMS

Partnering:

- The majority of respondents (60%) are interested in partnering with other organizations in the railway community
- Several respondents (25%) are uncertain about partnering
- Respondents suggested partnering (over 30 mentions each) mainly with:
 - PSTR for DOWT and train rides
 - NARHF for Nostalgia Days, tours, special events, Iron Horse Festival, education programs, fundraising
- Less often SOLRS, the Downtown Development Board, the Elgin County Museum were mentioned

PARTICIPATION/SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS OF ECRM PROGRAMS

What Respondents Like About ECRM Exhibits

- Scale and authenticity; real train artifacts add realism; 5700 is a superb example
- Well displayed, organized, identifiable, interesting, informative and educational
- “Hands on” aspect that you can touch and feel
- Restoration is well done, accurate and true to prototype
- Plaques and signs invaluable to visitors; very well labelled
- Model railway division and telegraphy display are excellent
- “wonderful atmosphere of a fabrication and repair facility; sound of locomotives in operation again; tremendous size of steam and diesel locomotives; passenger interpretation; restoration activities”

PARTICIPATION/SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS OF ECRM PROGRAMS

What Respondents Do Not Like About ECRM Exhibits

- Structural problems limit space, affects the exhibits; rolling stock and artefacts not presented in the best interests of the museum
- Collections are mainly static; no interpretation/audio visual; more hands on items, multi-media and modern technology needed in the displays
- Too dirty, dark, cold, damp, disorganized, overcrowded
- Insufficient/poor signage; better labelling required with more information on the items, their use and purpose
- Has a look of poor controls to preserve the artefacts
- Put together by untrained volunteers; could look more professional
- No orientation for visitors and no structure to the exhibition
- The exhibit space opens directly to the outside putting the artefacts at risk; too much natural light in the current exhibit room

EXPECTATIONS/SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAMS, SERVICES, FACILITIES

43% of respondents had suggestions for improving ECRM programs/services/events; 56% did not have any

Suggested Improvements:

- More events related to railroad history
- Education programs for adults/children
- Full time staff; more volunteers and young people
- State-of-the-art, interactive exhibits; virtual display; computer simulation; media sound and pictures
- More museum marketing/promotion
- Improve displays; better signage
- Preserve and save treasured rolling stock
- Involve professionals and form partnerships

EXPECTATIONS/SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAMS, SERVICES, FACILITIES

36% of the respondents reported that there are other programs/services/events that they would like to see offered at the ECRM;

Other programs/services/events suggested:

- Educational/teaching programs; children's workshops in a classroom about railroad history; teach youth about the restoration of locomotives; speakers program; adult education workshops on equipment maintenance, track repair
- Train rides
- Virtual cab with chance to work controls

EXPECTATIONS/SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAMS, SERVICES, FACILITIES

- Majority of respondents (57%) do not know if there are any existing programs/services/events that ECRM should no longer provide
- Several respondents (38%) reported that there are no existing programs that should not be provided
- Majority of respondents (70%) do not know if there are any future programs/services /events that the ECRM should not undertake
- For those (11%) suggesting future endeavors that should not be undertaken, risky ventures, taking on more equipment just because it is available, ventures that competed with NARHF were mentioned

EXPECTATIONS/SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAMS, SERVICES, FACILITIES

Short Term Future Development Suggestions:

- Repair, stabilize, renovate building including roof and windows; improve property (35 mentions)
- Form partnerships, co-operate with NARHF, PSTR, Elgin County Museum; umbrella organization (12 mentions)
- Acquire ownership of building and property (9 mentions)
- Membership drive; younger members (8 mentions)
- Hire full time staff, professional and support staff, Executive Director/Manager (6 mentions)

EXPECTATIONS/SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAMS, SERVICES, FACILITIES¹⁹

Long Term Future Development Suggestions:

- Become an important tourism destination; in the context of a Theme Park (12 mentions)
- Develop into a nationally recognized/major/unique railway heritage museum; state of the art museum; planned regional rail historical interpretive centre (9 mentions)
- Fully operational steam or diesel excursion train rides; acquire trackage rights; rail recreational corridor between London and Port Stanley (9 mentions)

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- A slight majority of respondents (57%) are prepared to provide financial donations to the ECRM once ownership is finalized most often in the \$20 to \$100 range
- Several respondents (31%) are uncertain about providing financial donations
- ECRM Board of Directors and Members (74%) are more likely to provide personal financial donations
- 48% of the respondents did not provide a financial contribution amount

BUILDING LOCATION AND DESIGN

Preference for Type of Building:

- Majority of respondents (70%) prefer that the building is renovated
- Several respondents (19%) prefer expansion or addition
- Some respondents noted a combination of renovation and expansion

BUILDING LOCATION AND DESIGN

- Very high majority of respondents (90%) reported that the ECRM should remain at its current location
- Main reason is the historical significance and railway heritage of the building (45 mentions)
- Central location in close proximity to the CASO station, downtown, PSTR and the railway lands was often cited (25 mentions)
- Building itself is a railroad artifact - mentioned several times (13 mentions)
- Most often, the respondents indicated that there are no reasons that would cause them to change their minds on the location of the ECRM (18 mentions)
- Some reported the cost of acquisition, renovation, clean-up of contaminated lands as reasons (14 mentions)

BUILDING LOCATION AND DESIGN

- While more respondents are satisfied than not with the ECRM building, the responses are mixed - Satisfied 43%; Not Satisfied 30%; Both 18%; Uncertain 10%
- Greatest number like the historical significance and heritage of the building (33 mentions)
- Many do not like the disrepair and condition of the building with emphasis on the roof and windows (35 mentions)
- Many respondents believe that everything with the design and layout of the space is working well particularly the display areas and list the openness of the building
- What is not working well is the space limitation due to the blocked off area and the lack of proper space layout for an office, retail, educational, lunch, storage, paint and sand booths

BUILDING LOCATION AND DESIGN

Preferences and Priorities:

- The top preference for new or improved spaces include: Interactive Exhibits (91), Static Exhibits (73), Refreshment Area (68), Retail (67) and Library (66)
- The top three priorities for the ECRM building include: Roof (46) Windows (37) Repair/renovation (19)
- Most important issue roof (27)

DAY OUT WITH THOMAS

- 35 visitors completed the survey
- Everyone reported satisfaction (57% very satisfied; 43% somewhat satisfied)
- Very high majority (86%) would attend again (54% definitely; 32% probably)
- All the respondents would recommend this event to friends and acquaintances
- Majority liked the train ride and the variety of activities
- Very little that visitors didn't like about DOWT except the weather
- A few suggested more food, picnic seating, fans in the closed cars

VISITOR SURVEY

- 18 visitors completed the survey
- Almost everyone was satisfied (50% very; 44% somewhat) and these same 17 would recommend the museum
- High majority (83%) would prefer renovation of the building and the same number (15) reported the ECRM should remain at its current location
- The following new or improved spaces: refreshment area (9), interactive exhibits (8), static exhibits (6), exterior parking (4)
- Particularly liked the knowledgeable, friendly staff but did not like the cold building with the closed off area