

Railfuture Meetings Policy

Guidance Notes

Introduction:

Railfuture seeks to minimise its administrative costs so that as much money as possible from subscriptions and other income sources goes on campaigning. One of the key costs of running the organisation relates to the holding of meetings and their associated travel costs. This guidance is intended for people who have the authority to arrange meetings within Railfuture at Branch, Group and Board level. It is important to remember that in person meetings are useful to engage with stakeholders, members, potential members and the general public, but the benefits have to be balanced with the cost of holding such meetings.

This policy seeks to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted to minimise meeting costs, but not to discourage in person meetings where there are reasons for holding them because of added value. The Covid 19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated that many meetings can be successfully operated “virtually” with all the resulting savings of cost, but equally importantly, the saving of people’s time and inconvenience. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence, not just from within Railfuture, to suggest that member and stakeholder participation and engagement has been better at virtual meetings during the Covid restrictions, compared to in person meetings. These benefits must not be lost as Covid restrictions are eased.

Exclusions:

Where a meeting involves no cost to Railfuture in terms of room hire costs, or the claiming of any expenses including travel, then the considerations below do NOT apply.

Process:

This section sets out the considerations that the organiser of any Railfuture meeting should examine when a meeting is proposed:

- Is the meeting necessary at all? Can the matter be dealt with via email or a telephone conversation?
- Can the matter under consideration wait until a planned periodic meeting?
- If a meeting is necessary, can it be arranged using an IT platform, Zoom, Teams etc.? Railfuture has access to Zoom accounts which can be booked by the host.
- The fact that some participants might prefer to meet in person, is not a reason to have an in person meeting. The organiser should carefully consider whether the expected outcomes justify an in-person meeting, rather than focussing on what people might prefer.
- The potential cost of an in-person meeting in terms of room hire and travel costs (where appropriate) and the time taken up by members, who are all volunteers, needs to be properly balanced with the alternative of no meeting, or a virtual meeting.
- It has to be recognised that in person meetings are important to build new relationships and cement existing ones and to network informally. The decision to hold an in-person meeting should be based on the outcomes expected. If for example the meeting was to introduce new Railfuture members, interview a person for a role in the organisation, or involved a guest speaker that members might want to interact with to support a campaign objective, then a in person meeting may be preferable to a virtual one.

- Is it possible to arrange a hybrid meeting? (a combination of an in-person meeting with some participants joining by video link). Railfuture supports this concept and any person wishing to consider this option is advised to contact the Director of Communications or the Finance and IT Director for guidance.
- If it is decided that an in-person meeting is necessary, then the organiser should seek to minimise the associated costs. The points set out below are not absolute requirements, they are guidance that meeting arrangers have a responsibility to consider in a mature and balanced way.

In Person Meeting Considerations:

- Where are attendees coming from? If expenses are being claimed (See Railfuture expenses policy) what location is likely to minimise the overall costs of travel? It may be, if most attendees live nearby, cheaper for one person to claim more, if the net cost overall is lower, rather than to go some notional half way point.
- Does the organiser have a budget for the potential associated costs? All Branches, Groups and the Board have an annual budget. The organiser should seek permission of the budget holder to call an in-person meeting if costs are going /likely to be incurred. The budget holder must not give permission if there is no budget provision. They should seek advice of the Director of Finance and IT in such circumstances.
- What is the cost of the venue hire? Clearly organisers should try to obtain free venues if possible. If it is necessary to hire a facility, it should be within the financial limit of no more than £10 per head for the expected number of attendees. Additional costs, for example provision of refreshments, should only be considered in exceptional circumstances.
- Is the proposed venue suitable? Does it have disabled access for example. Is it accessible to public transport? Guidance is available on such matters in the form of a venue checklist, which can be accessed from the Railfuture website.
- Organisers need to make a balanced judgement between the costs of room hire and the likely associated travel expenses. For example, a dearer venue might be better value if the proposed location resulted in lower travel costs.
- The meeting organiser should ensure that he/she is able to demonstrate due diligence when any associated expenses are signed off by the meeting chair.
- It may well be that if the meetings are of a regular or periodic nature, that a combination of in person and virtual meetings may be the best solution.

Concerns and Interpretation:

This guidance is intended to assist meeting organisers make value for money decisions about holding meetings. If you have any concerns about interpretation of this guidance you should approach the appropriate Chair of the Branch, Group or Board and seek guidance.

Railfuture Governance Group
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