



Meet your train driver - Noel Playfair

'Rail Issues' caught up between shifts with long-serving train driver Noel Playfair to find out a little more about him!

"I've been working as a train driver with the rail company for many years. In fact I'll be picking up my NIRailways 25 year service badge any day now! I'm based at York Road and start and end each of my working shifts there. I know the network, timetables and our shift patterns inside out. I enjoy my working domain – the driving cab! While it's a highly responsible 'office' – with many checks, procedures and controls to comply with – there's still the thrill of the daily variety and of seeing the track and countryside changing around me."

Noel said that he is very much looking forward to the arrival of the new trains. "They'll definitely be more reliable – and more comfortable for us as well as for passengers. I'm particularly looking forward to stepping into the new drivers' cab. Several of my colleagues have had an input into drawing up its detailed specification. I'm told that they've been designed with our needs in mind. The cabs will be user-friendly and thoroughly modern, with all the benefits of the latest technology. Also, like all the drivers, I'll be taking part in a very detailed familiarisation and training programme that includes the use of a special new simulator cab."

If you're a steam train enthusiast you might well recognise Noel, with his other driving hat on. He is the driver on all of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland (RPSI) steam outings.

He explains: "I've been driving steam engines for the last 15 years. Over that time, all the older NIRailways colleagues who were familiar with steam operations have retired from the company. I think I'm the only driver left who can drive these engines. It's hard physical work – especially for the fireman, an essential support to the driver. For example, on one recent steam outing to Dublin, the fireman, Gary Moore – also a NIRailways driver – shovelled 3 tonnes of coal to keep us steaming well to Dublin." Noel added: "I tend to organise my holidays around the RPSI's outings – so that I'm available to drive on its 30-odd special steam outings each year."

If you're interested in finding out more about the work of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, a lot of information and photographs are available on their website at: www.rpsi-online.org