

Council Bureaucrats Block Rail Workers Input to Working Group

Rail and Maritime Transport Union and Unions Otago Joint Media Release

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The Chair of Dunedin Holdings Limited (DHL) has refused to allow union representation on an important stakeholder group on the future of Dunedin Railways Limited (DRL).

The RMTU wrote to DRL on 1 September requesting membership of the Council's reference group charged with overseeing submissions into the future of the council-owned company.

The union letter was signed by RMTU Otago Branch Secretary Dave Kearns, as well as Unions Otago Convenor Andrew Tait and Unions Otago Secretary Malcolm Deans, on behalf of local affiliates of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions.

The reply from DHL Chair Keith Cooper says the expertise of actual rail workers is not required because the work of the group 'is very much at the strategic level versus operational analysis at this point.'

Mr Kearns says the reply is nonsense, given the sole strategic direction shown by directors and senior managers so far has been to try and close Dunedin Railways permanently.

"This is hardly strategic thinking in terms of the best interest of ratepayers and citizens of Dunedin."

This response shows unelected managers and board chairs are firmly in charge of Dunedin's future, not elected councillors or the citizens they represent, he says.

"This is a major issue for the future of Dunedin tourism and the jobs and infrastructure. It is a political issue. Yet the elected councillors seem to be giving managers and Board Chairs the power to make political decisions they are not qualified or entitled to make."

The RMTU represents rail workers including DRL workers and led the recent Keep Dunedin Rail Rolling campaign, with the support of Unions Otago and a wide number of people in the community.

The RMTU is a Union that has always operated at a strategic level not just operational and is a significant stakeholder as to why there is a national rail system in operation in NZ today, says Mr Kearns.

The RMTU led the Take Back The Track campaign which saw infrastructure renationalized and provided the momentum for the renationalisation of the whole rail system in NZ in 2008.

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