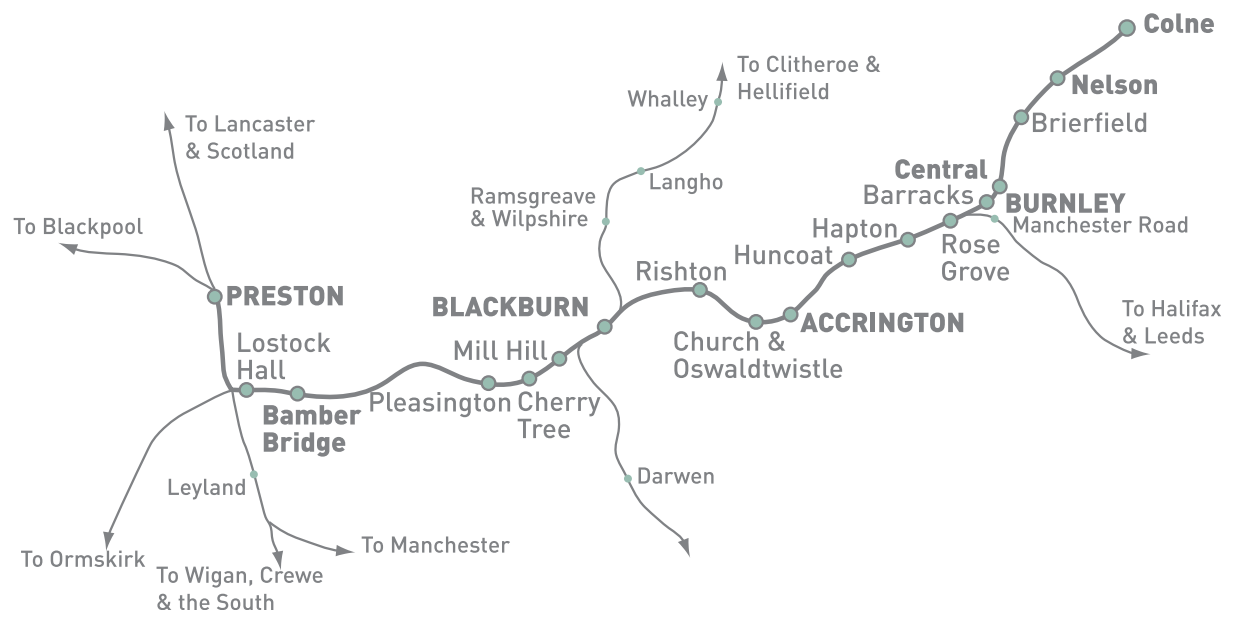


THE EAST LANCASHIRE LINE:
Preston – Blackburn – Colne

AN AGENDA FOR DEVELOPMENT
Summary

Association of Community Rail Partnerships
For Lancashire County Council,
East Lancashire Partnership,
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council,
Northern Rail

April 2005



Introduction

In October 2004 the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) was commissioned by Lancashire County Council and its partners to review options for establishing a community rail partnership for the Preston – Colne Line. Many similar lines have benefited from a partnership approach, helping improve services and facilities and increase the number of people using the railway. Today there are over 50 community rail partnerships around the UK and their work is strongly supported by the Strategic Rail Authority's Community Rail Development Strategy and the recent report by the Transport Select Committee on 'Rural Railways'.

This summary forms part of a much larger document which has been presented to the partners, launched on April 22nd 2005 at a conference in Accrington. Production of the report is only one stage in a much longer process which will involve further community consultation and discussions with stakeholders in local government and the railway industry.

East Lancashire Line Project: main partners ('the Steering Group')

- Lancashire County Council
- Blackburn with Darwen Council
- East Lancashire Partnership
- Northern Rail

The East Lancashire Line

Sleeping Princess

The East Lancashire Line, between Preston and Colne, is a sleeping princess. It serves a conurbation of some half a million people, ranging from affluent communities to some of the most deprived in England. Currently, the local stopping service does not serve any of these communities particularly well. The local service is perceived to be slow, unreliable with stations lacking in facilities and trains which are of poor quality. Part of the route is served by the Blackpool to York semi-fast service which offers a good quality east-west service but diverges at Burnley to Hebden Bridge and West Yorkshire. The section from Burnley to Colne is single line and has a residual feel to it.

The line requires significant improvement if the needs of local people, and visitors, are to be met. Currently, the service inhibits the wider regeneration of the East Lancashire corridor. Consultation revealed a high level of dissatisfaction by regular users. Use of the stopping service on the line is in effect a 'distressed purchase' – most users of the stopping service use it because they have little or no alternative.

The Northern Way

The railway should be linking up with strategies for regeneration along the corridor and feeding into 'The Northern Way' agenda for regional development.

There is substantial potential to develop the line, throughout its length. This is dependent on reaching a clear consensus on what the role, or focus, of the line is. Currently it tries to be all things to all people and fails. We believe its future potential lies in developing as a modern inter-urban route which provides medium to longer distance journey opportunities – with good bus links into the line and robust connections to InterCity services. This will raise questions over the continued relevance of some of the least well-used stations on the line.



Support

The Strategic Rail Authority's Community Rail Development Strategy, published in November 2004, creates a very positive environment in national policy terms to develop the line as a showpiece community railway. The combination of a supportive national framework, coupled with very strong community support for the line, gives considerable grounds for optimism that a qualitative leap forward can be made in terms of services and facilities along the Preston – Colne Line.

Community Rail Partnership

A community rail partnership is recommended as a means of delivering short term improvements to the stations and train service which will help generate additional ridership, which in turn will strengthen the case for further investment. A strong identity for the line should be developed which relates both to the heritage of the area and its future direction.

The East Lancashire Line

Recommendations

The recommendations propose a Community Rail Partnership for the line comprising key agencies making up a management group, with a broader stakeholder group which will ensure the Partnership is genuinely inclusive. The CRP could form part of a county-wide Railway Development Company. It is recommended that the CRP has its own dedicated CRP officer based along the line, with some administrative services supplied centrally by the RDC or LCC.

Manchester

The East Lancashire Line is not a basket case with no future potential. Throughout its length, from Colne to Preston, it has potential to provide a good quality alternative to the car for medium to long distance journeys. A key issue will be providing a through service into Manchester. The city is the undisputed regional centre and a growing number of people wish to commute, or shop, in Manchester. The train service, currently, does not offer a good option to do this. By building the case for through trains, the line – and communities in East Lancashire – can benefit from Manchester's success.

Regeneration

For the CRP to succeed it is essential that it is fully linked into wider regeneration projects for the corridor, being undertaken by East Lancashire Partnership, Elevate, the local authorities (boroughs) and County Council. There is a huge programme of development taking place within the East Lancashire corridor and the railway must be a central part of it. The message that a good quality rail service will assist regeneration and make East Lancashire a more attractive place in which to live, work and invest, should be stressed again and again.



Developing Potential

East Lancashire has a strong identity and the railway needs to re-establish its role as a central part of the communities between Colne and Preston. A community rail partnership is the means to deliver that. A CRP will face some difficult challenges but we are strongly of the view that the line has significant potential which can be realised.

The line has potential to offer some unique, agenda-setting initiatives. These include:

- a) demonstrating the potential of social enterprise applied to a local railway
- b) strong involvement of railway staff in the CRP
- c) potential for developing innovative timetable which meets local and visitor needs
- d) strong involvement with local bus operators delivering practical schemes to improve transport co-ordination
- e) longer-term potential for linking heritage railway operations with 'community' services
- f) involvement of local schools and colleges in practical schemes to raise awareness and deliver environmental improvements

Recommendations

Community Rail Partnership

- A community rail partnership for the Preston – Colne Line should be established as a matter of urgency, involving key stakeholders along the route
- Staff who work on the line (train crew and booking office) should be involved
- The CRP should be resourced by a full time officer as soon as resources permit – he or she should be based in East Lancashire
- An action plan for the CRP should be agreed as soon as possible
- Community adoption of smaller stations on the line should be a ‘quick win’

Train service

- Improved bus and community transport links
- Cross-Pennine service to call at Rose Grove and develop it as a local hub
- Improve reliability
- Build case for a through service North East Lancashire to Manchester
- Improved quality rolling stock (upgraded class 150, 156 or 158) when resources permit or possibly new rolling stock
- Improved journey times and connections at Blackburn and Preston

Stations

- Improved station facilities, through LTP 2
- Better access to and from stations
- Staffed facilities at Nelson, Burnley Manchester Road (possibly by third party ‘social enterprise’)
- Improved park and ride facilities at larger stations

Marketing the line

- The route should be branded with an appropriate name
- Trains and stations should be appropriately branded
- There should be better marketing of the service and places which the line gives access to, particularly for recreational purposes
- Early production of line guide and themed publicity by CRP
- Establish strong links with visitor attractions

Social and community enterprise

- A not for profit 'community enterprise' company should be established to work in partnership with the CRP
- The company could provide peripheral services including ticket retailing, charter trains, station cleaning and maintenance

Heritage opportunities

- The surviving heritage features should be protected and the line should link up with local heritage initiatives
- The potential for heritage operation over part of the route (Rose Grove – Colne) should be the subject of further appraisal
- This should be linked with other heritage transport services, e.g. heritage bus and narrow boat/barge

Wider Links

- A community rail partnership should be developed for both Clitheroe – Bolton and Preston – Blackpool routes. There should be discussion on whether this would include both routes to Blackpool or just the South line

Next Steps

Over the next few months ACoRP will continue working with the Steering Group and a wide range of local and regional partners to implement the recommendations from the report.

We welcome expressions of interest and potential involvement from the local community, including:

- Community groups
- Youth organisations
- Faith organisations/church groups
- Schools and colleges
- Businesses
- Trade Unions
- Tourist attractions
- Railway Staff
- Individuals



Already, a guide to the line is being produced and this will be ready in May. If you would like copies to distribute in your area, please let us know.

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Preston - Blackburn - Colne

