

Annual Report

The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership

December 2013



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Foreword by Chair

Once again it is my pleasure to write the foreword for the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership Annual Report. The main headline of 2013 is that patronage continued to increase year on year and performance, in terms of punctuality and reliability, also showed improvement. This is a great testament to the commitment and support we have received from our partnership members and staff. I would like to give a special mention to Bob Whitehouse, Community Rail Officer, and Stuart Woods, Secretary, for their continuing hard work.

In 2013, there were a number of positive developments along the line. Most notably, North Road station – which is generally regarded as the Cinderella station of the line – has seen dramatic improvements to its facilities. The improvement works are part of a joint project between Network Rail and Darlington Borough Council to modernise rail facilities in the area. Darlington Council has part funded the work using the Department for Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF). You can read more about the improvements in this report.

Bishop Auckland station also underwent some physical alterations last year to make way for the new Travel Hub. The Travel Hub, which will be staffed during opening hours, will create an important information centre at the station, providing visitors with transport and travel help. It will also provide a waiting area for passengers.

Following the adoption of North Road station by Bishop Trains, I'm proud to state that all stations along the line now have a station adopter. This means that we can expect to see even more station improvements over the coming year.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the success of Bishop Trains and their impressive ticket sales operation. Bishop Trains is now providing a booking service for international rail tickets, which represents a great opportunity to build their name and reputation around the world.

An initiative that proved a great success for the Partnership in 2013 was our heritage railway walks that took place in June. These walks coincided with the Festival of the North East and were jointly promoted with Locomotion, the National Railway Museum (NRM) in Shildon and the North East Branch of the Friends of the NRM. The walks were well attended and provided an opportunity to celebrate our historic region.

Whilst on the topic of walks, the LSTF has funded useful maps showing walking routes to our stations. It was highlighted in previous research that many Darlington and South Durham residents did not know how to get to their local station so the maps were produced to raise awareness of the station locations and ultimately encourage use.

Some very exciting news worth sharing is that Northern Rail has committed to provide an enhanced train service and publicity for the "Great Goodbye" event. This once in a lifetime opportunity to see the six remaining Class A4 steam engines together before the two transatlantic examples are returned to their museums in the USA and Canada, is quite simply the largest event the museum has ever organised. It is fitting that the Partnership can help to

facilitate this prestigious event, which will take place during the school half term in February 2014 at the 'Cradle of the Railways'.

Looking to the future, we have some challenges ahead. In response to views expressed by users of the line in a recent survey, we will continue to press for an hourly clock face timetable, a 'fit for purpose' Sunday service, more modern units and more evening services. We will also be looking to maximise the line's assets and make the most of publicity opportunities.

In this regard, I represent the Partnership at the Bishop Auckland Town Team. The group are constantly examining ways to promote tourist attractions and increase footfall in the town centre, and this forum will provide opportunities to identify cross promotion initiatives and help us to address the issue of filling off-peak capacity. One such joint promotion the Partnership is getting involved with in 2014 is the Weardale Railway and Locomotion 10th birthday celebrations. We are also seeking to work with the Hitachi project at Heighington to ensure that the train service is co-ordinated with the new plant's shift patterns.

It is a very exciting time for the Partnership and I hope you will join us in embracing the challenges of the year ahead.

Charlie Walton

Chair, Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership

Partnership objectives

The Partnership's overall aim is to raise awareness of the Bishop Line – locally, regionally and nationally. Over the last year, a number of initiatives have been delivered which have helped to increase patronage along the line. Many objectives are ongoing and will continue to be delivered in the short, medium and long-term.

Short-term

- Continue to build the business case for a regular interval hourly service, in partnership with the train operator and Network Rail
- Further develop the range of guided and self-guided walks along the line
- Continue to work with key attractions and local businesses to develop joint promotion initiatives
- Continue to roll out small-scale improvements at each station, including signage, CCTV and horticulture
- Continue to work with schools to promote rail safety and travel awareness
- Provide cycle facilities and associated signage at all stations along the line

Medium-term

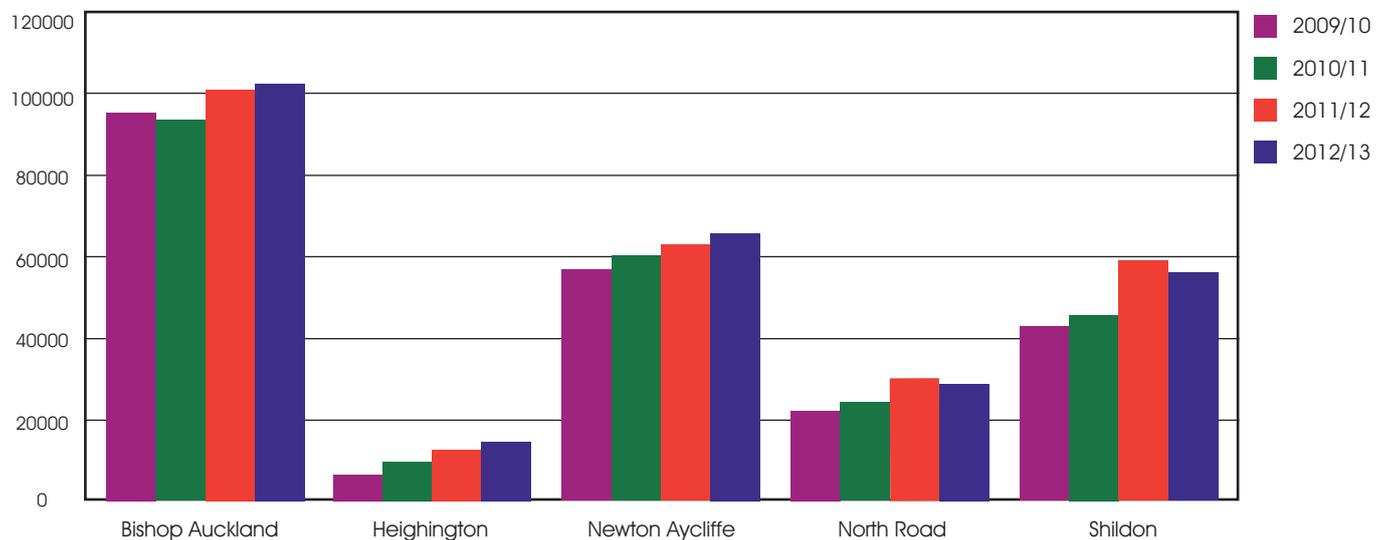
- Introduce an hourly service, based on an extension of the Saltburn to Darlington service
- Continue the Sunday service
- Introduce a later evening service (train or bus service)
- Introduce improved rolling stock (ideally an all-class 156 operation)

Long-term

- Construct a new station at North Road and extend the Head of Steam Museum
- Introduce a half-hourly tram train operation
- Devise a plan to maximum the legacy of Stockton and Darlington railway's 200th anniversary

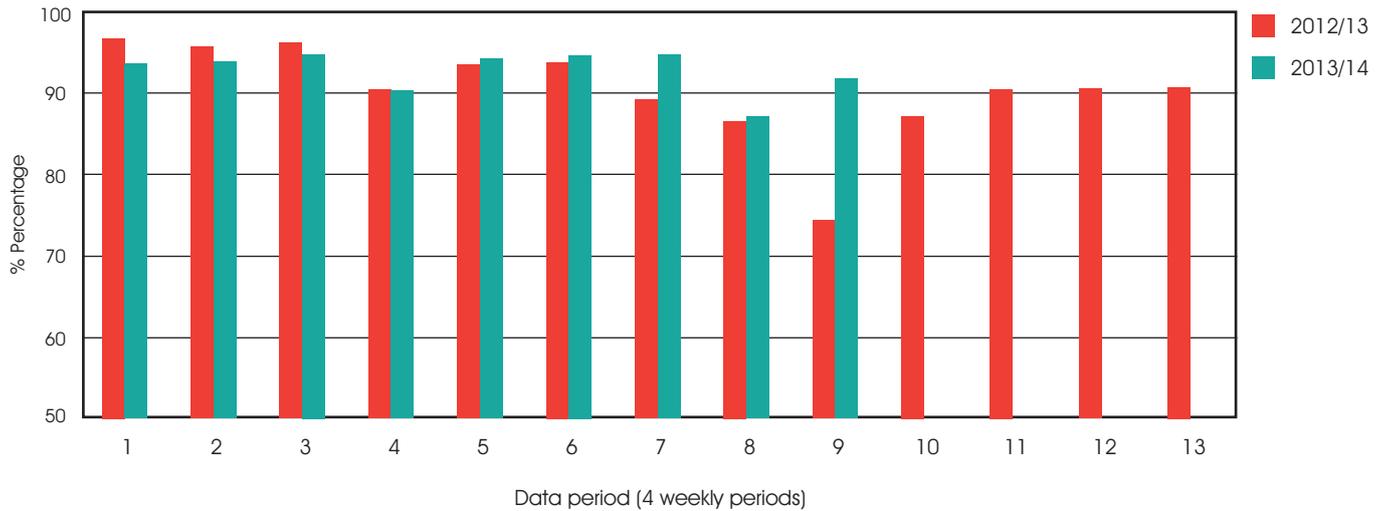
Results

Footfall



With the exception of Sildon and North Road, all stations have seen an increase in footfall in 2012/13 compared to 2011/12. It is pleasing to see that there has been a steady rise in footfall at each station since 2009. The largest percentage increases over this time can be seen at Heighington and North Road, which have experienced a 41% and 29% increase in footfall respectively. The total number of visitors to all Bishop Line stations has increased by more than 45,000 in 2012/13 compared to 2009/10.

Performance



The chart above shows the Public Performance Measure (PPM) for the Bishop Auckland to Saltburn railway line. The data compares performance from 2012/13 to 2013/14.

The PPM, which combines figures for punctuality and reliability, has followed a similar pattern in 2013/14 compared to the previous year. However, following a slight decrease in performance at the start of the 2013/14 cycle, service in 2013/14 has shown marked improvement from period 4 compared to 2012/13.

Station news

With footfall on the increase, it's more important than ever to have station facilities that meet customer requirements. This year has seen improvements to many stations all along the line, including new signage at Shildon and raised platforms at Heighington station providing improved passenger access. More improvements are planned in 2014 with customer information screen being installed at all stations early in the New Year.

North Road station improvements

Thanks to a joint initiative by Network Rail, Northern Rail and Darlington Council, North Road station has undergone some improvements to bring the station facilities in line with modern standards. Passengers are now benefitting from a new shelter with seating, improved signage and better security. Darlington Council part funded the work using the Department for Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF).



Transport Minister visits North Road station

It was pleasing to see the Transport Minister, Norman Baker, at North Road Station in June. His visit was part of his tour of the Tees Valley to review transport improvements funded by the LSTF and the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement scheme (TVBNI). The trip also provided an opportunity to meet with Michael Wilkinson and Stuart Watters of Bishop Trains who had recently announced their adoption of North Road station.



Bishop Auckland Travel Hub

The long awaited Travel Hub at Bishop Auckland is due to officially open at the end of the year. The Hub, which is funded by Durham County Council, will provide facilities and information to the travelling public and a base for the local sustainable transport organisation, Local Motion.



Station adoption groups

The Partnership is pleased to say that following Bishop Trains adoption of North Road Station back in May, all stations along the line now have a Level II adopter – a group of individuals, or an organisation, from outside the railway industry involved in the management and/or operation of a station. The Bishop Line station adopters are:

Station	Station Adopter
Bishop Auckland	Bishop Trains
Shildon	New Shildon Residents Association
Newton Aycliffe	Great Aycliffe Town Council
Heighington	Xcel Centre
North Road (Darlington)	Bishop Trains

Service news

Summer Sunday service

As a result of the changes to the Esk Valley Line – extending the number of direct trains to Whitby in the summer months – the number of direct trains running from Bishop Auckland to Whitby has reduced. Whitby is a very popular tourist destination and with just one service leaving Bishop Auckland at 7.50am, the Sunday patronage on the Bishop Line has reduced dramatically. The Partnership has made strong recommendations to Northern Rail that the temporary summer change is altered next year and through trains are restored.

Renewing the track

Track upgrades are continuing along the line to improve the journey experience for passengers. Noticeable improvements can be felt along the new tracks, even on the Pacer (Class 142) units. It is expected that most of the line will be renewed by the end 2014.

Competition with buses

Readers may well be aware that early in the year there were four bus services operating between Darlington and Bishop Auckland that were competing with the Bishop Line. Two of these were express services which provided a journey time similar to that of the train at a lower fare. During the year one of these services was withdrawn from service as it was no longer profitable. However, there has been no increase in rail patronage as a result, which suggests that rail and bus can coexist well together as they cater to two different audiences.

Onward Travel

As part of the Government's 'door-to-door' strategy – an initiative to create a more integrated sustainable transport system that enhances the whole journey experience – the Department for Transport has requested that the Partnership liaise with local bus operators to facilitate journey connectivity. A senior manager from one of the local bus operators has indicated that he will appoint someone to liaise with the Partnership. One option to improve the integration between train and bus in Bishop Auckland is to start operating Plus Bus.

Industry news

Franchising and devolution

Decisions are still to be made about franchising, in particular whether the franchising will be devolved to local authorities and how the Northern Rail franchise will be extended until the new franchise is set to commence in April 2016. The recently issued East Coast franchise prospectus creates an opportunity for lines such as the Bishop Line to be encompassed in this franchise.

As part of the franchise process, the Partnership has put forward a list of recommended improvements to the service:

1. **An hourly 'clock face', Monday to Saturday timetable.** This is a priority to address perceptions of irregularity and to encourage patronage – the service currently suffers due to lack of knowledge of train times.
2. **A Sunday service funded through the franchise.** Currently, Durham County Council and Northern Rail pay for the service, but this could be at risk if local Government spend is reduced further.
3. **Line specific marketing.** Brand awareness of the Bishop Line is still limited. From a resource and investment point of view, the rail network would benefit from an integrated national campaign delivered at a local level.
4. **Better units.** Our surveys show that passengers on the Bishop Auckland to Saltburn route don't consider themselves valued customers because of the quality of the old rolling stock.
5. **A trial of a later evening service.** The time of the last train restricts the amount of people using the train to travel for an evening out, in either Darlington or Bishop Auckland. By tapping into social activities we can help to promote rail as the preferred travel option for evenings out.

Designated Lines Conference

Research shared at the Designated Lines Conference indicates that branch line connectivity with mainline services has a direct correlation with improved economic activity. The Partnership is keen to get involved in promoting tourism in the area through rail travel, but connectivity at Darlington (Bank Top) station is difficult due to the fact that the branch line trains use the same platforms as the mainline trains. This means that Bishop Line services tend to arrive just before or just after mainline services making it very difficult for passengers to connect with the services.

Stakeholder conference

Partnership members attended a Northern Rail stakeholder conference at York shortly after the preparation of the last annual report. Northern Rail is doing quite well despite the economic downturn and are preparing a bid for the forthcoming franchise. It is understood that no additional services or stock will be introduced until there is more clarity over the new franchise.

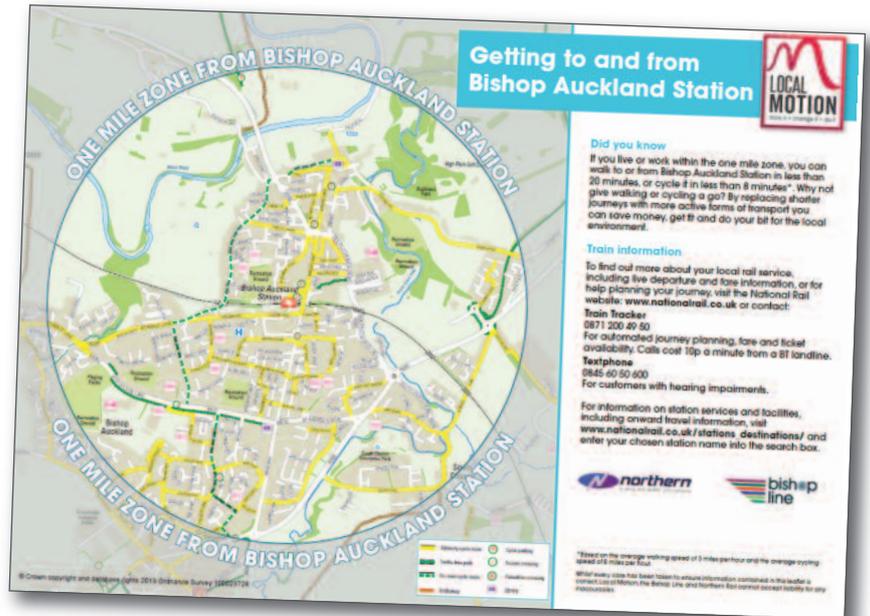
Changes at Northern Rail

Stuart Rands has now left Northern Rail and has been replaced with the interim Stakeholder Manager, John O’Grady. It is understood that Northern Rail is currently considering a restructure to provide an improvement in service to stakeholders. More details about this will be released when they are known.

Marketing collateral

Station maps

To help raise awareness of the Bishop Line stations, the Partnership has been working with the sustainable transport organisation, Local Motion, to create some station maps. The maps, which are being delivered to households within a mile of each Bishop Line station, are designed to raise awareness of the station location and to encourage more sustainable travel to and from the station. The station maps form part of Local Motion’s ‘Your guide to the Bishop Line Rail Service’ which contain timetable, fare and general rail information to encourage non users of the train to trial it.



Walking maps

Building on the success of the station maps, the Partnership is working with Local Motion to create some leisure walking routes that surround the Bishop Line stations. The walks are designed to encourage people to take the train and go for a walk in a new area.

NERA line guide

The Partnership is pleased to say that plans are advancing quickly to produce a line guide in conjunction with the North Eastern Railway Association. It is hoped that this will include a ‘then and now’ section, some information about future developments, including Hitachi, and some walking routes for rail travellers. The guide will educate train passengers on rail heritage and encourage them to explore the area surrounding the stations in more detail.

Events

MEGA Motion festival

In August the Partnership was represented at the Local Motion MEGA Motion Festival. This annual summer holiday event offers children and their families the chance to take part in arts & crafts, physical activities and competitions. The event theme is transport and travel and is designed to raise awareness of sustainable transport in the Darlington and South Durham area. The Partnership was provided with a stall to pass out information about rail travel. The event, which was held in Darlington town centre, was well attended and there was some good engagement at the rail stall.



School Transition programme

Once again the Partnership has been involved in delivering a number of transition days for pupils in Darlington. The transition days, which help to educate children about their transport options when moving from primary to secondary school, involved a session about the train and rail safety.



Nine Darlington schools signed up for the 2013 programme, involving 60 pupils in total. Each pupil that took part was awarded 'Junior Travel Ranger' status. As an ambassador for their school, the Junior Travel Rangers act as a liaison for their school, providing help and advice to classmates on how to plan their journeys to secondary school safely.

It is hoped that this programme, which is delivered through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, will be introduced into South Durham soon.

Press cuttings

Media: BBC Radio Tees

19 August 2013 – North Road station improvements

Media: Between the Lines

May 2013 & November 2013 – CRO Notes

Media: Coastliners Group

31 October 2013 – Talk about the improvements on the Bishop Line

Media: Croft Forum

20 November 2013 – Presentation

Media: Darlington and Stockton Times

13 June 2013 – Transition Day, pictured at Head of Steam Museum

Media: Northern Echo

5 February 2013 – North Road station improvements

3 June 2013 – Station adoption by Bishop Trains

13 June 2013 – Transition Day, pictured at Head of Steam Museum

19 June 2013 – Minister's visit

18 July 2013 – Mega Summer Festival

12 August 2013 – Service disruption volunteers

16 August 2013 – North Road station Improvements

Media: Saltburn Line Users

5 February 2013 – Presentation and talk about the Bishop Line

5 November 2013 – Talk about improvements and franchising

Looking forward to 2014

The Partnership is committed to delivering the short, medium and long term objectives for the Bishop Line over the coming year. Funding for the Community Rail Officer's post, which is dedicated to delivering on the action plan, has been provided until March 2015. It is uncertain if the role will be funded beyond this point as it will depend on the outcome of the East Coast Franchise decision.

Partnership members

Local authorities

Darlington Borough Council
Durham County Council
Great Aycliffe Town Council
Shildon Town Council
Bishop Auckland Town Council

Rail industry

Association of Community Rail Partnerships
British Transport Police
Network Rail
Northern Rail
Passenger Focus
Rail Trade Unions

Rail organisations

A1 Locomotive Trust
Bishop Trains
Friends of Darlington Railway Museum
Friends of the National Railway Museum
(North East Branch)
Locomotion, the National Railway Museum
at Shildon
Railway Heritage Committee
Weardale Railways Limited
Weardale Railway Trust

Community and voluntary based groups

Bishop Auckland Town Centre Forum
New Shildon Residents Association
Xcel Centre Newton Aycliffe

Membership

Membership of the Partnership is open to organisations that have an interest in rail, the Bishop Line, or improving sustainable transport in the local area. To find out more, or to become a member, please contact the Partnership.

Funders



Special thanks to TransPennine Express and CrossCountry trains for their support to the Partnership and its members.

This report is produced by the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership.

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