



THE BISHOP LINE



Contents

	INTRODUCTION	3
	KEY MESSAGES	3
1	METHODOLOGY	6
1.1	Topic Guide	6
1.2	Segmentation of Focus Groups.....	6
1.3	Recruitment of Focus Groups	7
1.4	Moderation of the Focus Groups.....	7
2	FINDINGS.....	8
	Initial thoughts in icebreaker	8
	‘Hard’ reasons for use of the train.....	10
	‘Soft’ reasons for use of the train	12
	Promotion and marketing of the Bishop Line.....	15
	Round up of views.....	19
	Comments on Bank Top Station	22
Appendix 1	Topic Guide	
Appendix 2	Strap-line Score Sheet	

INTRODUCTION

NWA Social Research was commissioned by Darlington Borough Council to undertake qualitative research with users of the Bishop Line and also Bank Top Station in Darlington. The purpose of the research was to inform the marketing strategy for use of the Bishop Line which is facing challenges both in respect of government policy, (that trains should be used for longer distances), and pricing and placing competition from bus companies. The views of Bank Top Station users were also collected by means of a separate focus group and these are also reported. However as the users of Bishop Line also are users of Bank Top Station (in the main), comments from all respondents are included in this section of the report.

KEY MESSAGES

Train travel was almost universally popular in the four groups and much preferred to bus travel. Reasons for preference were the relaxation experienced during train travel, the comfort of the journey, despite old rolling stock being used, the reliability of the trains and the safety features of train travel which included the presence of a conductor.

Reasons for the choice of train travel as opposed to bus travel were often simply the reverse of those things approved of on the train. Buses were seen, by all groups, as 'expensive for short journeys' and having 'too many stops' – making journeys long, even though the total distance achieved was relatively short. All groups referred to the frequent lateness of buses.

The majority of groups described buses as being crowded or claustrophobic, with 'no leg room', and even often 'smelly and dirty' whereas trains were thought of as clean despite the age of the carriages. .

Bus drivers were described as being 'unhelpful' in comparison to the generally pleasant and helpful approach of train conductors.

The advantages of the bus service over and above train services were the frequency of buses and that bus stops are closer to and in residential areas. The overall theme of the criticisms of the train service, and these were very few, was that there were insufficient trains, that they started too late and were not sufficiently regular through the day ('every two hours').

Trains therefore offer:

- A generally higher perceived service level than the bus.

- Are more reliable and quicker than buses and when a train service is not available additional transport is provided
- Cost less than bus travel
- Are more comfortable than buses – in part due to the design and facilities in the carriages and in part because of the way buses are perceived to be driven
- Means of payment, choice of means of payment and advanced booking were thought of as advantages
- Connections from the same station rather than having to seek out the relevant stop and availability of advice and support from conductors and other railway personnel make train travel more acceptable

In addition to practical advantages participants also recognised other ties to the train travel such as:

- Being able to appreciate the view
- The sense of history and connection with the past
- The support offered and given by staff
- The sense of safety when travelling by rail
- The perceived predictability of the journey and journey times
- The 'family friendly' nature of the offering
- The opportunity to visit further afield and the options to travel from coast to country (Saltburn to the Dales) with just one change

In order to market Bishop Line the following key issues were identified in all groups as being those that participants would use to encourage their friend or relatives to use the service:

- Reliability
- Comfort and facilities
- Cost and pricing offers
- Speed
- Historical connections
- Variety of destinations
- Train staff

The means of marketing the Bishop Line varied significantly between age groups with social media, personal text and viral marketing being popular amongst younger age groups and more traditional advertising, posters and leaflets being more commonly suggested by the older age groups. However, encouraging increased use by using the train itself for marketing and advertising purposes was a universally agreed approach with participants feeling that there is insufficient information/advertising material provided on the trains themselves.

1.0 **METHODOLOGY**

1.1 **Topic Guide**

Following a meeting with the client, Robert Whitehouse, Community Rail Officer - The Bishop Line, a topic guide was prepared by NWA and this was agreed with the Client (copy attached as Appendix 1).

Topic areas included:

- Ice breaker – Single words to describe the experience of using buses and trains, both good and bad.
- Practical (Hard) reasons for using the train – e.g. timing, cost, routes, environment etc.
- Other (Soft) reasons for using trains – e.g. security, activities on train, views etc.
- Small groups to develop single line comments on benefits which could be used to market the Bishop Line.
- Individual voting to rate the various suggested strap-lines.
- How these views could be presented/ advertised through the media.

Note: for the group discussing Bank Top Station an additional topic area gaining views on the groups experiences of using the Station, both good and bad, was introduced.

1.2 **Segmentation of Focus Groups**

To ensure that a wide range of views was gained from the various ‘audiences’ who are perceived to use the Bishop Line, respondents were split into a number of categories based on both age range and perceived main usage. Venues were identified which were considered to be attractive to the various market segments.

Group	Age Range	Target Audience	Venue
1	16 to 35 years	Students and Commuters	Darlington College
2	21 to 25 years	Young Families	National Rail Museum
3	36 years and over	Shopping and leisure use	National Rail Museum
4	All age groups	Bank Top Station	Darlington Fire Station

1.3 Recruitment of Focus Groups

Recruitment was carried out using two methodologies to ensure that adequate numbers in each category were recruited. Initially, telephone recruitment was undertaken with respondents who had previously been interviewed on behalf of the Bishop Line and who had agreed to take part in further research.

Once everyone who had agreed to take part in further research had been telephoned, on-street recruiters were used in Darlington, Shildon and Bishop Auckland to make up the numbers of recruits to meet the quotas applied for each group.

In total 37 participants attended the 4 focus groups 17 male/ 20 female, with each group being evenly split on gender with the exception of Group 3 (Shopping & Leisure Use) where 4 females and 2 males attended.

In terms of the age profile 15 participants were under the age of 35 years, 15 between the ages of 35 and 59 years and 7 over the age of 60 years.

1.4 Moderation of the Focus Groups

Focus Groups were undertaken using two facilitators. Each group was provided with refreshments with groups 1 and 4 being provided with a buffet meal as these took place over meal times.

The Topic Guide was closely followed in each case and, as agreed with participants prior to attending the meetings, the procedures were recorded to enable full notes to be compiled after the meeting. This information was then added to the Flip Charts and the notes taken during the meetings. In all cases the confidentiality of those attending has been preserved.

2.0 FINDINGS

Initial Thoughts in the Icebreaker

- 2.1 Participants were asked to write unprompted a single word or phrase on a post it note which described how they feel about various aspects of travelling on both trains and buses. These post it notes were then attached to large posters of a Train and a Bus. These contributions were then reviewed with feedback being provided for each of the groups to stimulate early discussions on both forms of transport. Responses as provided by participants are shown in the graph overleaf. Numbers attached to each comment show the number of groups mentioning this feature or benefit.
- 2.2 Unprompted responses across the four groups were similar particularly with problems with buses and the popularity of the train service. The journey experience on the train was predominantly characterised as being far better than that of the bus, 'not rushed'. The majority of the groups saw trains as 'fast because they did not suffer from traffic conditions' and 'comfortable, cleaner and less squashed than buses'. Half of the groups spontaneously ascribed the train service as being 'good and direct', 'relaxing and enjoyable', 'usually on time', 'cheap compared to buses' (in the main for shorter journeys). 'cheap for family trips', 'family friendly', and with 'staff helpful and friendly'.
- 2.3 Trains were described as 'wheelchair and pushchair friendly' with the added benefit of being able to transport bicycles. Also, in two of the groups older respondents said that they would rather pay half fare on the train rather than travel free on the buses. A number referred to the 'nostalgia of train travel' with 'memories of childhood holidays'.
- 2.4 Criticisms of the bus service were often simply the reverse of those things approved of on the train. Buses were seen, by all groups, as 'expensive for short journeys' and having 'too many stops' – making journeys long, even though the total distance achieved was relatively short. All groups referred to the frequent lateness of buses.
- 2.5 To reinforce the 'meandering' picture three groups described bus journeys as going 'round the houses' to get to their destinations, also that passengers were never sure that the bus would arrive. The majority of groups described buses as being crowded or claustrophobic, with 'no leg room', and even often 'smelly and dirty'.

Trains	Buses
<p style="text-align: center;">Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast – no traffic (3) Comfortable, cleaner, less squashed (3) Good service - direct to destination (2) Generally on time (2) Cheap compared with buses (2) Cheap for family trip (2) Family Friendly (2) Pay rather than use free bus travel (2) Journey enjoyable – relaxing (2) Staff/Conductors helpful & friendly (2) Wheelchair and Pushchair friendly (2) Reminds of childhood – Hols by Train (1) Can take bike on train (1) Single company – rules don't change (1) More reliable than buses (1) Toilets available on train (1) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buses convenient (2) Stops near to home (2) More stops available (1) Good for short journeys (1) Gets you from A to B (1) Wide range of destinations (1) Quick for long journeys (Whitby) (1) Free with concessionary pass (1) Better selection of times than trains (1) Safe (1) On time (1)
Trains	Buses
<p style="text-align: center;">Bad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel to the station – some remote (1) Times inconvenient (1) Not many regular trains (1) Only run every two hours (1) Don't start early enough (1) Often problems on the line–maintenance (1) No waiting rooms at some stations (1) Use old rolling stock on Bishop Line Often delayed (1) More expensive for some people (1) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Bad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive for short journeys (4) Too many stops – long routes (4) Often late (4) Don't like buses (3) Crowded, claustrophobic (3) 'Round the houses' - takes too long(3) Not sure if they will turn up (3) No leg room (3) Often smelly and dirty (3) Uncomfortable (2) Constantly stopping and starting (2) Often slow because of traffic (2) Bus drivers often unhelpful (2) Too many companies involved (2) Limited access - wheelchairs/ pushchairs (2) Less stops than previously (1) Disabled - conflict with elderly over seats (1) Can't take bike (1) Not sure where to stand for bus (1) Often need 2 or 3 buses to destination (1) Full of swearing kids on an afternoon (1) Can arrive too early at stop (1)

- 2.6 Drivers were described by members of two groups as being unhelpful and that the buses presented limited access to pushchairs and wheelchairs. In three groups at least one member indicated that they simply 'did not like travelling by bus'. Bus timetables and even routes were described by some participants as changing and causing them confusion
- 2.7 All groups referred to the frequent lateness of buses. To reinforce the meandering picture three groups described bus journeys as going 'round the houses' to get to their destinations, also that passengers were never sure that the bus would arrive. The majority of groups described buses as being crowded or claustrophobic, with no leg room, and even often 'smelly and dirty'.
- 2.8 The advantages of the bus service, recognised by some members in half of the groups, was that 'buses are convenient' and 'bus stops are near to people's homes (almost on your doorstep)' Conversely there was little criticism of the train service with one group unable to think of anything which detracted from the service.
- 2.9 The overall theme of the criticisms was that there were insufficient trains, that they started too late and were not sufficiently regular through the day ('every two hours'). A number referred to stations as being remote with passengers having to walk to the station or take a taxi.
- 2.10 Following the initial icebreaker participants were asked to review their ideas and to identify which they felt were the 'practical' or 'hard' reasons for train use and which they considered were the more 'personal' or 'soft' reasons for train use.

'Hard' Reasons for Use of the Train

- 2.11 **Overall a generally higher perceived service level** than the bus. This was made up of many elements including speed, comfort, cleanliness, available space, services of the conductor etc.
- 2.12 **Cost** Trains were seen by many, for short journeys, as being cheap compared with buses. Half price fares were available and the use of concessions such as family tickets made use of the train economical. However, it was also noted by some older participants they would rather pay rather than travel free on the bus as a number preferred to travel by train.

- 2.13 Although subject to occasional maintenance problems trains were believed to be more **reliable** than buses.
- 2.14 Buses were categorised by some as being cramped and trains **more spacious**.
'I am tall and on a bus sometimes you sit with your knees round your neck and it's better on a train'.
- 2.15 Participants were confident that on trains they can **usually find a seat**.
'It is only work times when it is really busy, but you can usually find a seat, it's fine'
- 2.16 Participants also believed that train journeys were **quicker journeys**– because the train does not go 'round the houses' and is more direct than the bus.
- 2.17 Another advantage of train journeys was the occasional use of **table space** – some referred to table space allowing passengers to work, read the paper, play cards, draw with the children etc.
'Nice little table for cards.' 'Get your paper out.'
- 2.18 Another advantage identified by participants was **payment by Credit Card** – available on the train. The ability to **book in advance** and pay on the train was seen as useful.
- 2.19 Should problems arise with the train **alternative emergency transport is provided** – free of charge to get to the destination – included both bus and taxi travel. If a bus breaks down customers simply have to wait for the next.
- 2.20 The ability to make **connections** to more distant destinations without leaving the station was seen as important to a number of participants. In addition, even access to a private railway that goes to Stanhope was mentioned.
'An American company runs it, it's still going.'
- 2.21 The provision of **toilets** added to the comfort of train travel, particularly for those travelling with children.
- 2.22 The provision of **space for wheelchairs/ children's buggies/ bikes** was a great assistance for people with disabilities or people travelling with children. This compared favourably with the more limited facilities provided on the bus. The ability to take bicycles on to trains was seen as useful.
'You can take kids on bikes from Shildon to Aycliffe and let them bike back'.
- 2.23 **Disabled access** – was seen as important to participants and train capacity for access was considered as superior to buses. It was reported that on buses there was often completion for limited space between wheelchair users and children in buggies and

also for the seats at the front of the bus between the elderly and people with disabilities. One participant, with variable health, uses the train because if problems occur she knows that the conductor is there to assist.

2.24 Most stations were said to **provide some shelter** to sit in so that users did not get wet, although several stations were mentioned as having minimal shelter.

2.25 Participants also noted the **provision of food and drink** – although others pointed out that the constant mess of litter, including cans and crisp packets indicated that many people apparently did eat on buses particularly children.

'You can eat and drink on the train. With rubbish bins to take the rubbish, you can't on a bus'.

2.26 A further advantage is the ability for **booking tickets in advance**.

'I can ring up two hours before a train and book train tickets and pay on the train when I get on – it is a straightforward phone call. Also some stations have no ticket office so you just buy on the train –easy'.

2.27 During holiday times trains offer **summer excursions to the seaside**.

'In summer, when they put the Whitby train on – it runs twice a day from Bishop to Whitby, they always put bigger trains on, more carriages, and it is easier'. 'They adjust accommodation at Darlington if the train is too crowded'.

2.28 As noted above concessions using **Young Peoples/Family Railcards** make train travel cost effective.

'You can get your money back just with travelling to Whitby'. 'There are deals for 3 or 4 adults and 4 children and if you book in advance you can get a third off'.

'Soft' Reasons for Use of the Train

2.29 The groups were asked to list the 'soft' reasons, concerning perceptions and feelings that added to the benefits provided by train travel. Suggestions were recorded on flipcharts.

2.30 Train journeys were considered to be more relaxing than bus journeys, not just because of the **smoothness** of the journey, but because the journey allows **appreciation of the view**.

'It is more relaxing and calming, seeing the countryside'. Very idyllic, picturesque.

'You can appreciate it more because you are not flying about.' 'See parts of the countryside you don't normally see'. 'The kids love going past the airport and seeing

aircraft taking off'. 'A lot of schools use trains to take children to Redcar or Saltburn. They know they can sit them together'.

- 2.31 It was recognised that the Bishop Line was unique – being part of the first railway line. It gave respondents a **'sense of history'**.

'It is quite a good feeling to think that part of the time you are travelling on the route of the first passenger railway in the world'.

- 2.32 Several participants commented on how staff are really **helpful/friendly and – knowledgeable**, helping with time tables, giving information if delays occur, and making announcements at each station. They are also helpful in providing advice on ticket pricing.

'I have found them particularly helpful, advice saved me over £120 on one trip.'

- 2.33 The train was thought to be **warmer** than the equivalent journey by bus.

- 2.34 A number of groups thought that the nature of the bus journey, travelling through heavy traffic was **much more risky** than a train journey,

'No lunatic drivers that put you at risk'.

- 2.35 Train journey times were considered to be more 'predictable' than bus journeys, which was, a benefit in itself but also allows easier meeting up for social outings.

'You know where you are going, what time you will get there'.

This makes the journey 'companionable' because of the predictability of the service and also being able to meet up with people on the train, talk to friends and/or even read a book. This was not thought to be possible on a bus.

- 2.36 Train journeys were considered to be more **safe and secure** than bus journeys.

'The railway is subject to more intense safety than the buses are'.

In addition the presence of the conductor was seen to add to the feelings of security by all groups.

'More relaxed that if there is a problem it will be dealt with by the conductor'. 'Yes, and on busier journeys there are two'. 'During the summer there are two, especially if you are going through to Saltburn, Redcar, Middlesbrough'. 'Yes, the conductor is always floating up and down and if he knows there is trouble, or knows there are kids around, he will stand where they are – he comes back and does the fares but always comes back to the same point and the children know he is there and won't do anything because they are frightened he will put them off'.

This was compared favourably with problems encountered on buses with children being described as 'often foul mouthed and unpleasant'.

- 2.37 The more relaxed atmosphere, the family charging policies, the ability to play games or read at the seats, conductors being available to offer advice and assistance, and the provision of toilets make the train seem more **family friendly** than buses. Also the ability for people to get up and move around made a number of groups consider that the Bishop Line is family friendly, particularly in comparison with buses.

Promotion and Marketing of the Bishop Line

2.38 Participants were asked to split into small groups (2 or 3) and for these to come up with two or three single line comments that they might make to friends to encourage them to use the Bishop Line/Bank Top station.

2.39 The various suggestions from each small group were added to a flip chart and all members were then asked to vote on which they considered to be their favourite in order to identify which resonated better in the group. A scoring sheet for this is shown at Appendix 2. The various suggestions from each group are shown below together with the an indication of the top three suggestions:

Group 1 – Students and Commuters

1. Cheaper, cleaner travel,
2. Saves on the driving
3. ***Reliable, quicker, friendly - use the train and beat the credit crunch. (1st)***
4. Travel anywhere in country from Darlington.
5. ***Comfortable, quicker and cost effective. (2nd)***
6. Want a sense of adventure, well hop on board from coast or countryside on our cheap, quick and quality service.
7. ***Cheap, quick and with good connections (3rd)***
8. Can go from the coast at Saltburn to Weardale – the Seaside to the Dales

2.40 In the group discussion that followed other points made concerned the importance of the Shildon Museum in drawing in tourists from all over Europe.

2.41 Also attractive was the opportunity to travel as far as Saltburn in one direction and go on the private railway from Bishop Auckland up to Wolsingham and Stanhope. 'Very much the Coast to the Dales'. It was felt that Northern Rail would gain mutual benefit by promoting this service as a tourist attraction.

2.42 It was felt that Northern Rail should include information about the historical nature of the Bishop Line as being part of the route of the famous Stockton – Darlington Railway.

2.43 Key for one train user was that in choosing the train for travelling to work he encountered far fewer problems than he had previously when travelling by car or

bus. ' I use the train daily and have encountered problems but few and far between compared to other forms of transport, which I think is the key issue.'

- 2.44 Suggestions were made for both earlier (4 am) and later (8 or 9 pm) trains to improve the service. Also the possibility of putting on football specials and charging a competitive price.

Group 2 – Young Families

1. Ride the iron. Feel the steel.
2. Go clean, use the train
3. Snail? No. Trail? No. Train!
4. Swiftly, nifty, thrifty - use the train
5. Bishop Line, My Line
6. Get in, get on, get off. The train -fast and efficient
7. Swiftly and with style
8. Faster cleaner comfort by train
9. Track fast, road slow
- 10. *History started here (1st)***
- 11. *The Polar Express - Saltburn to Stanhope (3rd)***
- 12. *Shopping packages (1st)***
- 13. *Dales and Rails (3rd)***

- 2.45 The group spoke of approaches to marketing the service – 'posters at the station, big enough for people to notice, so it hits you in the face.' Also in the booking office at Bishop'. It was felt important to 'emphasise the fact the trains started in this country, in this area' 'Use the history'.

- 2.46 Other suggestions included advertising on TV, the use of flyers, 'encourage people with a half price day'.

- 2.47 The idea of establishing a 'tourist trail' was very popular with steam trains from Darlington to the Head of Steam Museum, where the Tornado was built, coming to Locomotion and perhaps onto Weardale.' The Polar Express was mentioned, Saltburn to Stanhope, as being run at Christmas. It was felt that 'if run more

frequently, on a weekend, this would attract walkers, tourists and people interested in the whole line’.

- 2.48 It was felt that weekend steam trips to York would also be popular – ‘Weekends like that are absolutely packed’. Other suggestions were to put on ‘shoppers packages’ – but in this case one participant felt that there was a need to clean up and improve the stock. Also working through Travel Agents to establish attractive tourist or shoppers’ packages.

Group 3 – Shopping and Leisure

1. The train is a lifeline for family and friends
2. **Travel quick, travel cheap, travel train (2nd)**
3. **Cheaper by the train - you can take the whole family (3rd)**
4. The supermarkets are on the doorstep by train
5. **No need to sit at home, the seaside is on the doorstep by train (1st)**
6. Hitachi - Bringing the trains home to the North East
7. Convenient and safe for work - the ALL weather train
8. if it is good enough for the Royals.. (picture of Prince Charles on train)

- 2.49 It was felt by this group that the history of rail was not sufficiently promoted.

‘There is only us who live in Shildon who know about the history’.

The return of the Stanhope train was welcomed but it was generally thought to be an expensive trip – ‘£75 for 3 people’. It was also felt that the duo-ticket was not well known and should be featured on the website.

- 2.50 A number of participants felt that promotion would be possible by means of the internet with the main message being ‘a cheap day out for kids’. It was noted that both the schools and the Cubs use the train for days out with children.
- 2.51 Other suggestions for promotion included Posters, Facebook with pages created for the Bishop Line or the Locomotion, ‘and have that advertised on Facebook all the time’. It was felt that little statements such as ‘I went to Whitby by train today’, ‘we had a bit of a picnic on the train’ could be published and used to create interest.
- 2.52 It was pointed out that people with a disability can take a carer free on the train with them which might also be of interest to groups representing people with disabilities.

2.53 It was also noted that Bishop Castle was opening in April and there would be an opportunity to link travelling by train with attending various events. Prince Charles was seen to be using the local train service as part of a Royal Visit. It was felt that this would give a promotional opportunity for the Bishop Line.

2.54 Another opportunity was the perceived environmental benefits of the use of the train over buses and cars.

'And one train can pull a dozen carriages or more, so more environmentally friendly, using less fuel'.

Group 4 – All Age Groups

1. Be happy - change from bus to a train
 2. Why sit on somebody's lap when you can have your own seat, use the train
 3. **2 for 1 on half price deals on the train (1st)**
 4. Meet people, different people, from different places - its friendlier on the train
 5. **Staff are always happy to talk to you on trains (3rd)**
 6. **Cheaper, comfortable, cleaner on the train (1st)**
 7. Smoother journey
 8. Let the train take the strain
 9. A more relaxed atmosphere - Don't go to sleep on the train
 10. More on board facilities - food, toilets, luggage – use the train
 11. We will get you there, satisfied and safe
- 2.55 When asked how they would wish to see the service promoted a number of participants said that they already use the website to get information and this would be a good means of promotion. One participant had signed up for a text service and this was used to pass information about timetables and other aspects of the service. This was felt to be more acceptable to young people than posters.
- 2.56 More 'traditional' means suggested included posters at train stations and on the sides of buses, advertisements in free papers and leaflets. Advertisements should include information on the lower costs, higher speed etc. Announcements on trains was favoured by a few participants and also advertising using Facebook pages.
- 2.57 It was suggested that a computer be installed in each train station, similar to major bus stations, which gave information on the various train services.

Round Up of Views

- 2.58 Individuals were asked if they had any other views to express and how they would like to hear about changes to the Bishop Line service.

Group 1 – Students and Commuters

- 2.59 A number of participants sought written information in the form of free 'Advertisers' individually produced and distributed in different areas, with Darlington, Shildon and Bishop Auckland being mentioned.
- 2.60 A number suggested that advertisements be placed on the trains. It was suggested that other rail services frequently carried advertisements but this was not the case for the Bishop Line. Northern Rail was described as 'not good' at self promotion.

"Compared to other companies I don't think Northern Rail are that good about promoting themselves..... on the Northern Railway there are lots of health and safety signs but no information"

- 2.61 Others recalled that for previous changes 'little leaflets' were handed out to passengers and displayed in Ticket Offices. Advertisements should include advance purchase discounts, family ticket discounts etc.
- 2.62 Other places for advertisements included local paid for papers (e.g. The Northern Echo) and also electronic means. Facebook was preferred by many and also SMS texts. One participant reported '*I get texts from East Coast all the time*'.
- 2.63 As an alternative to Face book, which was described by one participant as used to 'bombard people', a system of "sending out group emails to all clients, or group texts.

'Just to remind you the train service is therePeople read every text pretty much"

- 2.64 Also the use of the website to pre-select things that people wanted to be notified about – "timetables, discounts, tick which are relevant".

Group 2 – Young Families

- 2.65 A wide number of points were covered by this group in the final round up of views. A number of participants considered that the stock was looking 'tatty' and needed 'cleaning up' before a major marketing push. Compliments were paid to the staff – 'The staff are lovely' with a request for more frequent trains to improve the service.

- 2.66 One complaint, which was made by a number of groups, was that staff working in the Bishop Line office were *'trying to force people – actually standing in people's way - to go into their office and buy tickets, rather than do it on the train'*. It was noted that this risked people missing trains because of the anxiety caused that a ticket must be purchased prior to getting on the train'

'It is a big issue and has been going on since that office opened'.

However, another participant praised the service provided by the Booking Office and commented that:

'The man in the booking office has given me advice that has saved me £121 for tickets to Ipswich – he did me a good turn'.

- 2.67 One respondent made the suggestion – originating from a system operating in Germany – where combined tickets were available which allowed travel on both buses and trains along a defined route. It was noted that a similar system already existed between bus services in the area.

Group 3 – Shopping and Leisure

- 2.68 When asked about promotion of the Bishop Line the groups views were generally similar to those expressed by the previous groups. These included: advertising on the 'Internet or local paper or even ads on the side of a bus'. Also, mentioned were posters and advertising on Facebook.
- 2.69 As previously reported by this group the train is known to be used by groups from schools and Cub Scouts for outings. A suggestion was that flyers should be sent to each school or scout/guide troop etc. to remind them of the option of using the train and any discounts that could be available to such groups.
- 2.70 An idea was that of linking the Bishop Line website to local websites, (assuming this is not already done), e.g. Durham County Council, Locomotion, and events such as the opening of Bishop Castle with the theme of making a special historical day visiting these by travelling on the train.

'The history issue – people with children will pick on this – the idea of 'History in Motion' – it is that, particularly with the museum here'.

- 2.71 Also appealing to the environmental lobby was the suggestion that trains are environmentally cleaner than alternatives such as cars and buses.

'One train can pull a dozen carriages or more, so more environmentally friendly, using less fuel'.

- 2.72 One participant pointed out that when using Facebook there are free advertising sites allowing the creation of pages and viral marketing.

'People put –'I have been to Whitby on the train'. You get someone come back to you - I didn't know you could get the train to Whitby, how much is it, where do you get it from? One person snowballs into 10.'

- 2.73 Other possible 'stories' could include 'An added bonus is a family of 7 can go on at once – when we take the kids we have to take two cars to get everybody in but on the train everybody can sit together'; 'we had a bit of a picnic on the train' and information such as 'the disabled can take a carer free of charge, on a train'.

Group 4 – All Age Groups

- 2.74 This group concentrated, in the main, on issues around service frequency. There was a number of suggestions that there should be more trains and a more regular service from Darlington to Bishop Auckland.

'They don't suit people going to work even, there are two, three hour gaps. That is why a lot of people don't use them because they don't get them there in time.'

'There should be more trains, more regular services.'

'They have an extra one first thing but the next is at 10 o'clock – if you miss that one'

'You either get to Darlington at a quarter to 8 or at 10 to 9 – for most people one is either too early or too late.'

'You can't even go out for a drink in Darlington and get a train back to Bishop – Middlesbrough trains run sometimes every 15 minutes at peak times but we only have them every two or three hours!'

'I know a lot of people don't use the train because the times aren't suitable or there is too much gaps in between.'

- 2.75 A suggestion was made that, if an improved service was to be provided, a short trial be carried out to judge its popularity prior to a full commitment. A clue as to why currently there might not be a sustainable case for extra trains was expressed by one participant:

'I agree with you but coming back most get off at Shildon sometimes I am the only one going through to Bishop.'

- 2.76 However, it was pointed out that, with the Hitachi development, additional transport would be needed for the anticipated large staff and services would need to be timed to meet the shift patterns of the new enterprise.

'There is huge potential there for extra passengers, in both directions – there will be thousands working there. They must look seriously then about putting trains on for the shifts.'

- 2.77 Other aspects that the group wished to promote included: the low pricing of the train service for many people, the fact that journeys are much more comfortable than buses and that seats can be reserved prior to the journey allowing larger groups, including families, to travel together.

- 2.78 One participant suggested that the provision of a 1st Class area on the train might be popular and increase the use of the service. A number felt that the trains could be cleaner, particularly the windows, which would help improve the view of the countryside.

'Have 1st class, that might get more people on trains.'... 'It would be better if windows were cleaner so you could see out.'

Bank Top Station

- 2.79 Group 4 was also asked about their views on Darlington's Bank Top Station. The station was universally thought of as 'always clean' and a number spoke of 'Good customer service'. When asked to elaborate it was explained that the provision of information – *'Every time I have needed help they have helped me out, given me a journey time and so on'* – has been excellent. Also Tannoy announcements, and screen displays, kept people up to date if a service was running late, or alternative transport had been provided.

- 2.80 The station was said to be *'Reasonably comfy'* with the provision of a decent 'Refreshment room'. Also, the staff were described as 'friendly' and willing to provide information and advice on routes and ticket prices .

- 2.81 A major advantage of Bank Top Station was seen as the train service itself - this was generally felt to be to an excellent standard – *'Always frequent, trains always there on time. Right on our doorstep.'* Also, Darlington Station provided first class connections throughout the country.

- 2.82 The station was seen as compact 'Not too spread out' with the provision of security cameras for passenger safety and also the presence of staff gave a high perception of security. The only time that passengers said that they feel unsafe on Bank Top

Station was when a football match was being played locally and large crowds of football supporters were on the platform. However, in these circumstances the police presence was generally thought to be high but feeling crowded was uncomfortable.

2.83 Participants were asked were there any aspects of the station or the service that they would like to see improved. Some participants thought that all train stations are to an extent 'cold and draughty'. A number of the intervening stations between Bank Top and destinations were thought to be poorly lighted in comparison and needed more security cameras to make passengers more comfortable.

2.84 One problem, acknowledged by a number of participants, was the potential for delay at Bank Top Station. It was suggested for example that Bishop Line trains frequently were held up outside of the station awaiting a platform and that this could take anything up to half an hour to solve.

'What I don't like, I know you have to prioritise but the Bishop train always gets held up outside, sometimes for quite a long time...Waiting for a platform to come free, that is an issue.....It tends to be held up more coming from Middlesbrough, they let all the trains through first. Sometimes you can be held up for half an hour or more, outside.'

2.85 Also of concern was that sometimes if trains had been held up outside Darlington or were running late, they were cancelled even though there are 'people waiting all along the line'.

2.86 While waiting in the Bank Top Waiting Room was not seen to be a major problem this was not the case at some of the smaller stations. If considerably delayed then passengers could be forced to use very small spaces and in these circumstances this was seen to be very uncomfortable. People said they were reluctant to wait in the cafe if they were not buying anything. One suggestion was that magazines and books should be provided in the Waiting Rooms to help ease the waiting.

'Bishop to Darlington, if you miss the 9.25 you sometimes have to wait 2 ½ hours for the nextsit at the station for ages and the waiting room is tiny – you are rubbing shoulders if all waitingFeel you can't go into the café unless you buy something....It's cheeky.'

2.87 One participant wanted to record that another problems at the smaller stations included the 'lack of toilets at Bishop Auckland Station' also a lack of adequate lighting on some stations.

2.88 No mention was made of car parking facilities at the station as in the main participants attending these groups were not travelling to Darlington station by car.

Whilst most comments about Bank Top were positive some participants said that they felt uncomfortable if waiting for any period of time to sit in the café.

Appendix 1

INTRODUCTION

My name is We are from a local research company and the work we're carrying out has been commissioned by Darlington Borough Council. The purpose of the research is to inform the marketing strategy for use of Bank Top station/Bishop Line which is facing challenges both in respect of government policy, (that trains should be used for longer distances), and competition from bus companies.

As we said in the letter we would like to tape our discussions so we can write up our notes afterwards. However everything you say will be confidential to the people in this room. The meeting will take no more than an hour and a quarter so we should be finished here by: (time according to start time).

Icebreaker – 10 minutes

While you're finishing your lunch/tea we'd like you to do is to write on your post it notes single words or phrases on how you feel about travel by bus and travel by train and then attach these to the pictures.

Feedback from initial icebreaker to review views on the two different forms of transport.

'Hard' Reasons for Use – 10 minutes

Following the initial icebreaker we will then ask the groups to consider the practical ('hard') reasons why they may use Bishop Line/Train.

Prompt if necessary with

timing of the services,
physical comfort,
ability to move about during the journey,
connections,
distance from the station,
ease of access,
presence of a 'conductor', etc.

perceived cost,
space,
times of trains,
routes,
opportunity to travel from same station
environmental considerations,

CHECK positive for train and negative for buses

FLIPCHART.

'Soft' Reasons for Use – 10 minutes

Those are the practical reasons – what about other reasons?

Prompt as necessary with

sense of security,

meeting new people

feeling relaxed;

perception of continuity with the past

'special relationship'(e.g railway worker, nostalgia, feeling 'special').

opportunity to speak to others

views from the windows;

habit

activities possible on a train

FLIPCHART

Indicators to Promote the Bishop Line & Market it – 20 minutes

So those are the benefits of train and dis-benefits of bus travel. What we would like you to do now is to split into small groups (2 or 3 – number dependent on number in group) and for you to come up with two or three single line comments that you might make to friends to encourage them to use the Bishop Line/Bank Top station.

Some may be more important than others so at the end we'll ask for you to rate them.

When straplines have been developed from all groups ask them to feedback and write them on FLIPCHART and number them.

Round Up of Views – 15 minutes

Individual responses – which of these did you rate as a '5'? Why do you say that?

If time allows, to review how information/advertising is currently received/seen and preference for future receipt.

Appendix 2

STRAP LINE SCORE SHEET

Number on Strapline	Ranking of importance 1 to 5 with 5 being the most important
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	