

Annual Report 2016

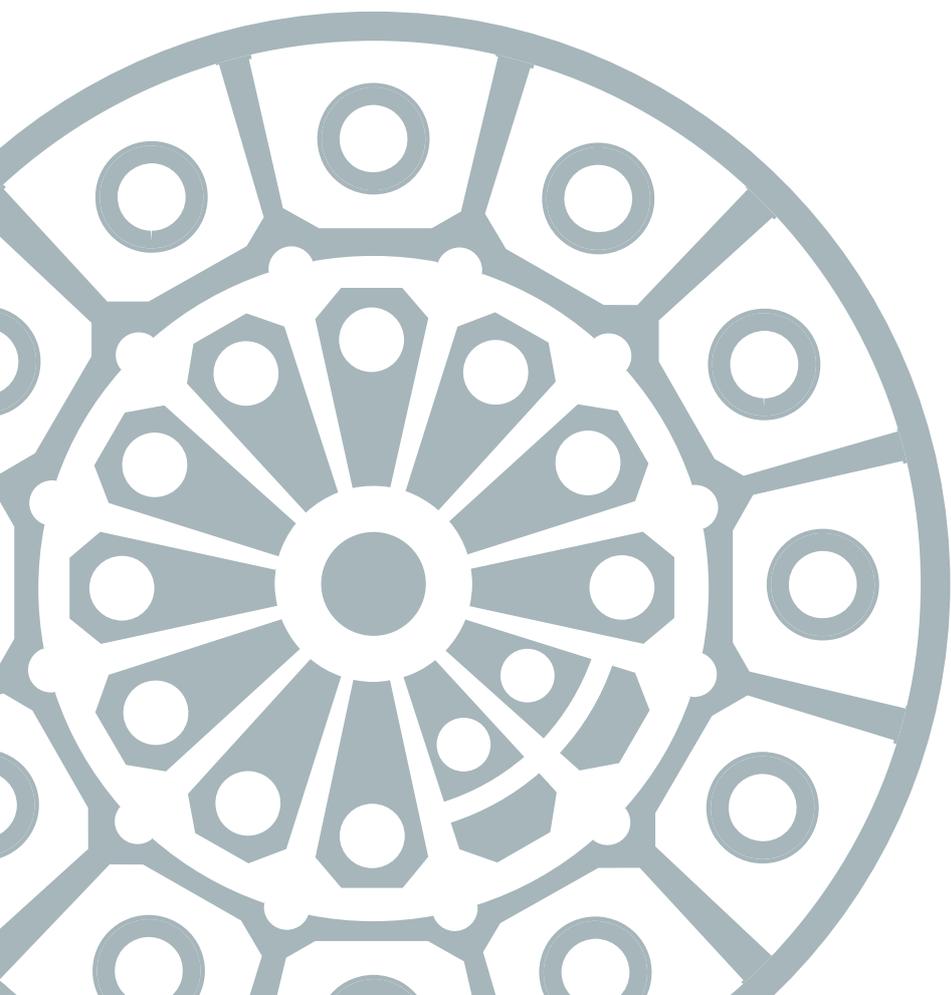
Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership



Contents



Foreword by Chair	3
Partnership Objectives	5
Results	6
Station News	8
Service News	9
Industry News	10
Marketing Collateral & Events	11
Media Releases	13
The Coming Year	14
Partnership Members & Funders	15



Foreword by Chair



It is that time of year again. How time flies! It only seems like a couple of months ago since I last penned the foreword for the 2015 Annual Report. Where has this year gone?

Well, those of us in the Partnership who have been trying to complete the tasks set out in the Bishop Line Plan know what a challenging and rewarding time we have had this last year. My thanks as always on behalf of the Partnership go out to all those individuals and station adoption groups who have supported the Bishop Line with particular thanks to our stalwart Community Rail Officer, Bob Whitehouse, and our Secretary, Stuart Woods. Their help and friendship is invaluable.

The new Northern franchise is still bedding itself in and we all look forward with eager anticipation to the replacement of the Pacer units with more modern rolling stock and the enhancements to the timetable in December 2017 less than a year away. These welcome improvements are important in themselves but very timely too given all the exciting developments along the rail corridor which require a convenient and sustainable means of transport.

As your representative on the Bishop Auckland Town Team, I am party to regular updates about the phenomenally successful Kynren historic re-enactments at the Eleven Arches site and the exciting proposed developments at Auckland Castle and in the market place. Like so many Bishop Auckland residents, I get impatient while the town is getting ready for its renaissance. Road improvements, infrastructure and building works all take their time, after all, as the old expression goes, you can not make an omelette without breaking eggs! Seriously, we all must accept that the town is currently in transition but the rewards in terms of regenerating this part of the North East will be well worth the wait. Encouragingly, the train service to Bishop Auckland will be ready and able to help to contribute to making all these tourist related developments a success and firmly put our terminus on the map.

Bishop Trains continue to provide an excellent ticketing service and have organised their own special charter trains. We wish them every success in their new home, the waiting room and former Durham County Council travel hub on the station.

And let us not forget the successful expansion this year of the Weardale Railway's heritage services to Witton le Wear with plans for next year's timetables already underway and the seasonal treat afforded by the Polar Express Christmas specials.

Locomotion, The National Railway Museum at Shildon hosted the spectacular Flying Scotsman Shildon Shed Bash event in July with our enhanced train services playing their part to bring visitors to and from Shildon Station adjacent to the museum.

I also extend my congratulations to Ken Hodgson, the Chair of the Shildon Station Adoption Group and Chair of the New Shildon Residents Association, whose brainchild it was to have the saucy post card inspired artwork at the station replaced with new artwork produced exclusively by students at the Greenfield Community College working alongside local artist Nicola Golightly. November saw the official unveiling of this stunning and thought provoking display which demonstrates what can be achieved by the Partnership working closely with the local community. New artwork is planned for other stations along the line.

November also saw the official launch of the historic interpretation panels on each of our stations celebrating the unique railway history of the old Stockton and Darlington Railway in general and of each station in particular. Our thanks go out to the enthusiastic support of the North Eastern Railway Association for helping to produce the text for the panels and the accompanying historical photographs.

Northern are in discussion with Hitachi about the train service. Interestingly, instead of the train operator trying to adjust the new timetable to support the shift patterns at the train assembly plant, the opposite is now happening. Hitachi are trying to fit their shift patterns to coincide with the train services enabling workers to use the new hourly train service if they wish. The new college at Aycliffe also gives fresh impetus to students using the Bishop Line, students who in turn it is hoped will be ambassadors for the train service in helping to promote sustainable transport in the area.

At North Road Station there is the prospect of a heritage quarter, an initiative which the Partnership would endorse as it would provide the Bishop Line with a fitting curtain raiser for the rest of the route. There is also talk of extending the Community Rail Partnership beyond Darlington Bank Top into the Tees Valley to Saltburn - watch this space!

As I said last year, there is something positive happening at every location along the line and I hope that you will join with us in ensuring the Partnership plays its full part.

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 to help sustain 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

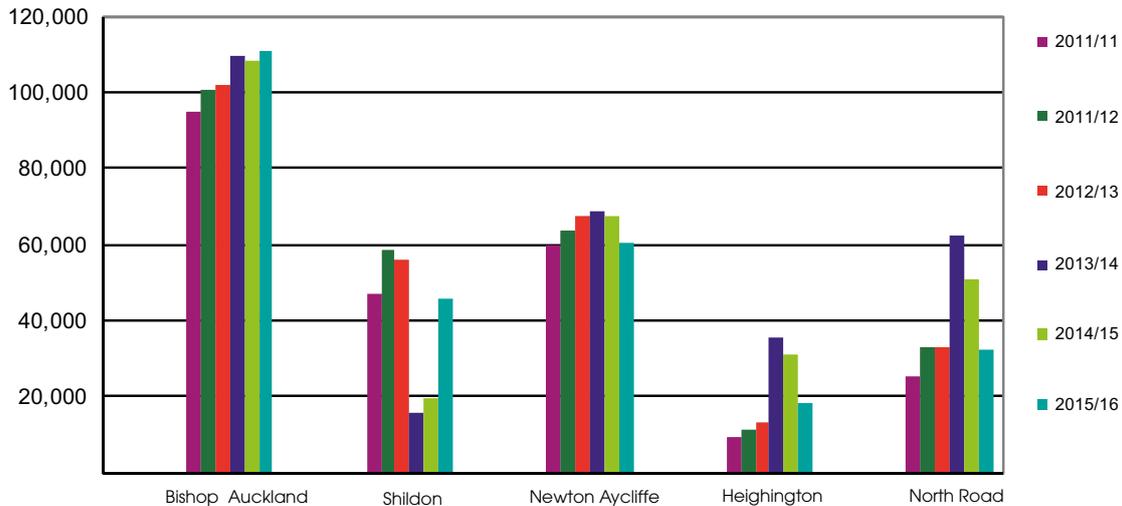
- Introduce an hourly service, based on an extension of the Saltburn to Darlington service
- Continue the Sunday service
- Introduce a later evening service (train or bus service)
- Introduce improved rolling stock (ideally an all-class 156 operation)

Long-term

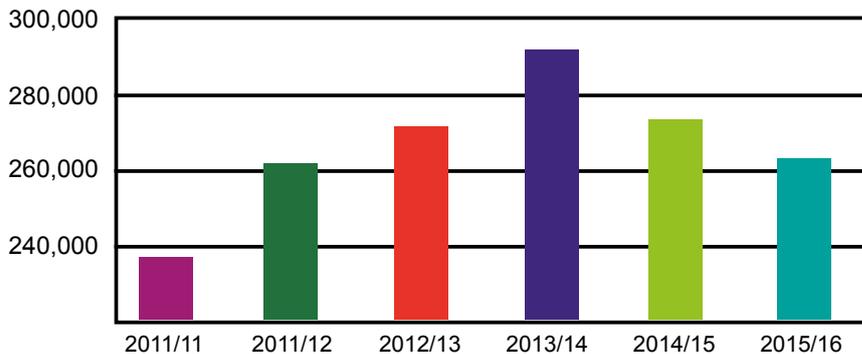
- Construct a new station at North Road and extend the Head of Steam Museum
- Introduce a half-hourly tram train operation
- Devise a plan to maximise the legacy of Stockton and Darlington railway's 200th anniversary in 2025.

Results

Patronage



Annual totals



Patronage is tracked by station for each full year from period 1 (starting 1st April) through to period 13 (ending 31st March). There has been a slight decrease in patronage along the line in 2015/16 compared with 2014/15, except at Bishop Auckland where patronage has risen from 108,286 boarders and alighters to 110,826. This represents an increase of 2%. There has also been a huge increase at Shildon station where patronage has risen from 19,773 boarders and alighters to 45,899. This represents an increase of 132%. This increase can be attributed to the Flying Scotsman event at Locomotion, The National Railway Museum at Shildon.

Customer service

This year has continued to see good customer service by conductors and other staff. This is again supported by verbal comments from passengers made to the Community Rail Officer whilst travelling along the line.

Performance

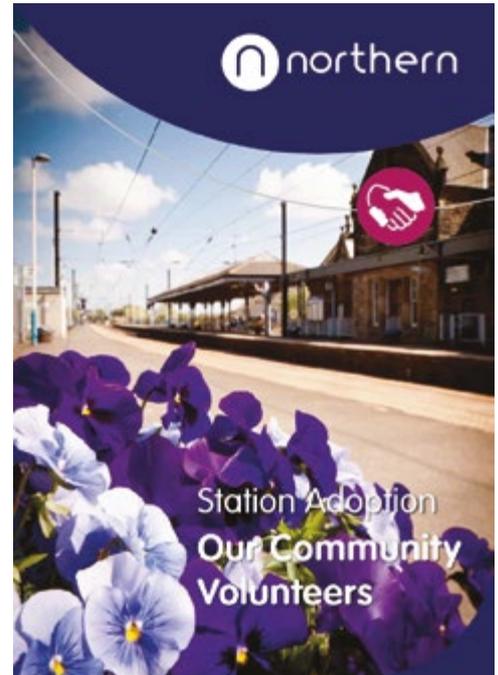
Due to the change in franchise, performance data is no longer reported on.

Station adoption

All stations have now been formally adopted by the following organisations:

- Bishop Auckland - Bishop Trains
- Shildon - New Shildon Residents Association
- Newton Aycliffe - Greenfield Community College
- Heighington - Xcel Centre
- North Road - Bishop Trains

Northern has a new station adoption scheme which is available to groups. Substantial investment in the groups is taking place and an information pack has been provided for their assistance.



Bank Top station

Proposals for improvements to Darlington Bank Top station are welcomed particularly in view of the increased traffic along the line. It is particularly important to ensure that flow between Bishop Auckland and Saltburn continue and are supplemented by good connectivity at this station. Current connectivity is poor but should be improved by the hourly service towards the end of next year.

Extension of the service designation

The current service along the line runs from Bishop Auckland to Saltburn, however the current designation is from Bishop Auckland to Darlington, only part of the route. The Partnership, supported by Northern, is willing to support the extension of the designation through to Saltburn. This will have the advantage of a much longer route along which activities may take place together with numerous destinations to promote. We have approached Northern and the North East Rail Management Unit (of Rail North) to progress this matter.

Interpretation panels

A series of interpretation panels depicting the heritage of the Bishop Line have been installed on the station platforms between Darlington - North Road and Bishop Auckland. The boards have been compiled with the help of North Eastern Railway Association using fascinating images from their archive.

Boards have also been produced for Dinsdale Station which, although it strictly sits as part of the Tees Valley Line, shares a common history with the rest of the Bishop Line.

The Heritage boards were unveiled by David Corfield, Vice Chairman of NERA on Friday 25th November at North Road station. Mr Corfield was joined by the Mayor of Shildon - Councillor Trish Pemberton, along with members of the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership, Northern, ACORP (The association of Community Rail Partnerships), ASLEF (The Train Drivers Union), Rail North, Weardale Railway, Tyne Valley Railway, New Shildon Residents Association, Darlington Borough Council and Durham County Council.

Shildon Platform Artwork

A new piece of artwork has been installed on Shildon platform, produced by students from the Greenfield Community College Sunnydale Campus and Shildon Youth Group 'Teen Spirit' working alongside local artist Nicola Golightly.

November saw the official unveiling of the panel which celebrates Shildon's past, present and future. To find out more about the artwork visit shildonrailway.wordpress.com New artwork is planned for other stations along the line.



Flying Scotsman Event – Locomotion

Locomotion, The National Railway Museum at Shildon held a successful joint 'Flying Scotsman and the Shildon Shed Bash' event in July. This attracted thousands of people and we were pleased that Northern were able to supplement their normal services with an enhanced timetable between Darlington and Shildon to deal with the extra demand.



Station Adoption in Tees Valley

As a precursor to the possible extension of the designation, we have agreed that our officer should assist with station adoption in Tees Valley. It is pleasing to see that adoption groups have been found for nearly all of the stations. A number are undertaking horticulture and others are considering artwork.



Bishop Line franchise

Arriva Rail North Limited is the current franchisee for the service on the line. It has agreed to operate an hourly service from the end of 2017 and withdraw the much disliked Class 142 (Pacer) multiple units. The franchise also provides for a dedicated North East management unit. This unit is welcomed and provides a local presence of managers.

Service quality audits

Service quality audits continued along the line until 31st March 2016 when the franchise changed. We were pleased to find all of the stations were in a good state of repair and clean.

Hourly service and connections survey

It is pleasing to note that the hourly service will start towards the end of 2017. This improvement removes what the respondents to surveys have identified as a major obstacle to using the service. It now falls to Northern to publicise and market the service next year, a task with which the Partnership is extremely willing to assist.

Virgin East Coast Trans-Pennine Express and Cross Country Trains franchises

The Partnership is pleased to receive support from these franchises both in financial terms and 'in kind'. It is particularly relevant when considering connectivity of the Bishop Line passengers with trains going north and south at Darlington.



Trans-Pennine Express Fund

A fund, for which bids can be made by Partnerships, has been set up by Trans-Pennine Express. Currently the partnership does not comply with the requirements of the fund however when the hourly service comes into effect a bid will be possible.

Designated Lines Seminar

A designated lines seminar was held in March at Norwich where the Department for Transport was able to give an update on Franchising and Rolling Stock. Other presentations included ideas for projects and future trends for community rail.

COMREG

Northern have set up a Community Rail Executive Group as part of its franchise commitment to ensure it delivers what is required to community rail. Malcolm Chainey (of the Tyne Valley Partnership) has been appointed as the representative for the three North East CRP's with our own officer, Bob Whitehouse, as his deputy. It is a group in its infancy and is still finding its feet but the prognosis for the future is good.

Personnel

The Partnership, as an unincorporated association, has agreed that its officer should continue to be employed by Darlington Borough Council and that a service level agreement be put in place.

Marketing Collateral & Events

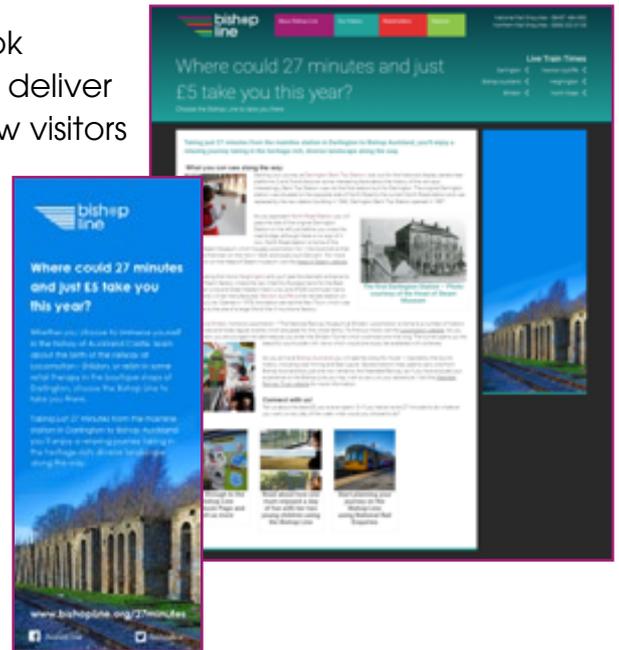
Website

The Bishop Line website is updated regularly and now includes images of the new platform artwork at Shildon, images of the interpretation boards and the opportunity to purchase copies of the history booklet which compliments the interpretation boards. It also contains a number of informative downloads such as annual reports and research.

27 minutes campaign

Following the success of the website launch facebook campaign in summer 2015, the partnership set out to deliver a 2016 marketing campaign which would attract new visitors to the Bishop Line website with an emphasis on using the line for leisure and tourism and targeting young families as well as more mature rail enthusiasts.

The '27 minutes' campaign was launched in April and was supported by a half page advert in the Northern Echo 'This is the North East' supplement. Targeted facebook posts ran for 4 weeks throughout April and May and reached 28,528 people, of those 418 clicked through to the Bishop Line website which is a click through rate of 1.5%, note that anything above 1% is considered successful.



Click throughs were directed straight onto a campaign landing page which described the views you can see as you travel from Darlington Bank Top to Bishop Auckland along the Bishop Line. A secondary webpage was linked to the main campaign page with a first-hand story of a mum's fun journey with her two young children along the Bishop Line.

Schools transition programme

For the fifth year the Partnership has assisted in delivering transition days for pupils in Darlington schools. The transition days help to educate children about their transport options when moving from primary to secondary school. The sessions cover issues such as road safety, cycle repair and maintenance, journey planning and understanding public transport information.

Over 800 pupils from 16 Darlington schools took part in the 2016 programme.



Media Releases



16/05/2016	<p>Darlington primary school pupils take first step to independence</p> <p>http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/14555997.Pupils_prepare_for_secondary_school/</p>
18/08/2016	<p>Free Travel Advice Brings Health Benefits to Hartlepool Residents</p> <p>http://www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk/news/news-item/?id=380</p>
24/11/2016	<p>Bishop Line Heritage Celebrated Through New Platform Installations</p> <p>http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/14930826.Railway_art_celebrates_train_line_heritage/</p> <p>http://www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk/news/news-item/?id=461</p>
25/05/2016	<p>Free Travel Advice Brings Health Benefits to Hartlepool Residents</p> <p>http://www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk/news/news-item/?id=380</p>
Social media posts	
07/10/2016	<p>New Railway Station at Horden</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/BishoplineCRP/photos/a.651365848374975.1073741829.596116733899887/652880044890222/?type=3&theater</p>
07/11/2016	<p>Poppies at Nunthorpe</p> <p>http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tees-37938564</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/BishoplineCRP/photos/a.651365848374975.1073741829.596116733899887/652884074889819/?type=3&theater</p>
21/11/2016	<p>Shops within 5 minutes walk of North Road Station</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/BishoplineCRP/posts/651365861708307</p>
21/11/2016	<p>We are currently reviewing our action plan for the Bishop Line. If you wish to be involved please let us know.</p>
21/11/2016	<p>Please use the footbridge at Newton Aycliffe Station it is an offence to trespass on the railway</p>
23/11/2016	<p>Please do not trespass on the railway. If you see someone trespassing on the line please telephone British Transport Police on 0800 40 50 40 or text 61016. In an emergency call 999</p>
23/11/2016	<p>Map: The remarkable distances you can travel on a European train in less than a day</p> <p>https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/06/05/map-the-remarkable-distances-you-can-travel-on-a-european-train-in-less-than-a-day/?utm_term=.ec967196aa80</p>
23/11/2016	<p>A fantastic event to launch the new artwork on Shildon platform designed by students from the local area, well done!</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/BishoplineCRP/photos/pcb.652483768263183/652482008263359/?type=3&theater</p>
02/12/2016	<p>Lets hope this includes all parts of the rail industry not just the Train Operators</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/putting-passengers-first</p>

Please note: If any of these links do not work, copy and paste them into your web browser.

The Coming Year



Funding

The Partnership is currently funded by Virgin East Coast, Northern Rail, Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council. We have been told that there is funding in the forthcoming year from Cross Country Trains and wait to see the amount of the funding. We are aware that local government funds are extremely limited and we await the details of the financial support to the partnership in the future. We also receive benefit in kind from First Transpennine Express and Cross Country Trains, for which we are grateful.

Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway

The Friends Group, who are members of the partnership have been involved with the Local Councils in undertaking an extensive audit of the original route and this will shortly be released to the public. They have also organised a number of walks along the route of the original railway. It is hoped that they are able to arrange, together with the Councils involved, some form of celebration for the 200th anniversary of the formal opening of the line which will be on 27th September 2025.

Darlington's Heritage Campus

The Heritage Campus project, which is based around the old Darlington Station at North Road, received much support from the community. The project meetings started in 2010, and now have been subsumed into the overarching Experience Darlington strategy for which a consultation will be undertaken in 2017.

Partnership Members

Local authorities

Department for Transport
North East Rail Management Unit
(Rail North)
Darlington Borough Council
Durham County Council
Great Aycliffe Town Council
Shildon Town Council
Bishop Auckland Town Council

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
Weardale Railway Heritage Services Ltd
G5 Group

Rail industry

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

Community and voluntary based groups

Bishop Auckland Town Team
New Shildon Residents Association
Xcel Centre Newton Aycliffe
Greenfield Community College

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. Contact details can be found overleaf.

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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