

Annual Report

The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership

December 2012



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Foreword by Chair

The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership has made steady progress this year and, on behalf of the Partnership, I would like to extend my thanks for all the contributions and support we have received. I would especially like to thank Bob Whitehouse, Bishop Line Community Rail Officer, and Stuart Woods, Secretary, for the work they have undertaken throughout the year.

We have delivered some real improvements in 2012 – from timetable enhancements to line guides – and implemented some great initiatives – from the customer satisfaction survey to our guided walks and work with schools. I would particularly like to highlight the work carried out by the station adoption groups; the Xcel Centre, Great Aycliffe Town Council and New Shildon Residents Association have actioned a range of station improvements to the benefit of rail users and the local community. We have now secured Bishop Trains as the adoption group for Bishop Auckland station and we hope to secure an adoption group for North Road station in the New Year.

Behind the scenes, we have done a great deal of work over the last year in planning for future developments, particularly in relation to the possible upgrade of Darlington (Bank Top) station. As part of the East Coast Main Line improvements, we are focusing on the implications for service trains and the potential impact of traffic sources on the track layout. Coal trains, aggregate trains from Weardale, the NRM steam shuttles from York to Shildon, charter trains, stock and engineering movements, and the Agility Trains project at Heighington are all being reviewed.

One of the highlights of 2012 for me was the Timothy Hackworth naming ceremony at Darlington (Bank Top) station in March. Locomotion – the National Railway Museum at Shildon – provided the venue for the after show festivities and a considerable number of civic dignitaries and local Councillors attended. My thanks go out to everyone involved, but I would like to make a special mention to Northern Rail and to the children of Timothy Hackworth School in Shildon who stole the show in their Victorian costumes. The event generated excellent press coverage and helped to raise the profile of the line.

So what is coming up for the Community Rail Partnership in 2013? Boosting tourism and generating additional patronage on the line continue to be priorities. Look out for the proposed travel hub at Bishop Auckland station and potentially a new footpath between Bishop Auckland station and Weardale Railway's heritage line. Both initiatives, if implemented successfully, could bring significant increases in passenger numbers to the line.

Over the next year and beyond, one of the main opportunities for raising the profile of the line will come from the 2025 bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. We are already in communications with the NRM at York and Locomotion to discuss ideas, but we are keen to invite input from the Partnership, so please get in touch with your suggestions.

On behalf of the Partnership, I hope you will join us in embracing the challenges of the year ahead.

Charlie Walton
Chair, Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership

About us

The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership (BLCRP) is an independent not for profit body, created in 2003 to coincide with the establishment of Community Rail Partnerships by the Strategic Rail Authority.

The BLCRP actively promotes the Darlington to Bishop Auckland line and is very proud to cover the route of the legendary Stockton and Darlington Railway – the first public railway to be empowered by Parliament to convey goods and passengers by steam traction in the country.

The Bishop Line, previously known as the Heritage Line, is just over 11 miles long and runs from Darlington (Bank Top) to Bishop Auckland station. The line is made up of six stations, all of which are operated by Northern Rail.

The partnership represents the interests of local people, in respect of the rail service, and brings together local authority officers, and representatives of the rail industry and voluntary/community sector.

Partnership objectives

The BLCRP's overall aim is to raise awareness of the Bishop Line – locally, regionally and nationally, and increase patronage through a range of short, medium and long-term objectives.

Short-term

- Build the business case for a regular interval hourly service, in partnership with the train operator and Network Rail
- Develop the range of guided and self-guided walks from the line
- Develop joint initiatives with key attractions and local businesses
- Deliver small-scale improvements at each station, including signage and CCTV
- Develop work with schools to promote safety and travel awareness
- Engage staff in developing and implementing the vision for the line
- 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

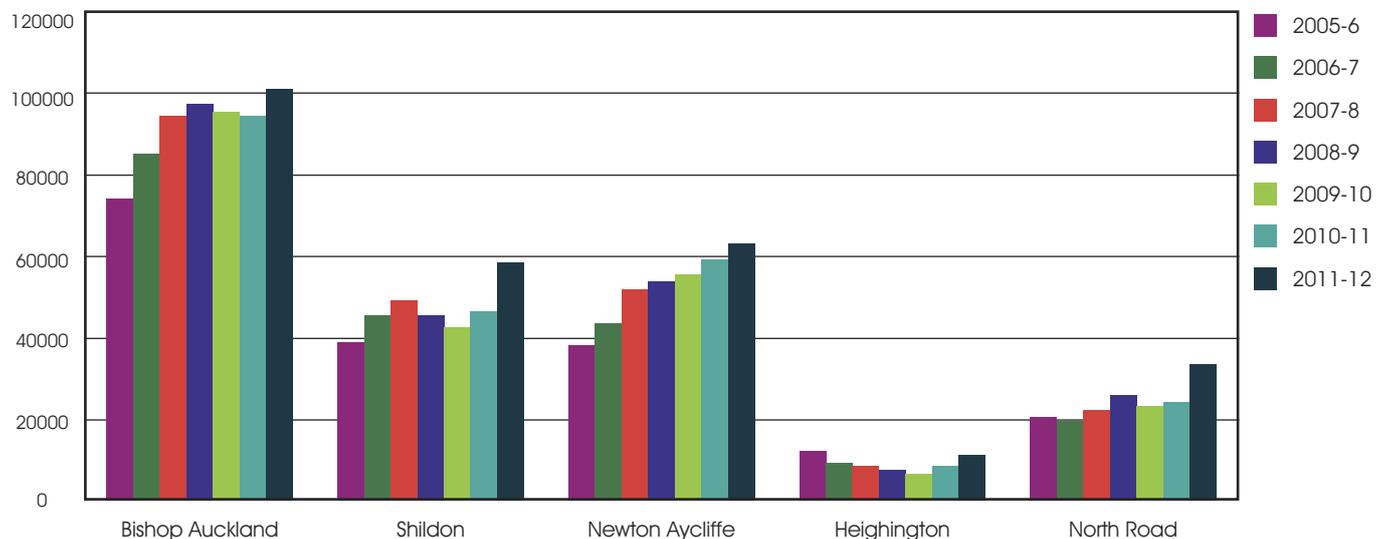
- Continue the Sunday service
- Introduce a later evening service (train or bus service)
- Introduce improved rolling stock (ideally an all-class 156 operation)

Long-term

- Construct a new station at North Road and extend the Head of Steam Museum
- Introduce a half-hourly tram train operation
- Introduce freight services west of Bishop Auckland
- Build a new station between Bishop Auckland and Shildon
- Devise a plan to maximum the legacy of Stockton and Darlington Railway's 200th Anniversary

Results

Footfall



With the exception of Heighington, there has been a steady increase in footfall at each station on the Bishop Line between 2005/6 and 2011/12. All stations have experienced an increase in footfall in 2011/12 compared to 2010/11, notably at North Road and Shildon stations (rising by 24% and 20% respectively).

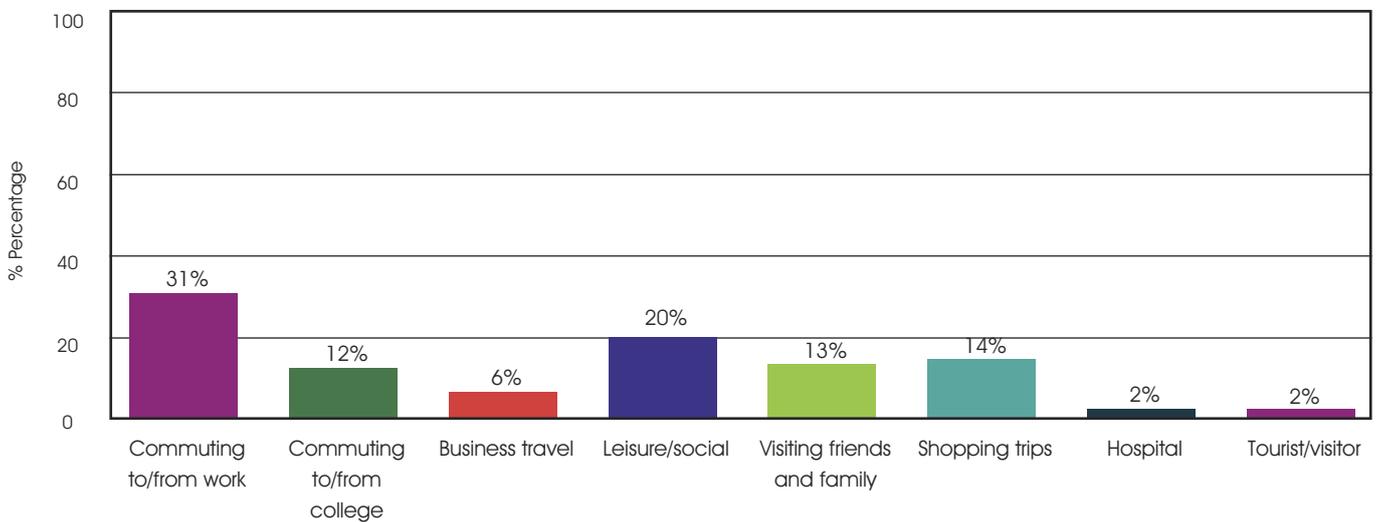
Customer satisfaction research findings

A customer satisfaction study was commissioned by the Partnership in October 2012 to monitor perceptions of the service quality on the Bishop Line, and to identify potential improvements. Interviews were conducted with 320 Bishop Line users.

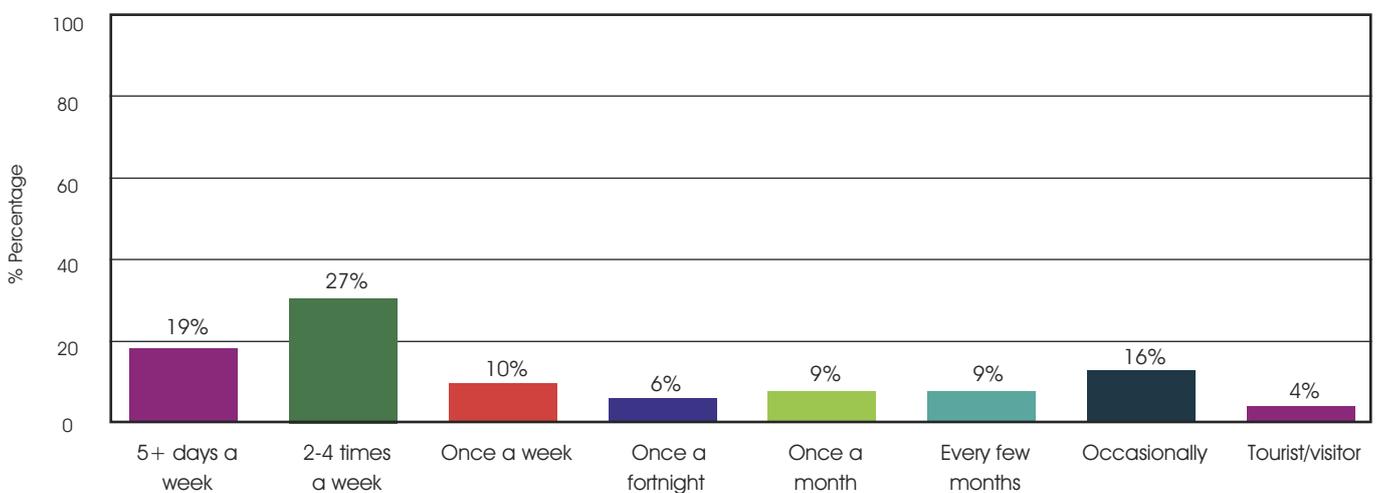
A summary of the study findings include:

- The Bishop Line is predominantly used for commuting to/from work and leisure activities.
- The largest percentage of people surveyed use the Bishop Line 2-4 times a week, with over half the sample making trips more frequently than once a week.
- Almost one third of the people surveyed use the train at morning peak time (before 9.30am), with usage decreasing throughout the day.
- Bishop Line users believe that the train is more convenient, easier, quicker and cheaper than other forms of transport.
- The main improvements that users would like to see on the Bishop Line are more frequent services, modernised trains and better communication regarding line news updates.

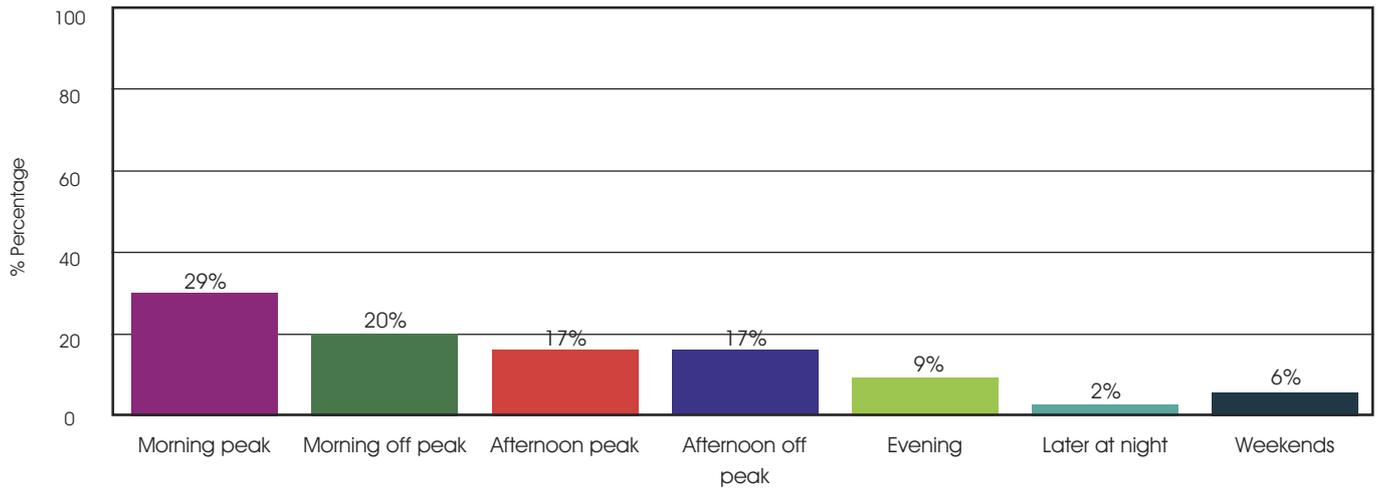
Types of trips made on the Bishop Line



Frequency of trips made on the Bishop Line



Time of travel



Main reasons for using the Bishop Line

Convenient and easy **Direct**

Don't drive, no car **Better than car** (cheaper, quicker, more convenient and comfortable)

Quicker than other forms of transport **Relaxing, social, less stressful**

Good connections **Cheaper** than other forms of transport

Better than bus (cheaper, quicker, more convenient) **Infrequent**

Main weaknesses of the Bishop Line / things that need improving

On board temp too hot/cold **Staff rude** **Overcrowded**

Cancellations/delays

Infrequent **Tannoy not working**

Trains old/need updating

Lack of info regarding delays

Seating in poor condition **Dirty**

Station adoption groups



The Bishop Line currently has four station adopters – the Xcel Centre, Great Aycliffe Town Council, New Shildon Residents Association and Bishop Trains. In their role as station adopters, individuals and group representatives have been tasked with checking their adopted station for faults, and improving the ambience and environment at the station.

- Bishop Trains, the adopter at Bishop Auckland Station, has provided a 'meet and greet' service for most trains during the working week and brought some colour to the station with flower planters
- New Shildon Residents Association is the umbrella group that has adopted Shildon station. Working together with local schools, they have provided artwork and planters to brighten up the station. A local charity also wishes to undertake horticultural work at the station, for which a licence is required from Network Rail before work can begin.
- Great Aycliffe Town Council, the adopter at Newton Aycliffe station is focused on managing the area surrounding the station, following a license granted by Network Rail.
- The Xcel Centre has adopted Heighington station and is working on some initiatives to deliver station improvements for the local community and rail users over the coming year.



Consultations

The Partnership has responded to a number of consultations during the year, including:

▪ **InterCity East Coast Franchise**

The InterCity East Coast franchise consultation, which took place between 26 June and 18 September 2012, was held to establish stakeholder views on the minimum requirements that the government should set in the InterCity East Coast franchise specification. The consultation invited passengers, local councils and anyone with an interest in improved services on the East Coast Main Line to send in their views on what they want from the next franchise. The consultation outlined what the next operator is expected to deliver, including better service quality, improvements to stations, the roll out of smart-ticketing technology and good levels of punctuality. The winning bidder will be announced in August 2013 with the new franchise planned to start in December 2013.

▪ **Rail Decentralisation**

The rail decentralisation proposal looks at how decision-making is managed on the railways and explores the potential gains of transferring power and responsibility from central

government to a local level. Most train services in England are funded and managed centrally by the Department for Transport based in London. The consultation period was held to seek views on whether improved outcomes for transport users might be achieved if more decisions relating to local rail services were made closer to the communities they serve. The consultation period also provided an opportunity to invite sub-national bodies (Passenger Transport Executives' and local authorities) to come forward with outline proposals for taking on decision-making responsibility for passenger rail services in their area.

- **Network RUS: Alternative Solutions**

The objective of the proposal was to develop a strategy which presented alternative solutions to carrying the future demand for rail passengers more cost effectively. The Draft for Consultation, published on 28 September 2012 for a 60 day public consultation, examined three alternative solutions as part of efforts to deliver a better-value-for-money railway. Tram and train, community rail initiatives and more innovative ways of replacing diesel traction with electrically powered trains were studied in more detail as part of the route utilisation strategy (RUS). Customers, suppliers, funders and anyone with an interest in the sustainable future of Britain's railway network were invited to respond to this consultation.

Events and promotions

Timothy Hackworth naming ceremony

In March, Northern Rail named one of their units after the railway pioneer who helped to create the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The Timothy Hackworth, a diesel class 156, was named at a ceremony at Darlington (Bank Top) station. The event was well supported by a number of civic dignitaries and school children from Timothy Hackworth Primary School, Shildon, who came dressed in period costumes.



School's Transition

A number of successful transition days have taken place for pupils of Darlington schools. The transition days provide transport education and training to pupils that are about to leave primary school and begin their own independent travel to secondary school.

The training involves pupils actively participating in safe travel; through walks, cycling, bus and train travel. Pupils are encouraged to consider a range of sustainable transport options when planning their journey to school and, on completion of the training, are appointed Junior Travel Rangers.

Part of the training involves travelling by train from Darlington (Bank Top) station to the Head of Steam Museum at North Road Darlington. Pupils participate in a number of fun activities to



help them learn how to read a timetable, buy a ticket, and to familiarise themselves with general railway safety.

Eleven Darlington primary schools signed up for the 2012 programme, involving 105 pupils in total. Each pupil is now a travel ambassador for their school, providing help and advice to classmates on how to plan their journey to secondary school. The scheme will continue throughout 2013 and be extended to include schools in County Durham.



Thermal mug promotion

In an effort to improve knowledge of, and patronage on, the Bishop Line, the Partnership launched a giveaway promotion towards the end of 2012. The promotion was devised to reward passengers and drive people to the Bishop Line website. Passengers can claim a free thermal mug when they purchase a hot drink from Expresso's Café at Bishop Auckland station. Awareness of the offer among the general public is low, so more promotional activity is planned to raise the profile of the giveaway in 2013.

Publications and press cuttings

Publications

As part of its Local Sustainable Transport Plan, Darlington Borough Council and Durham County Council teamed up with the Partnership to produce an information booklet.

The 'It's Better by Train' booklet details the benefits of rail travel and provides fare details for journeys along the Bishop Auckland - Saltburn route. You can download a copy from www.bishopline.org/times-and-fares/better-by-train-booklet



Press cuttings

Publication: Northern Echo

19 March 2012

Headline: Locomotive pays tribute to rail pioneer

Content: Coverage of the Timothy Hackworth naming ceremony at Darlington (Bank Top) station

18 January 2012

Headline: Regeneration scheme 'a lost opportunity'

Content: North Road station pictured in relation to making more of the historic importance in the Darlington regeneration project

18 November 2011

Headline: Artwork to Brighten up Train Station

Content: Friends of Shildon Station group, Shildon Youth Group and school pupils team up to create artwork for Shildon station

Publication: Friends of Darlington Railway Centre and Museum Newsletter

Spring and Summer edition

Headline: The Bishop Line

Content: Bob Whitehouse, Community Rail Officer of the Bishop Line, explores the future prospects of the line

Spring and Summer edition

Headline: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of Bishop Auckland

Content: Andrew Everett, Member of North Eastern Railway Association and the Bishop Line Partnership, summarises the history and future of Bishop Auckland station

Spring and Summer edition

Headline: Museum Programme Exhibitions

Content: Promoting the history of North Road station event

Looking forward to 2013

The Partnership is dedicated to growing local, regional and national awareness of the Bishop Line. We will continue to look for new ways to improve the service offering and increase patronage across the line. Below is a sample of some improvements to look out for this year.

Darlington station plans

Plans have been put forward for proposed improvements to Darlington (Bank Top) station, involving changes to the track and the service operating on the line. The Partnership has identified that it would like an hourly through service to Saltburn, and not a severance of the service at Darlington.

Customer Information Displays

In an effort to improve communication at the stations, the Partnership is looking to introduce Customer Information Displays at each station. This will provide up to the minute information on delays, cancellations and general service updates.

North Road station improvements

A feasibility study has been commissioned to develop a fully accessible platform at North Road, with other station enhancements being carried out in the short-term. This will include improved security, better signage, seating and cycle parking.

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)
The Hackworth Society
Locomotion, the National Railway Museum
at Shildon
Railway Heritage Committee
Weardale Railways Limited
Weardale Railway Trust

Community and voluntary based groups

Age Concern
Bishop Auckland Community Partnership
Bishop Auckland Town Centre Forum
New Shildon Residents Association

Funders



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This report is produced by the Bishop Line Community Rail.

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