

# The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership



Annual Report  
2014



[www.bishopline.org](http://www.bishopline.org)

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# Foreword by Chair



It is once again my pleasure to write the foreword for the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership Annual Report. The Partnership continues to make good progress and as usual, I would like to thank all who have supported the Bishop Line and assisted in raising its profile.

I would like to extend my special thanks to Bob Whitehouse our Community Rail Partnership Officer and Stuart Woods our secretary for their continued support and friendship.

Patronage continues to be encouraging and performance in terms of punctuality and reliability remains very good overall despite a dip because of the impact of incidents elsewhere. The DfT endorsed our Action Plan and we are continually looking at new initiatives for the next iteration.

In this regard, the next version of the Action Plan acknowledges that given the uncertainties around the new franchises, the Partnership and the rail industry generally is in a period of transition. It also acknowledges that the Partnership needs to re-engage with existing partners, seek out new ones and carefully examine the way we work to refresh ourselves to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

There have been a number of significant developments along the line. Most notably, the much needed facelift to North Road Station and the opening of the travel hub at Bishop Auckland Station. In terms of infrastructure, we have witnessed track and signalling improvements, mainly at Heighington in connection with the Hitachi development, and the installation of a replacement bridge adjacent to Asda at Bishop Auckland.

We have also printed some very useful guides and station maps and our line guide has been very well received, in fact we have had to re-print it. Bob has also been involved in the schools transition programme to acquaint younger people with the advantages of train travel.

I am also grateful for the work of our station adoption groups. Bishop Trains now provide a booking service for international rail tickets, which provides a welcome opportunity to build their name and reputation around the globe.

On the topic of worldwide exposure, the highlight of the year was without doubt the Great Goodbye Mallard 75 event at Locomotion; the National Railway Museum at Shildon, in February. The Partnership working in collaboration with the NRM and Northern Rail introduced an enhanced train service providing more trains and longer trains that ensured thousands of visitors used the Bishop Line to access the event. Feedback was very positive and helped to re-affirm Shildon's claim to fame as the "Cradle of the Railways".

It was also a timely reminder of what can be achieved if all partners pull together and how such an event can raise the profile of the line locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Given the phenomenal success of the Great Goodbye, the Partnership prepared a paper which was presented to the Friends of the NRM Council regarding the Stockton and Darlington Railway Bicentenary in 2025 highlighting the need for all interested parties to work together as planning for such a prestigious event needs to begin sooner rather than later.

It was also encouraging this year to witness the successful establishment of a heritage railway service between Wolsingham and Stanhope on the Weardale Railway. The Partnership will continue to support the group and wishes them well in the future. Moreover, the Polar Express Christmas extravaganza on the Weardale Railway is set to beat all records.

We will of course continue to press for an hourly clock face timetable, fit for purpose Sunday services and crucially more modern units. The new Hitachi development and its ancillary supply chain requires an appropriate train service for the workforce. It is somewhat ironic that the world's leading manufacturer of the latest high speed trains will be served by a train service relying upon 30 year old Pacer units. We will also continue to maximise the line's assets and try to make the most of publicity opportunities. I am working with the Bishop Auckland Town Team and we are having constructive dialogue with staff at Auckland Castle in terms of using the train service to promote tourism. We have also been networking with Visit Durham.

With something exciting happening at practically every station along the line I hope you will join with us in embracing the challenges and seizing the opportunities which lie 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

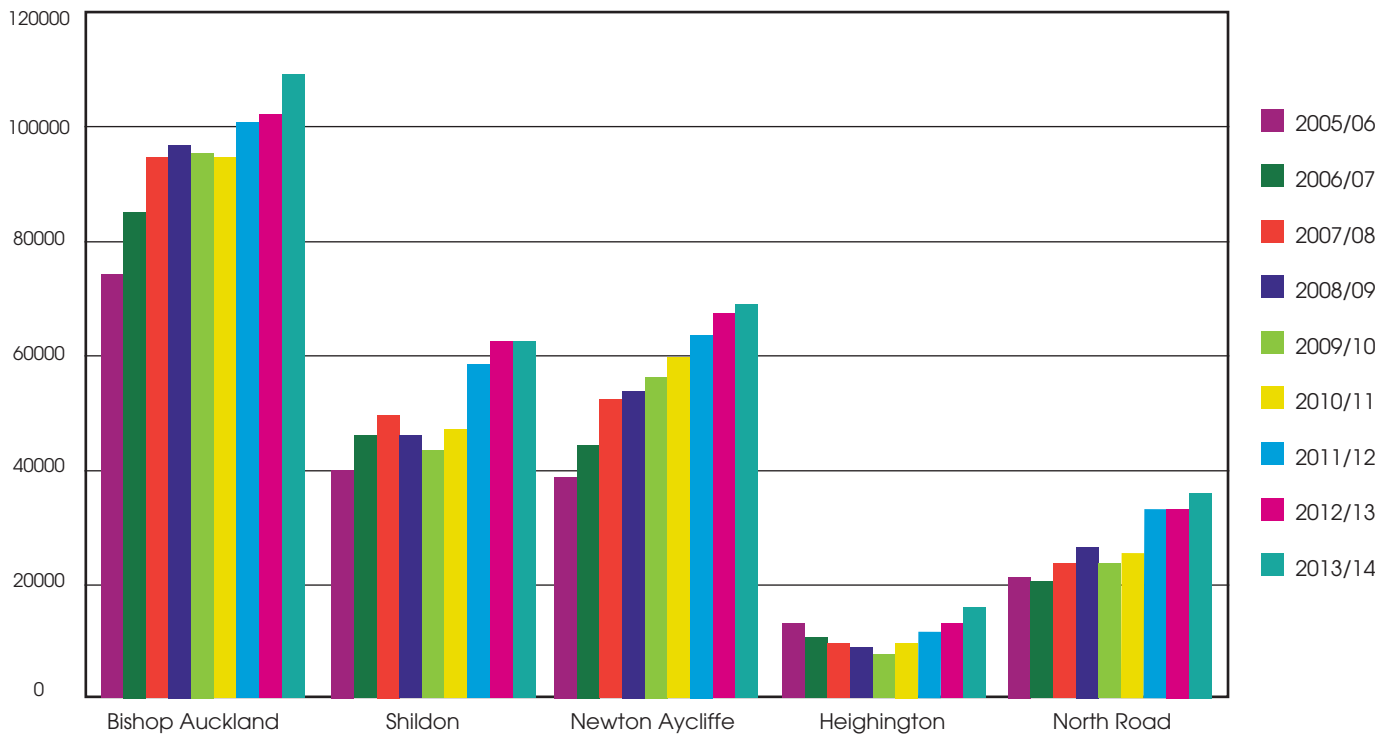
- Introduce an hourly service, based on an extension of the Saltburn to Darlington service
- Continue the Sunday service
- Introduce a later evening service (train or bus service)
- Introduce improved rolling stock (ideally an all-class 156 operation)

## 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 maximise the legacy of Stockton and Darlington railway's 200th anniversary in 2025.



## Patronage



There has been an increase in patronage at all stations along the line in 2013/14 compared with 2012/13. It is pleasing to see that the trend is upward year on year since service designation by the Department for Transport.

## Customer service

Customer feedback on the line has been exceptionally good this year, with particular reference to the high levels of customer service given by conductors and other staff. Northern Rail have been asked if they wish to survey the line in view of these reports so that this information is more formalised.

## Performance



The line has experienced above average traincrew cancellations linked to high levels of traincrew sickness but also a significant number of traincrew off work post fatality (which we have had more of in the North East over the last 12 to 18 months than we have even seen before).

In addition the line has been let down significantly by infrastructure issues at Darlington, Redcar and Eaglescliffe, a signalling power failure at Shildon and a failure of S29R signal just outside Bishop Auckland, all of which contributed to disappointing performance.



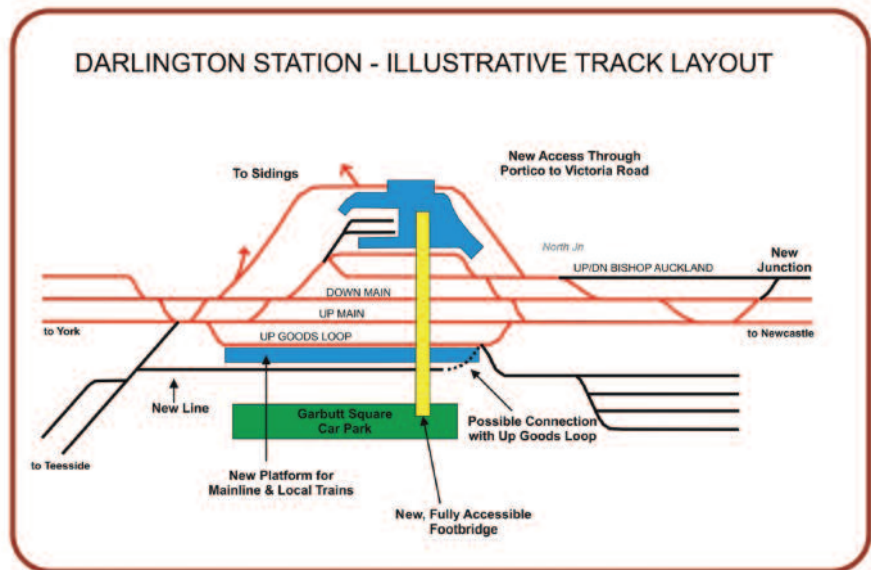


## Station adoption – Newton Aycliffe

The Great Aycliffe Town Council has reported difficulties and delay in getting the station licence from Network Rail. Discussions have taken place with Network Rail to identify the cause of the delay and how this can be overcome in the future. We await the outcome of their investigations.

## Bank Top station

A meeting has been held with Councillor Bill Dixon, Leader of Darlington Borough Council in respect of the proposed improvements to Bank Top Station. We have indicated support for the improvements which include a 'ladder' junction across the East Coast Main Line for the Bishop Line. This option gives the opportunity to continue through services if the aspirational scheme is progressed.



## Locomotion Way

The walking/cycle route between Shildon and Newton Aycliffe stations was opened during the year and provides a legal route between the two stations.

## Walks from Shildon and Bishop Auckland

It has been agreed that 'Treasure Trails' be approached to provide two routes; one at Locomotion and one at Bishop Auckland. Funding has been agreed and these should be available early in the new year.

## Customer information screens

'Real Time' screens are being installed at all stations along the line; the posts are in place and are awaiting screens. These will provide accurate real time information about train times for the travelling public. This will provide an excellent enhancement to customer service.





## Service quality audits

As part of the new franchise, service quality will need to be measured both on the stations and on trains. Nexus has asked the Partnership to undertake audits of the stations along the line (excluding North Road, which is currently audited by Tees Valley). The Officer will begin auditing once survey requirements have been confirmed.

## Hourly service and connections survey

As readers may be aware it has been the wish of the partnership to have an hourly 'clock face' service on weekdays. Currently we are awaiting the costs of providing this from Northern Rail. A survey to try to identify the likely patronage for such a service has been undertaken for the Partnership. The results show an increase in patronage if the service was to be improved. We are making presentations to prospective bidders for the next franchise for such an hourly service.

## Sunday service to Whitby

Discussions have taken place during the year about re-instating the direct Sunday service to Whitby with Northern Rail and its train planners. The service was lost in 2014 due to the changes requested by North Yorkshire Moors Railway at Whitby station. The partnership requested a morning service around 9.a.m. from Bishop Auckland with a direct service returning late afternoon. If this were not possible the Partnership requested a similar service with a good connection at Middlesbrough. Northern Rail are considering these requests.

## East Coast franchise

Discussions took place with prospective bidders for the East Coast franchise during the year. The partnership indicated that the major concern was connectivity of mainline services with our branch which are poor at the moment and prevent our trains being used for longer journeys. We are aware that Virgin/Stagecoach have been awarded the franchise from March 2015 and we await developments.

## Competition with buses

Competition with buses along the route of the branch is strong and this has increased with one of the operators introducing a 'Sapphire' service which has new buses with WiFi and charging points, e-leather seats and customer information in real time on board. This is strong competition indeed with our very old 'Pacer' trains which do not have these enhancements, however patronage figures still show increases.



## **Designated Lines seminar**

Both the Chairman and Officer attended the Designated Line Seminar at Blackpool. Topics discussed included Rail North and devolution, rolling stock, social media and working with schools. Slides from the presentation can be found at [www.acorp.uk.com/events.html](http://www.acorp.uk.com/events.html)

## **Northern Rail's new franchise**

Northern Rail has received a new franchise which will run until 6th February, 2016.

## **Northern Rail and Trans Pennine franchise consultation**

The partnership has been consulted by DfT in relation to the new franchise from 2016, our comments are shown in Appendix A.

Following the prospectus being issued, three preferred bidders for the franchise have been identified they are Arriva, Govia and Abellio. Each of these bidders have been in contact with the Partnership.

## **Weardale Railway**

The Chair and the Officer attended the press opening of the new Weardale rail-bus service. It is pleasing to see the railway being used again for tourism purposes. It is hoped that this is a success and will eventually link with our services at Bishop Auckland.

## **Onward travel**

As part of the Government's 'Door to Door' sustainable integrated journey strategy, which is supported by the Confederation for Passenger Transport and the Association of Train Operating companies, the DfT have asked the Partnership to liaise with local bus operators. A senior manager of one of the local bus operators attended a meeting of the partnership and has indicated that the bus company will consider appropriate liaison. One option is to have Plus Bus operating in Bishop Auckland.

## **Local Sustainable Transport Fund**

Both Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council have received confirmation of successful bids for funds for 2015-16.

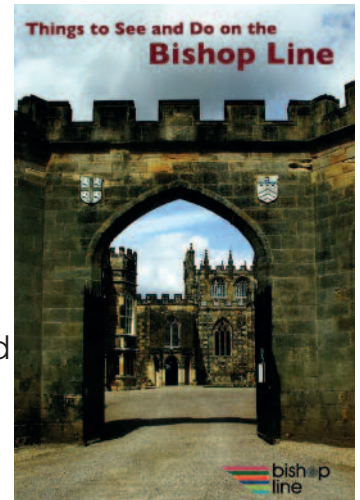
## **Personnel**

The Partnership has been able to confirm that it has renewed the contract for its Officer, Bob Whitehouse, for the forthcoming year.

# Marketing Collateral & Events

## Bishop Line booklet

The North Eastern Railway Association prepared a line guide specifically going from Tees Valley to Bishop Auckland with the objective of getting more people travelling on the line. The booklet is being given away free of charge and has been well received. Durham County Council via it's LSTF have funded a second edition of the booklet which is a huge success. It featured in a two page spread in the Northern Echo. Supplies of the second print are already at a very low number with libraries and organisations in the Tees Valley asking for further copies.



## Website

We are currently in the process of updating the website to reflect its readership which is mainly from stakeholders and persons interested in the Partnership. It will re-direct the travelling public to other websites such as Northern Rail and National Rail Enquiries.



## Mallard 75

This was a major event for Locomotion where thousands of visitors attended. Northern Rail were very helpful in providing four additional services during the event and another strengthened service, together with other support. This gave an hourly "clockface" timetable for the line for the duration of the event. It is pleasing to see the trains full to capacity.

## Schools transition programme

For the third year the Partnership has assisted in delivering a number of 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 train and rail safety along with walking routes, cycling routes and using local buses safely.



60 pupils from nine Darlington schools took part in the 2014 programme. Each pupil that took part was awarded 'Junior Travel Ranger' status. They would then act as an ambassador for their school, providing help and advice to their classmates on how to plan their journeys to secondary school.

# Press Cuttings



16/02/14 Northern Echo	<b>Rail museum's historic event attracts massive crowds to Shildon</b> <a href="http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11014537.Thousands_flock_to_see_giants_of_steam/">www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11014537.Thousands_flock_to_see_giants_of_steam/</a>
22/04/14 Northern Echo	<b>Historic Ticket to Ride (Bishop Line Booklet)</b> <a href="http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/features/columnists/memories/darlington/11162891.Historic_ticket_to_ride/">www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/features/columnists/memories/darlington/11162891.Historic_ticket_to_ride/</a>
27/06/14 Northern Echo	<b>Transition day ensures journey from primary to secondary school is a smooth one</b> <a href="http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11306540.Transition_day_ensures_journey_from_primary_to_secondary_school_is_a_smooth_one/">www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11306540.Transition_day_ensures_journey_from_primary_to_secondary_school_is_a_smooth_one/</a>
02/09/14 Northern Echo	<b>Improved rail travel facilities unveiled at train station</b> <a href="http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11447303.Improved_rail_travel_facilities_unveiled_at_train_station/">www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11447303.Improved_rail_travel_facilities_unveiled_at_train_station/</a>
22/09/14 Northern Echo	<b>New footpath links Shildon and Newton Aycliffe</b> <a href="http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11487065.New_footpath_links_Shildon_and_Newton_Aycliffe/">www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11487065.New_footpath_links_Shildon_and_Newton_Aycliffe/</a>
16/10/14 Northern Echo	<b>Huge increase in passenger numbers at Dinsdale Station</b> <a href="http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11540460.Huge_increase_in_passenger_numbers_at_Dinsdale/">www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11540460.Huge_increase_in_passenger_numbers_at_Dinsdale/</a>
21/04 /14	<b>Tees Valley takes to the trains</b> <a href="http://www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk/LocalMotion/newsevents/News/RailPatronageIncreases.htm">www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk/LocalMotion/newsevents/News/RailPatronageIncreases.htm</a>
17/07/14	<b>Have a Great Day Out on public transport this summer and save</b> <a href="http://www.primarytimes.net/teesside/news/2014/07/have-a-great-day-out-on-public-transport-this-summer-and-save-">www.primarytimes.net/teesside/news/2014/07/have-a-great-day-out-on-public-transport-this-summer-and-save-</a>
25/06/14	<b>Working together to get older men back on track</b> <a href="http://www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk/LocalMotion/newsevents/News/GettingOlderMenBackOnTrack.htm">www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk/LocalMotion/newsevents/News/GettingOlderMenBackOnTrack.htm</a>
Oct 2014 Between the Lines Magazine	<b>Getting on board the Bishop Line</b> <a href="http://www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk/LocalMotion/newsevents/News/BishopLinePatronage.htm">www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk/LocalMotion/newsevents/News/BishopLinePatronage.htm</a>

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

# The Coming Year



## **Partnership membership**

The steering group is looking at the Partnership structure and ways in which Partnership membership can be widened to include more local community members and those who have economic regeneration involvement.

## **Funding**

The Officer's post has been funded and his contract has been extended to April 2016.

There are concerns for future funding if Local Government funding is reduced. There obviously cannot be any commitment from new franchise holders until the franchises are agreed.

## **Darlington's Heritage Campus**

The partnership has been consulted about the proposals for Darlington's Heritage Campus and we have provided some suggestions (See appendix B).

## **Action Plan**

The Action Plan is due to be discussed at the meeting and is currently being updated. If you have any actions with which you can help please let us know.





## Consultation questions

**TO1:** What are your views on increasing below-average fares over time to levels typical on the rest of the network in order to improve the frequency, capacity and quality of local services? Do you have any evidence to support your views?

The current average fare on the Northern Rail network is £3.50. On lines such as ours there is competition with the bus and this should be considered if we do not wish to see modal shift to road transport. We are unable to comment further without appropriate information being released.

**TO2:** What are your views on giving priority to improving the quality of the Northern Rail rolling stock at the expense of some reduction in lightly used services (e.g. fewer calls at low-use stations)? Do you have any evidence to support your views?

We are concerned that trade-offs (or retrenchment) are being considered in a time of improving economic prosperity, we owe it to the future to improve sustainable transport. Improving Rolling stock is a priority and long overdue - current rolling stock gives the impression of 'third class' citizens and passengers continue to express dissatisfaction, this will be particularly shown when leaving a brand new IEP train to get on a Pacer. However if service reductions are likely with the withdrawal of the Pacer fleet we would rather see them retained. We do not see a reduction in calls at low use stations to be an improvement to public transport. Heighington Station, although below the low use threshold, is adjacent to the Hitachi train plant and as such, an improvement in footfall is expected.

**TO3:** What are your views on allowing some reduction in the hours ticket offices are open and staffed if this is accompanied by the ability for passengers to have widespread access to ticket buying opportunities (e.g. through new and improved approaches such as smart ticketing, increased advance purchase ticketing or via mobile phones), adequate measures to ensure vulnerable passengers are not disadvantaged and more effective customer service by both station and on-train staff? Do you have any evidence to support your views?

The majority of stations on the route are unstaffed and revenue collection should be made easier but this may need a culture and technological change for some rail passengers. It is imperative that Smart ticketing is pursued at a faster rate than currently and that the new franchise holder should be encouraged, or contracted, to participate in the multi-modal NESTI project.

**COM1:** How can local communities, local businesses and other organisations be further stimulated to play an active part in the running of Northern Rail and TPE rail services, including at stations?

- CRP's will work in partnership with the rail industry, they need to be involved and respected in this partnership and supported financially. Financial stability would enable medium term planning to take place.
- Station Adoption is imperative to involve the community with their railway. The new operator should be mandated to assist and support station adoption which provides a large volunteer base at a very small cost.
- It is important that school children are taught how to use the railway responsibly and the operator should engage with local primary schools (with, or through, the Community Rail officer where appropriate).
- The proposed North East Business Unit would deliver these aspirations with Community Rail partnerships being an integral part. Community Rail partnerships currently have good connections with Town Councils, business groups and others to encourage economic regeneration using rail transport.

**COM2:** What opportunities are there for Community Rail Partnerships to expand their role and range of activities?

We would like to ensure that bidders engage with, and support Community Rail Partnerships to ensure that medium term planning can take place and continue the liaison and partnership working which currently occurs.

**FID1:** What factors may impact on demand for travel on the new Northern Rail and TPE franchises? Please provide evidence.

The new Hitachi IEP plant at Heighington will become part of the expanding Aycliffe Business Park with secondary suppliers to the plant also attracting further employees. This will require a better service than the currently found two hourly service during the day. This irregular service may become a barrier to sustainable travel to work.

**DTD1:** What are your proposals for providing passengers better and safer access to different modes of transport at stations (including bus, tram, cycling and walking?)

Access and facilities are good although the privatisation of the bus industry prevents the local authorities ensuring that buses call at railway stations, many of whom see the railway as a direct competitor and do not see it in their interests to stop at stations. This has a direct impact on door to door journey experience.



**DTD2:** How do you suggest your proposals to improve the door-to-door journey experience might be funded?

Smart Ticketing on a regional basis is imperative for a good financial solution.

**NTSR2:** Please set out, with evidence where available, any other approaches that might improve route utilisation and make better use of existing resources on the Northern Rail franchise.

Better connectivity at Darlington with mainline services would improve patronage. The current 'rationalised' station layout prevents such connectivity. In addition an hourly service will improve both connectivity and economic prosperity along the line. Research has taken place to show that where communities are well served by railways economic prosperity follows.

As rail usage increases more 'doubling-up' of units will be needed to cope with capacity. As many stations on the Northern Rail network have short platforms selective door opening on all stock is crucial. This is technically possible but at a cost.

**OTH1:** Do you have any other views on the future of the Northern Rail and TPE franchises that you would like to set out?

That the franchise should:

- Maximise collection of revenue
- Use improved rolling stock to obtain greater passenger satisfaction
- Strive to have high levels of customer service
- Improve connectivity with other services within and without the franchise
- Improve the frequency on the Bishop Line particularly in view of the new Hitachi rail development

# Appendix B



## Darlington Heritage Campus proposal suggestions

- A vision should be created for the campus and thereafter (and not before) a strategy together with associated workflows should be implemented
- The campus should form part of an integrated offer for attractions along the line which will include those attractions within Durham County Council and Stockton Borough Council's areas
- A long distance cycle way/footpath should be established which would follow the course of the original Stockton and Darlington Route -this would pass through the site
- The museum should be moved to adjacent buildings (releasing the museum for other economic uses – see below)
- The museum should tell the story of Darlington chronologically with a special room for railway history (It is jumbled at the moment)
- The museum should have appropriate advertising at Darlington (Bank Top) railway station
- There should be a 'living museum' ethos for the site with the ability for visitors to participate in workshops, or just watch, which would make the site value for money
- The North Eastern Railway Association should have an area for public research within the site
- There should be level access to the North Road railway station directly into the site i.e.
  - Re-instatement of the old railway station entrance; and
  - A gateway for out of hours use
- The train shed needs restoring to its former glory – it is part of Darlington Borough Council's lease of the building

- The current museum should be available for different public use, making it a community resource and economically viable e.g.
  - o Small units for artisan crafts/produce
  - o A meeting room with projector and audio visual equipment for public hire e.g. clubs/societies
  - o A high quality restaurant
  - o A ticket selling area e.g. rail tickets and attractions
  - o Tourist information and hotel booking
  
- The site should be integrated with interpretation panels appropriately placed
- The whole site should be landscaped and regularly maintained to allow public usage (currently fenced and not maintained in areas)
- CCTV should provide security for the site
- A walking route around the site to encompass Skerne Bridge, Lime Kilns and Coal Drops
- An audio visual short film showing 'Darlington Then and Now' which could be sold
- High standard signage should be installed with directions from the town
- Consideration of Steam service between Shildon (National Railway Museum) and North Road – perhaps involving Weardale Railway (There is capacity on the line)
- Good access for visitors including appropriate car 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)  
Locomotion, the National Railway  
Museum at Shildon  
Railway Heritage Committee  
Weardale Railways Limited  
Weardale Railway Trust

## Community and voluntary based groups

Bishop Auckland Town Team  
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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