

# Annual Report 2023

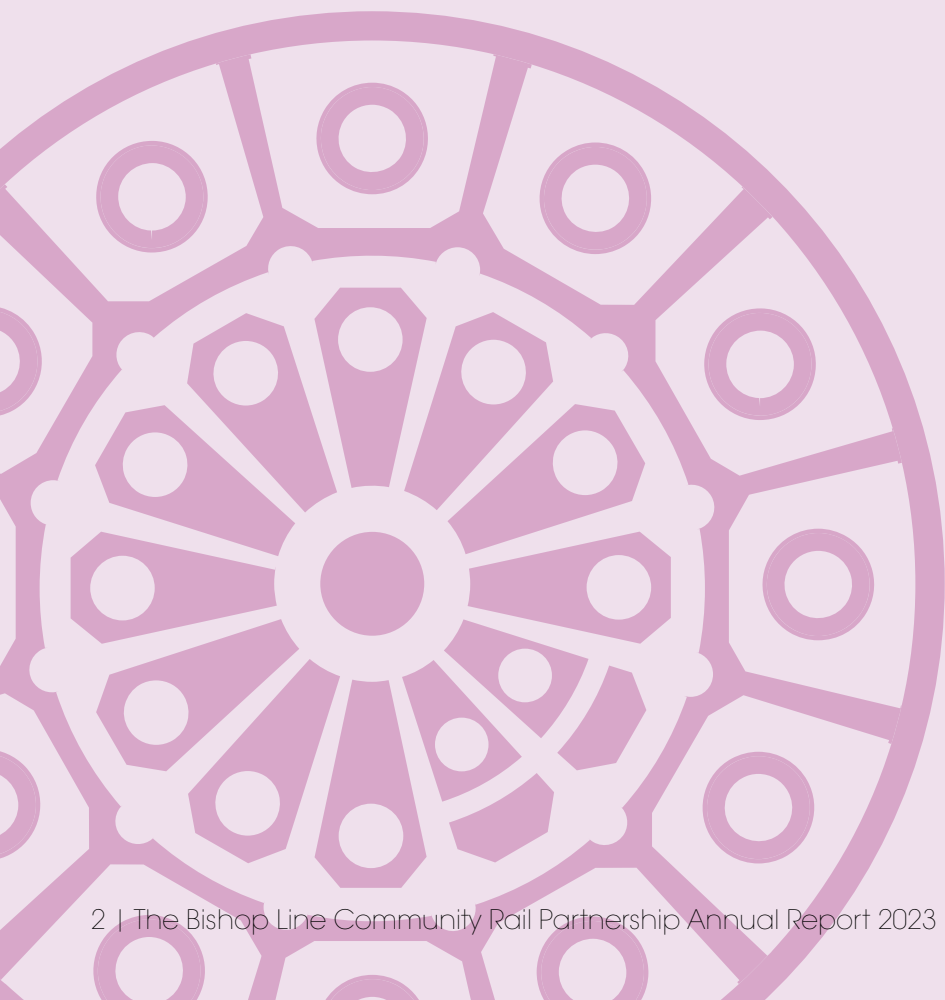
Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership



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# 2023 Highlights



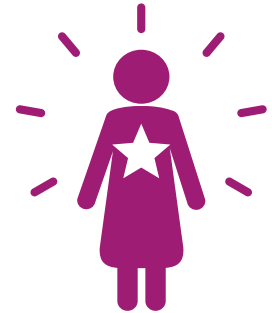
Re-accredited by the Department for Transport in 2023



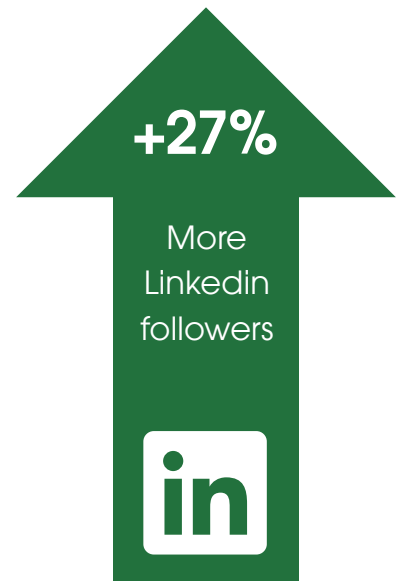
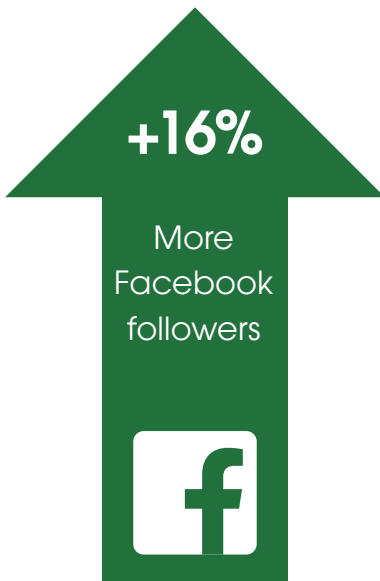
2  
Projects shortlisted for awards



New Chairperson



New Rail Education Officer



# 1. Foreword by chair



As we embark on another year of progress and community engagement, it is my utmost pleasure to welcome you to the annual report of the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership. At the heart of our endeavours lies a profound commitment to connecting communities, fostering sustainable travel, and preserving the unique heritage of the beautiful Bishop Line. Together, we have forged bonds, inspired change, and created lasting impact. Through unwavering dedication and collaboration, we continue to chart a course towards a brighter, more connected future.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all partners, volunteers, and supporters for their invaluable contributions. Together, let us journey forward with renewed zeal and determination

## **Caroline Pearce – Chair of the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership**

In section 8, 'The coming year', we set out in summary the exciting programme of what we aim to achieve in 2024. Our priorities continue to be to improve rail safety, building on the fantastic work Jess has accomplished since joining the Partnership and to encourage more people to use our train service more often.

We are very fortunate to have significant tourist attractions along our line; the new Hopetown attraction at North Road Station, the National Railway Museum at Shildon and The Auckland Project at our terminus at Bishop Auckland. The standout visitor attraction in 2024 will be the New Hall at Locomotion. It will tell the story of Shildon as the first railway town in the world and the movement of coal and freight, the life blood of the railways for many decades. 2024 will not only mark the 40th anniversary of the closure of Shildon Wagon Works, once the largest in Europe, but also the 20th anniversary of the opening of Locomotion itself. The New Hall will accommodate approximately 45 vehicles resulting in the museum having the largest collection of heritage railway vehicles under cover for the public to enjoy in the world! A fitting tribute to Shildon leading up to the 2025 bicentenary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway. We also look forward to delivering the Shildon Smart Art project which aims to reduce anti-social behaviour at Shildon Station and the much-anticipated cosmetic improvements to the appearance of the footbridge which connects the two platforms.

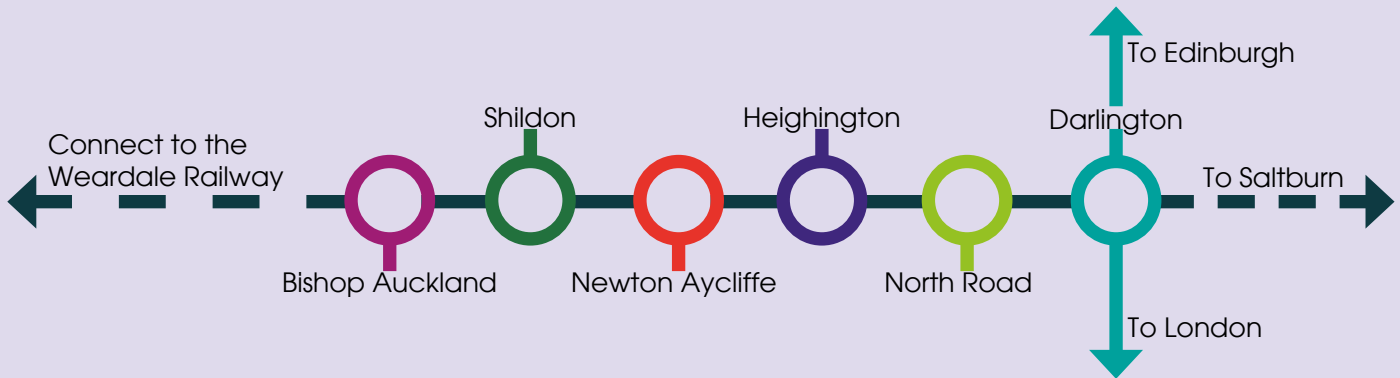
We are both thrilled at the success of our projects in local and regional awards and very proud of the DfT accreditation for the 5th year running. We applaud the continuing hard work and boundless enthusiasm of Felicity for making these things happen. Indeed, we thank all the individuals and organisations which have contributed to making the Partnership a success and, as always, we extend our thanks to Stuart Woods our secretary for his continued support.

## **Charlie Walton - Vice Chair of the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership**

## 2. The Partnership and its Aims



The Bishop Line is the railway which runs from Bishop Auckland to Darlington with 6 stations serving residents, commuters, and tourists on their journeys for work, education and leisure. The line is part of the original Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR), and its heritage is clear to see as you travel along it.



The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership (CRP) aims to help our communities to get the most from the railway and make traveling on our line enjoyable. This involves working with our stakeholders to ensure our rail service and our stations meet the needs of our communities. We work with local groups and schools to deliver arts projects which you can see at our stations. We also work closely with the attractions on our line to promote rail as a sustainable travel mode to explore what our line has to offer.

Our work delivers against the four pillars of the Department for Transport's Community Rail Strategy.

1. Providing a voice for the community.
2. Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel.
3. Bringing communities together and support diversity and inclusion.
4. Promoting social and economic development.

The Partnership is supported by a steering group who help guide our work by prioritising projects according to local needs, enabling progress on projects by connecting people and ensuring that the work we deliver strives to achieve the pillars above.

Our steering group is composed of the two local authorities – Darlington Borough Council and Durham County Council, the train operating companies which our local community can access via our line – Northern, LNER, Cross Country, and TransPennine Express along with Network Rail and the Community Rail Network.

# 3. Ticket Sales



In this annual report we outline ticket sales within the 2023 calendar year.

Ticket sales reports the number of tickets sold on a particular date rather than the number of passengers travelling so is not a true representation of patronage, however annual figures can be tracked.

The report records passengers travelling to and from any of the stations on the Bishop Line.

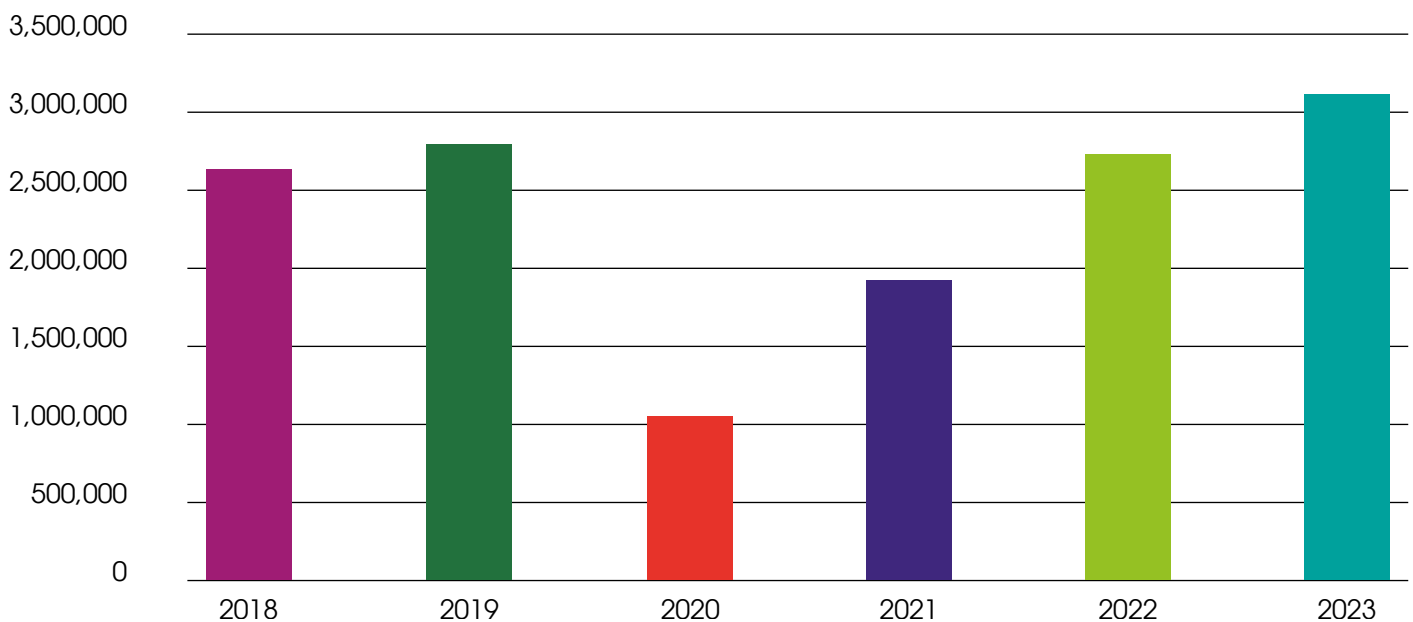
The rail reporting year runs from periods 1 to 13, 1st April to 31st March. To show the calendar year which our annual report covers, our charts show Rail Year 2023 period 11 (Jan 2023) through to Rail Year 2024 period 10 (December 2023).

## Rail reporting periods

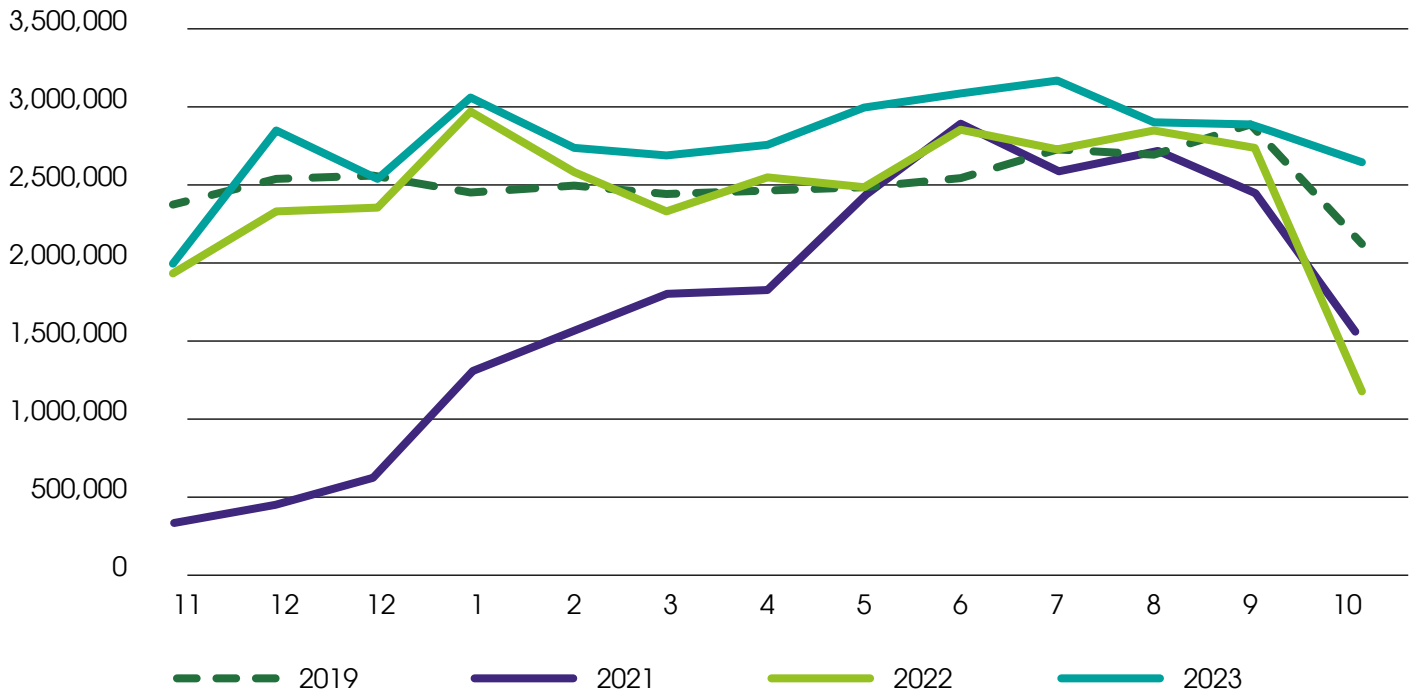
|                 |                   |                  |                 |                  |                |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Period 1</b> | April 1-27        | <b>Period 6</b>  | Aug 18 - Sep 14 | <b>Period 11</b> | Jan 5 - Feb 1  |
| <b>Period 2</b> | April 28 - May 25 | <b>Period 7</b>  | Sep 15 - Oct 12 | <b>Period 12</b> | Feb 2 - 29 Feb |
| <b>Period 3</b> | May 26 - June 22  | <b>Period 8</b>  | Oct 13 - Nov 9  | <b>Period 13</b> | Mar 1 - 31     |
| <b>Period 4</b> | June 23 - July 20 | <b>Period 9</b>  | Nov 10 - Dec 7  |                  |                |
| <b>Period 5</b> | July 21 - Aug 17  | <b>Period 10</b> | Dec 8 - Jan 4   |                  |                |

As the charts show, ticket sales on the Bishop Line have recovered well following the pandemic. The annual figure for 2023 shows an increase on the previous best performing year, which was 2019.

## Bishop Line Annual Ticket Sales 2018 - 2023



## Bishop Line Ticket Sales per period Jan 2021 - Dec 2023



# 4. Partnership News



## New Chair

In April 2023 we welcomed our new Chair, Caroline Pearce. Caroline has been linked with the Partnership since 2016. Whilst managing Luxi – a not for profit production company, Caroline worked closely with our previous Officer then Chair Bob Whitehouse on the Our Line – theatre on trains project and later with current Officer Felicity on the Our Line Connections project. Together Luxi and the Bishop Line CRP achieved great success and their collaboration was recognised in local and national awards. In 2021, we were shortlisted for Best Arts & Business Partnership at the Journal North East Culture Awards and in 2022 Our Line Connections came 3rd place in the Community Rail Awards for Best Project Involving Diverse Groups.

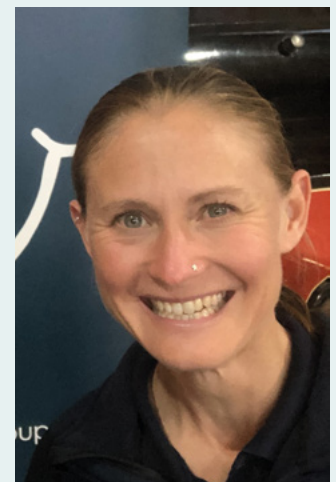


Welcoming our new Chair Caroline Pearce

Caroline now runs a coaching business and has brought with her a wealth of knowledge and experience of helping organisations and individuals to achieve their goals. Caroline and Felicity have been working together to build a plan to strengthen and diversify the Partnership to deliver its aims in a collaborative, community-centric way.

## New Rail Education Officer

In September we recruited Jess Young to the new role of Rail Education Officer, with the aim of increasing rail safety awareness in young people along the Bishop Line and ultimately reducing the number of trespass incidents on the line. Jess comes from a teaching background and has a passion for sustainability. In her first 3 months she has developed strong links with colleagues in other community rail partnerships, gathering examples of best practice and using those to develop assets and materials to use in our local schools. The role is currently funded until August 2025. As this this is a vital role and delivers huge impact, we will be seeking to secure further funding to keep the role for longer where we can.



New Rail Education Officer Jess Young

## Community Rail Officer

Our Officer Felicity has increased her hours to 30 per week.

## Department for Transport (DfT) Accreditation

The Partnership was assessed as part of the DfT's annual community rail accreditation programme in November 2023 and was successfully re-accredited for the 5th year in a row. The accreditation process for community rail partnerships in England and Wales commenced on 1st April 2019 aligned to the DfT's new Community Rail Strategy. Accreditation is formal recognition by the DfT that a CRP operates to a high standard and that its objectives and activities are supported by Government. It is in place to provide assurance to others, including potential funders and partners, that the Bishop Line CRP operates to high standards of governance and financial propriety; adopts a collaborative approach; is worthy of trust by others; and is a suitable entity for receiving public funds.



## Stockton & Darlington Railway Heritage Programme

The Officer continues to represent the Partnership on the Stockton & Darlington Railway Heritage Project Board. This means we can represent the community that our railway serves in relation to this historic celebration of its 200th anniversary on 27th September 2025. We look forward to carrying on our involvement with the programme as it progresses.



## Stockton & Darlington Railway Education Information Sharing Group

The officers both attend this group co-chaired by Felicity and Caitlin Barratt – DBC's Heritage and Community Participation Manager. The group includes representatives from all tourist attractions, community groups and organisations which deliver educational engagement to communities along the route of the S&DR. The remit of the group is to create a space where members can share ideas, ensure that delivery complements what others are doing, reduces overlap, builds collaboration and helps co-promotion. The group met for the first time in October and will meet quarterly from 2024.

## Social Media

We have seen a healthy increase in following on all our social media platforms this Year. If you aren't already following us please do.

Facebook - @BishopLineCRP

Twitter - @BishopLine

LinkedIn - Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership

# 5. Station News



## Darlington Station

The station is currently undergoing a transformation which includes a new multi-storey car park, transport interchange, new gateway entrance connected to Central Park, two new platforms and improvements to the Victoria Road entrance. Work on the new car park and entrance hall has progressed at an exciting pace in 2023. Up to date information on the project can be found on the dedicated Tees Valley Combined Authority webpage. [Darlington Station 2025 - A New Future - Tees Valley](https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk) (teesvalley-ca.gov.uk)

Darlington Station has no station adopter, to register your interest in becoming station adopter for Darlington please contact us.



## North Road Station

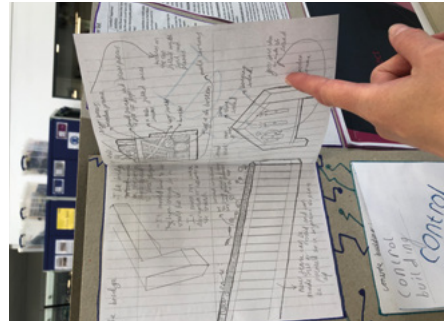
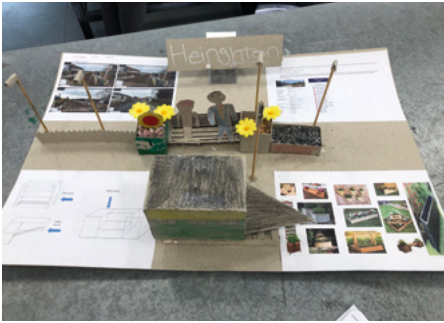
Work has progressed at speed on Hopetown, formerly Head of Steam Museum. Located at North Road Station this hugely transformed and expanded attraction will be at the heart of the 200th Anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in 2025. Hopetown will open in summer 2024 featuring North Road Museum with new immersive black box ride experience, The Goods Shed featuring the Visitor Centre, Clocktower Café and Hopetown Good and Gifts, Wagon Woods railway themed play area, Carriage Works featuring the stores and exhibition areas, and the new live engineering building 'Locomotive Works'.

The entrance to Hopetown will be located at the corner of McNay Street, and its new ramp and wide staircase will also serve North Road Station meaning the platform will be much easier to use for all passengers. We hope that rail will be one of the main modes of travel to Hopetown, so a project group is now working to further improve the accessibility of the station. More information on Darlington's newest visitor attraction – Hopetown can be found on the new website. [Hopetown - Home](https://hopetowndarlington.co.uk) (hopetowndarlington.co.uk)



## Heighington Station

Our station adopters for Heighington are the students at UTC South Durham. This year they have been working with us on ideas to embed station adoption into school life. The students have generated some fantastic ideas to improve the station, its facilities and its biodiversity. We look forward to continuing to work with the students to progress their ideas.



## Newton Aycliffe Station

We are still looking for a passionate adopter for Newton Aycliffe station and we look forward to working with them to engage the local community. If you are interested please contact us.

## Shildon Station

This year, Locomotion became co-adopters of the station to support its existing and long-standing adopter Ken Hodgson. Together they have made a huge impact on the station already.

We are looking forward to progressing 'Shildon Smart Art' project in 2024. This project will see us work with Locomotion, and Illumination Wall Art to engage with local secondary school students to improve the experience of using the station's footbridge. The area has experienced anti-social behaviour, and we aim to use this project to help reduce that whilst improving the initial impression for visitors using the station to access Locomotion.



## Bishop Auckland Station

In April the community celebrated the opening of a long-awaited path connecting Bishop Auckland Station to the Weardale Railway. The path was officially opened by His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of County Durham, Mrs Sue Snowdon, joined by Peter, Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill, Chair of Network Rail; Jonathan Ruffer, Founder of The Auckland Project; and representatives from the rail industry and local communities.

The new path at Bishop Auckland Station makes it easier and safer for passengers to access Weardale Railway services whether arriving on a Bishop Line train from Darlington or using Bishop Auckland as a terminus. As a result, the communities of Weardale, Bishop Auckland and Darlington are better connected by rail. The project was joint funded by Network Rail, The Department for Transport's Community Rail Development Fund through the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership, Weardale Railway Ltd and Weardale Railway Trust.



## Weardale Railway

The Partnership continues to work collaboratively with Weardale Railway and its owners The Auckland Project on marketing and rail education around Bishop Auckland.

## Station Adoption

Our stations are so much nicer to use when we have engaged station adopters, we hope you'll agree that the more our communities get involved and put their stamp on their local station, the more the Bishop Line will feel like part of the communities that it serves.

In 2023 all our stations were uplifted with new artwork from the talented Lizzie Lovejoy as part of the 'Trailways' project. Lizzie spoke with people who live on, or have used, the Bishop Line and learned about stories and culture surrounding this historic location, they then created a series of visual artworks which are displayed at our stations, translating local memory into an art trail. To find out more about Lizzie's project visit [www.lizzielovejoy.com/Ongoing-Projects/trail-ways](http://www.lizzielovejoy.com/Ongoing-Projects/trail-ways)



# 6. Industry News



## Industrial Action

This year has again been interspersed with industrial action which continues to disrupt travel plans. We hope that 2024 will provide passengers with more confidence in rail travel.

## National Ticket Office Closure Consultation

In July we responded to this national consultation. Darlington Station was included in the list of stations proposed to close along with Thornaby, Middlesbrough and Redcar Central. The ticket office at Bishop Auckland Station is operated by a third party therefore it was not in the scope of this consultation. We were pleased that so many people responded on issues such as accessibility, inclusivity, staffing and safety, and as a result the train operators withdrew their plans to close ticket offices.

## Northern Timetable Changes

The Partnership was consulted on the May and December 2023 timetables. Our aim is to make travelling by train simple for everyone and an inconsistent timetable can be a barrier for some people. We achieved a 'Clockface' timetable (train due at the same time each hour) in 2018 and are working with Northern to try to achieve this again for all future timetable changes.

## Half Hourly Service and Through Service

The Partnership continues to pursue a half hourly service and a through service to Saltburn where possible and we are raising this intention at every opportunity.

## DfT and CRN Community Rail Conference

The DfT and Community Rail Network (CRN) hosted two in-person conferences in 2023, in March and November. Our Officer and Chair both attended the November event. The event comprised of formal sessions on evolving our fundraising mindset and demonstrating our value and impact. This was followed by delegate led sessions which were proposed by and facilitated by partnership representatives who had a topic they wanted to discuss with others.

## Northern Community Rail Conference

Our Officer attended Northern's online Community Rail Conference on 5th December, which included a general business update followed by sessions on biodiversity, CRN Membership, Try the Train project, and sustainability.

## LNER Virtual CRP Conference

Our Officer attended LNER's virtual CRP Conference on 6th December which delivered informative content from the LNER team on accessible and integrated Travel, Startup Sherpas, LNER Marketing, LNER Perks and CALM update followed by a general update from the Community Rail Network.

## CrossCountry Community Conference

In March 2023 our Officer attended the conference in York, the first in-person event hosted by CrossCountry Trains since the pandemic. The event focussed on education and sustainability with presenters from the National Railway Museum, Community Rail Lancashire and Primary Engineers who upskill teachers to deliver rail related engineering projects.

## TransPennine Express (TPE) CRP Virtual Update

In March our Officer joined this online event where Dan Fox, TPE's Community Manager updated attendees on TPE, future funding, sustainability targets and social value work.

## COMREG

The Community Rail Executive Group (COMREG) was set up to ensure that Arriva Rail North's (now Northern Trains Ltd) franchise commitments in respect of community rail have been met. COMREG meetings take place throughout the year with one representative from each region. The Partnership Officer works with colleagues from Esk Valley and Tyne Valley to prepare a report for our region which is then presented by our regional representative.

## Network Rail

The Partnership's working relationship with Network Rail continues to strengthen. Since July 2022 Network Rail and community rail partnerships in the North & East and East Coast routes meet to discuss how we can all work better together. We regularly discuss community rail projects, rail safety hotspots, school visits and a hot topic for each meeting. Thank you to Rob Merry for continuing to co-ordinate these meetings.

## Community Rail Education Network

The Community Rail Education Network is a collective of community rail partnerships from across the UK and its purpose is to share ideas and feedback in relation to educational engagement in community rail groups. Until 2020 the group met a few times a year in a variety of locations to share best practice. Since lockdown the meetings take place virtually and our Officer and Rail Education Officer attend. The group is very supportive and together has developed award winning projects.

## Industry Support

We continue to be thankful for the involvement of all our train operating company partners, Northern Trains, CrossCountry Trains, LNER and TransPennine Express. Thank you for continuing to fund community rail through core funding and through specific project funding, but most importantly thank you for your ongoing interest and genuine involvement in the projects you help make happen along the Bishop Line. Thank you also to other rail industry colleagues in Network Rail and British Transport Police for your support to progress projects and improvements in our area.

# 7. A Year of Activity - Projects, Events and Marketing



This year has been all about growth for Bishop Line CRP. Our team grew as we welcomed new Chair, Caroline Pearce and Rail Education Officer, Jess Young. Patronage grew as we worked with partners along the line to attract new passengers to visit the amazing locations and events our community has to offer. Rail safety awareness grew as Jess started working in our schools, community spirit grew as we introduced new station artwork, and we learned more about our passengers through the Storylines project. Here's a quick summary of our year and you can find out much more on our website [www.bishopline.org](http://www.bishopline.org)

## January

As part of the **Backtrack** project team, we brought together students from two north-east based colleges to celebrate the winners of the 2022 Backtrack anti-trespass competition.

The event was hosted by Newcastle College's Rail and Civil Engineering Academy in Gateshead. We took students from University Technical College (UTC) South Durham from Heighington Station by train via Darlington and Newcastle to Felling Metro station where some students experienced Metro travel for the first time. At the celebration event, on Tuesday 31st January the teenage STEM enthusiasts enjoyed a full day at the rail training facility where they took part in activities to build and reflect on their employability skills.



## February

Our Officer, Felicity refreshed her Mental Health First Aid qualification during an intensive 2-day course. She attended with other Darlington Borough Council MHFAiders who work hard together to normalise talking about mental health. The training has helped Felicity to connect with colleagues in other departments who have a shared aim of improving mental wellbeing which will translate well into community rail projects.

## March

We joined the Story Train Day at Locomotion Museum organised by Citizen Songwriters, showcasing artists who have been responding to themes of railway heritage and community. We took the opportunity to give out zonal walking and cycling maps, Partnership leaflets and Backtrack information.

## April

What a busy month! We hosted our AGM at Locomotion's Sunday School building, and welcomed our new Chair Caroline Pearce. Lizzie Lovejoy's unique artwork went up at stations which brought colour and characters to brighten up our passengers' day. We linked with The Auckland Project to launch an offer for rail travellers – 10% off the cost of a full-price annual pass at the Auckland Project on presentation of a valid rail ticket. We joined community rail colleagues to start building the Northern sponsored 'Try the Train' project. Later in the month our epic Storylines project launched at Darlington station with great media coverage in print and on radio. To end this busy month, Felicity joined LNER to take a Newcastle based school on a visit to the National Railway Museum at York to learn about railway history, careers, and rail safety. Felicity gathered 22 entries to the Backtrack competition from this eager group of students.



## May

In May we welcomed 200 young people from local schools to our Rail Safety Event. They took part in activities to improve their rail safety awareness, journey planning, travel confidence, and mental well-being. We'll be running another day like this in 2024 and can't wait to welcome another cohort of young people. This month, as part of the Storylines project, Sam Slatcher took 10 Sanctuary Seekers living in Stockton on a liberating day out on the Bishop Line then connected onto the Weardale Railway to experience the Story Train - Citizen Songwriter's community arts train carriage located at Stanhope station. Anxhela, a Sanctuary Seeker, said "This was a new experience for me. I learnt more about the railways and enjoyed the countryside views. It was a wonderful journey that I wouldn't have had the chance to do ordinarily". May also saw Shildon Station celebrated as one of four stations shortlisted in the World Cup of Stations North East Region category.



## June

Work began at North Road Station on the new access steps and ramp to Hopetown. The steps and ramp will also be used for access the station, making it more accessible for all. This work involved temporarily closing the original stepped ramp and installing a temporary pedestrian route to the platform via the Hopetown site. We met with Northern, Darlington Borough Council and Network Rail to ensure that the route would be accessible and safe and the result was great. The path was segregated from the works site using mesh fencing so the route was visible, well lit and covered by CCTV. The new steps and ramp should be complete by spring 2024.



## July

In early July we encouraged a huge number of people to travel by train to visit Saltburn Food Festival. Passenger numbers were up 400% on the day! We're lucky to have great events like this and Bishop Auckland Food Festival, both of which you can get to on the Bishop Line. Later in the month, following the success of the Bishop Line Rail Safety Event in May, we supported Tyne Valley CRP in the delivery at another event in our region. With support from our rail industry colleagues from Northern and BTP we delivered a day of rail safety sessions at Castle View Enterprise Academy in Sunderland. The day was a great success, and students took part in the rail safety session as part of a full day of safety awareness including water safety. July also saw the Bishop Line host writer Lisette Auton for a day where she spoke with passengers about their ideas about home, talked about what its like to be a writer and offered the chance to have a go at writing from prompts. Lisette also based herself at other sites in Darlington such as the Library, the Hippodrome Theatre, the Indoor Market and in cafés. This was part of the 2023 Creative Future Writers' Award programme of which Lisette is a past winner.



## August

Throughout August our Storylines artists travelled on the train, chatting with passengers and finding out why they use the Bishop Line and what the upcoming 200th anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway means to them. Our amazing artists then took those treasured stories and worked them into poems and music which tell the story of the people who use our railway today. These will be shared wider as we lead up to the Stockton & Darlington Railway anniversary celebration in 2025.



# September

In early September we worked with Tracks Darlington CIC, to help increase footfall to the 'Last Train Home' music and comedy festival, cleverly named so that the last set of the event is timed to catch the last train home. The partnership accessed funding from the Community Rail Development Fund to help the festival achieve an increase in ticket sales of 67%.

Jess joined the partnership as Rail Education Officer. She started delivering sessions in schools in November and has already reached a milestone, 1,000 young people now safer on our railway. Jess' work continues on from the initial links made with schools along the line through the New Writing North Collaboration in autumn 2022.

On the 27th September, to coincide with the 198th anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, we celebrated all the beautiful work of the Storylines project at a live event in Darlington.

**LAST TRAIN HOME**  
**MUSIC & COMEDY FESTIVAL**

**+67%** increase in ticket sales

increase in social media following  
 Facebook +149  
 Twitter (X) +153  
 Instagram +325  
(The Recording Store 16 Sept 2023)

No empty stages

**72%** Smashed the PMS key strategic external target of 50/50 with over 70% of female performers and staff

Work placements for 3 local young people

More new young local artists

All venues accessible

Connections made between Tracks and rail industry

Eco-friendly merchandise

"Brilliantly organised, great staff, reasonable bar prices, full of like-minded music lovers, some incredible bands packed into 5 venues over a distance of probably just 200 metres. And the cost for all this? An absolute steal at just £20. Seriously, what's not to like?"  
(review from BackseatMafia.com)



bishop line

**1000**

young people safer on the railway

**DARLO DANCE MOVES**  
 ILLUSTRATED BY SLITTLERACH-TATTOO FOR LTHF'23

- 1. THE CLOCK TOWER**  
 -ARMS OUT TO THE SIDE, THEN SWEEP IN A BIG CIRCLE  
 -LIFT YOUR FOOT TO MAKE THE TICK
- 2. THE SPINNING TOP**  
 -FEET TOGETHER, ARMS HANGING LOOSE  
 -KEEP YOUR HEAD STILL WHILE YOU SWIVEL YOUR HIPS - HULA STYLE!
- 3. THE TRACKS CHOO-CHOO**  
 -ARMS BY YOUR SIDE, BENT AT THE ELBOWS  
 -LIFT AND LOWER YOUR SHOULDERS WHILE STEPPING FORWARD AND BACKWARDS  
 -"SHOO" "WOOWOOOO" STEAM TRAIN STYLE.
- 4. THE ECHO 3 EGYPTIAN**  
 (THE POLKA AT ECHO 3 COFFEE BREAK BY THIS ONE)  
 -CLASSIC WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN  
 -FOLLOW WITH THE DEEP SEA DIVER (POLO NOSE, VISIBLE YOUR OTHER HAND IN THE AIR AS YOU BEND YOUR KNEES)

SHOW US YOUR MOVES!  
 @LASTTRAINHOMEFEST  
 #LTH23  
 #DARLODANCEMOVES



## October

As key members of the Backtrack team, our Officers joined representatives from the rail industry to judge the 2023 competition entries. Over 1,000 entries were submitted this year which was a tenfold increase on last year, the highest number received since the competition began in 2020.



## November

DfT accreditation is an important objective for our Partnership and the November accreditation meeting is a key event in our annual calendar. This year our hybrid meeting was well attended both in person and online. Chaired by Martin Clarke of CRN, the Partnership was represented by both Partnership Officers, Chair – Caroline Pearce and Vice Chair – Charlie Walton, along with Cheryl Oxley – Programme Control Officer for Darlington Borough Council. Carolyn Watson and Matt Croasdale – Northern, Alex Bray – CrossCountry, Dan Fox – TransPennine Express and Sandy Lynch – Network Rail joined the meeting online. The meeting was extremely positive. In 2022 the Partnership identified opportunities for improvements and this year the team presented evidence to show that great progress has been made. The Partnership was once again recommended for accreditation. Official confirmation was received in the new year.

## December

In December Jess and Felicity delivered the Try the Train project to a group of young adults in Darlington with a focus on building travel confidence and skills to take them to the next step of their learning journey. The Partnership was also proud to be shortlisted once again for Best Business and Arts Partnership in the Journal North East Culture Awards together with Tracks Darlington for the Last Train Home Festival. We hope we can build on this success together.



## 8. The Coming Year



In 2024 we look forward to **improving rail safety** for even more young people as Jess delivers more sessions in primary schools and secondary schools. We look forward to attracting even more people to **travel by rail to our many tourist attractions**. The historic Hopetown attraction will open at North Road, the New Hall will open at Locomotion and The Auckland Project's many museums and galleries will unveil new exhibitions and events. We will be working on creative projects to get ready for the imminent celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in 2025 such as **Stop Write Here**, a creative writing project launched by the community and supported by the partnership. We will continue to share the fantastic work created in our recent project **Storylines**, through station posters and online. We look forward to delivering the **Shildon Smart Art** project which aims to reduce anti-social behaviour at Shildon Station and improve the experience of using its footbridge. And we will continue to grow and diversify our partnership to best reflect the needs and aspirations of the community which we serve. We also continue to look forward to the SDR 200 and Rail 200 celebrations in 2025 and will be building a programme of activity to help strengthen the connection between the operational service on the Bishop Line and its heritage. We will be developing an updated version of our successful booklet – **Things to see and do on the Bishop Line** in collaboration with The North Eastern Railway Association (NERA) and other stakeholders and will be updating the route boards at each station to reflect the line's significance in the 2025 celebrations.



# 9. Partnership Membership and Funding



## Membership

Membership of our Partnership is open to anyone with an interest in the Bishop Line. In particular we would like to invite more representatives of local charities, schools, groups and businesses. So please get in touch if you'd like to be involved.

## Steering Group

The partnership is assisted by a Steering Group currently made up of representatives from Darlington Borough Council, Durham County Council, Community Rail Network, Northern, Cross Country, LNER, TransPennine Express and Network Rail. We welcome more representation on the Steering Group from community groups, educational settings and employment sites. If you have an interest in helping steer the work we do for our communities please get in touch with our Partnership Officer to register your interest in joining the Steering Group.

## Funders



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council



Thanks also go to the Community Rail Network and Grand Central for their support to the Partnership and its members.



## Community Rail

Accredited Partnership  
2023-24

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

Enquiries about the partnership should be made to

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