

# Annual Report 2024-2025

Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership



# Foreword by Chair



## Welcome to the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership Annual Report for 2024/25.

This report sees a shift in our reporting format from calendar year back to financial year to better align with rail industry reporting. So, to bring reporting into alignment, this report records activity in the 15 months between Jan 2024 and March 2025.

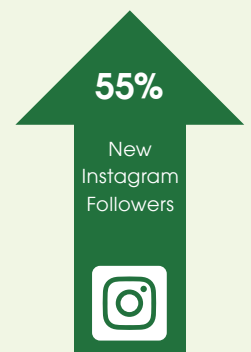
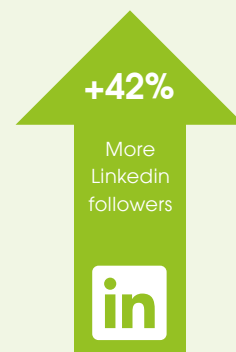
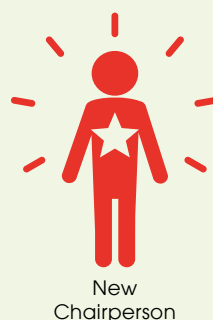
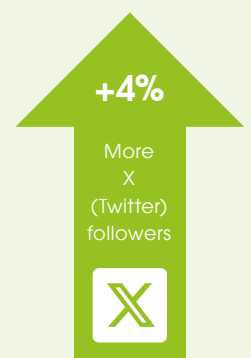
This is my first opportunity to speak formally as Chair of the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership, and it gives me great pleasure to represent this collaboration of organisations which delivers such great work along the railway between Bishop Auckland and Darlington. It delivers projects which delight its communities, rail passengers and partners, projects which encourage travel by train to explore the many world class local attractions, projects which increase passenger confidence through training and experience trips, projects which help to ensure our future generations can travel safely to access education and work opportunities, and projects which celebrate the wealth of heritage linked to the Bishop Line, which is of course part of the original Stockton & Darlington Railway.

I joined this partnership at an exciting time; during the preparations for S&DR200 and Railway 200 and in that time, I have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunities which this has brought my way. I have spoken with many of our stakeholders to understand where our strengths and our priorities lie and have been able to promote the benefits of the Bishop Line by engaging with the community whilst pursuing my love of riding on railway for business and leisure.

I look forward to continuing the anniversary year celebrations and working with the partnership to shape its position for the future, which I'm sure will be an even brighter one.

**Paul Winstone**, Chair of the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership

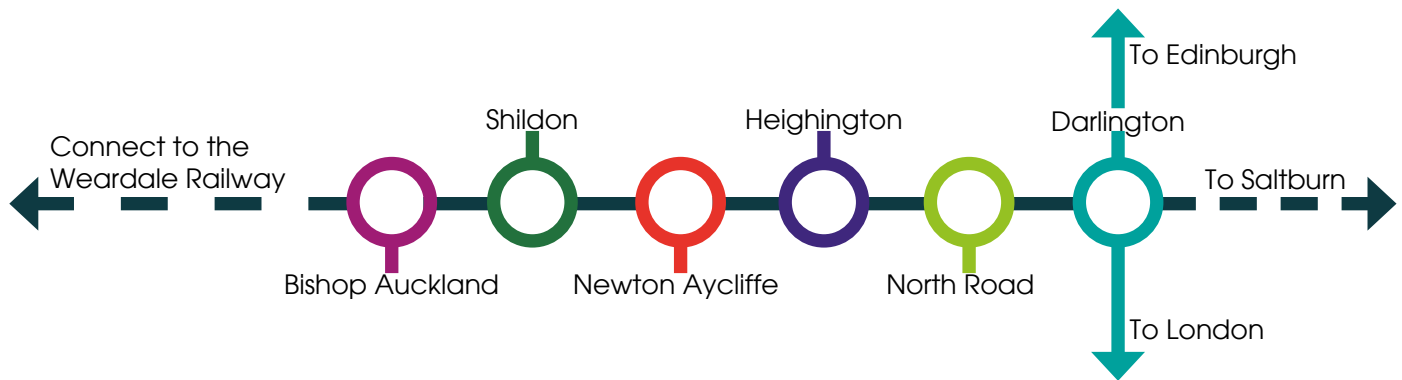
## 2024/25 in numbers



# 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, and its heritage is clear to see as you travel along it.



The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership 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, and we 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.

Membership of the CRP is open to any local or regional organisation with an interest in furthering the aims and objectives of the partnership such as local schools and colleges; environmental groups; chambers of commerce and trade; business improvement districts; tourism and destination marketing organisations; county, district, and parish authorities; third sector organisations; rail user groups and relevant train operating companies.

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# Finances and Patronage

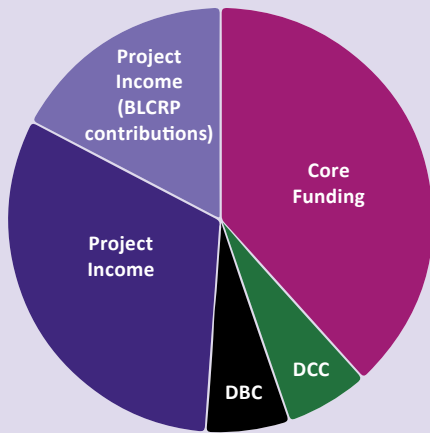


Financial End Position - 2024/2025	Operating	External funded Spend/Projects	Total
Balance brought forward from 23/24	£95,270	£38,735	£134,005
Income Received 24/25	£69,978	£76,421	£146,399
Expense 24/25	£81,667	£56,272	£137,739
Carry forward to 25/26	£83,581	£58,884	£142,465

## Total Income Received 2024/25

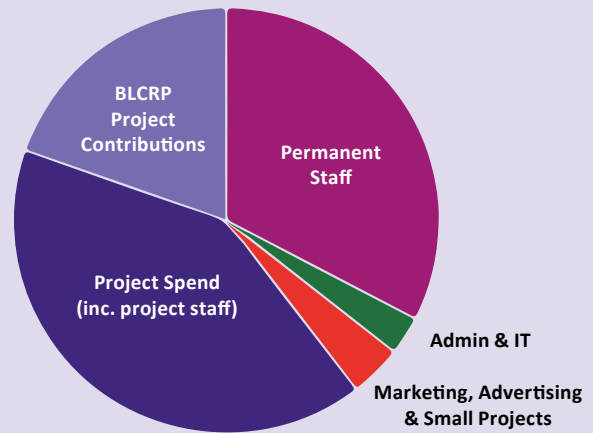
**£146,399**

+£134,005 brought forward from 2023/24



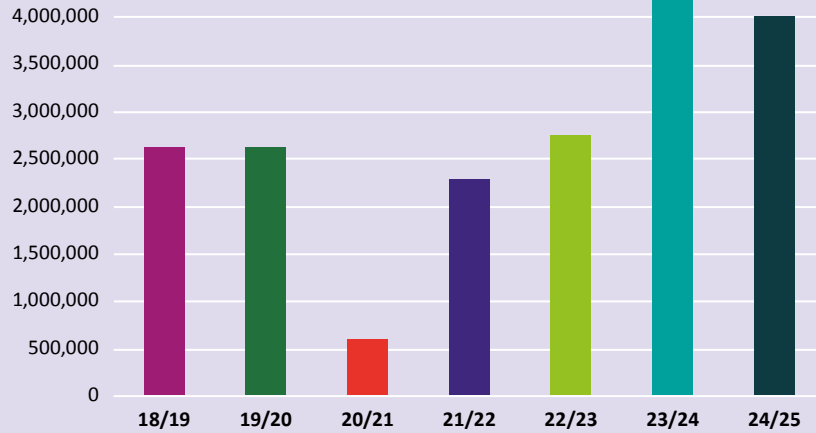
## Total Expense 2024/25

**£137,939**



## Bishop Line Annual Ticket Sales

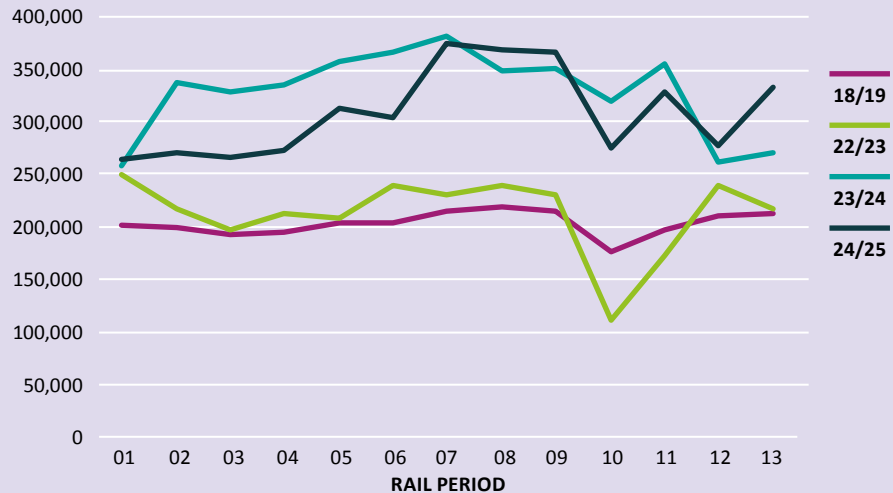
2018/19 - 2024/25



## Bishop Line Ticket Sales per period

2018/19 - 2024/25

This chart only shows 4 years, the last pre-covid year, then post covid growth from 2022/23 to 2024/25.



# Partnership News



## New Chair joins the partnership

In December 2024 Paul Winstone joined the partnership as Independent Volunteer Interim Chair. Paul joined on an Interim basis to assist the partnership with a task & finish review of its governance. He is an engineer and has experience of governance with charities. Paul was selected from some very strong candidates, and the Partnership's Steering Group was pleased to attract such applications to a voluntary role.

## Community Rail Awards

Three Bishop Line projects were celebrated at the national Community Rail Awards for their innovative approach to engaging communities with the local railway line and stations. **Shildon Smart Art** won the Community Creative Projects and Station Arts award for engaging with local young teens and Street Artist, Dan Walls to create artwork on Shildon footbridge that enhances the experience for passengers and makes the area more welcoming. **Explore the Bishop Line by train this summer** won the Tourism & Leisure Award for raising awareness of attractions easily accessible by rail along the line. And the **Bishop Line Rail Education Programme** came second for the Involving Young People Award. In its first year the programme engaged with almost 4,000 young people along the Bishop Line and delivered over £90,000 in social value.

## Community Rail Awards Fringe

Bishop Line CRP collaborated with local CRPs Esk Valley and Tyne Valley to reflect the friendly and diverse communities of the North-East and North Yorkshire to those visiting the Community Rail Awards in March. The CRPs worked together to showcase the amazing work being delivered in each CRPs area, brought the CRPs closer together through joint literature and highlighted some fantastic events for awards delegates to take part in while the region.



Joanne Roberts - Interim Transport Manager DBC,  
Felicity Machnicki - Community Rail Officer,  
Paul Winstone - Interim Chair,  
Charlie Walton - Vice Chair,  
Kenneth Hodgson - Station Adopter.



Tim Dunn, Sam Slatcher – Citizen Songwriters,  
Claire Gibbons – Weardale Railway, Josh Parker – Hopetown Darlington, Felicity Machnicki, Jess Young, Catherine Hodgson – The Auckland Project, Martijn Gilbert – Lumo.



Claire Gibbons – Weardale Railway with  
Ian Dinmore – Community Rail Network Board.

# Youth & Education projects



## Rail Education Programme

It's a priority of the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership to better educate young people of the dangers of trespass and Anti-Social behaviour on and around the railways. The CRP recruited Jess Young as Rail Education Officer, in September 2023. In the first academic year (Nov 2023 – July 2024) the Rail Education Programme was delivered along the Bishop Line (Bishop Auckland to Darlington) to **22 schools** engaging with **3,791** pupils.



Rail Education Officer Jess Young taking primary school children to the train station and learning about rail safety in the classroom.

## Shildon Smart Art

The 'Shildon Smart Art' project aimed to improve the experience of using Shildon Station footbridge, to feel safer and more welcoming, reduce anti-social behaviour and increase community pride.

Our partnership brought together Shildon Station Adoption Group including Locomotion, Street Artist Dan Walls, and 200 local Year 9 students.

The students explored rail safety, pride of place, the 200th anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, Railway 200, and the positive impact street art can have on a local community and for the many visitors using Shildon Station to visit Locomotion in 2025 and onwards.

They shared their feelings of using the footbridge in its current state and how they would like it to feel, these ideas were turned into inspiring words. A small group of students then worked with Dan to develop a collaborative piece of art featuring their inspiring words and local imagery. The students visited the bridge to learn street art techniques which they used to apply the design to the footbridge. The outcome is that the bridge now feels safer, and more welcoming and community feedback is positive.



## Primary Schools Rail Safety Event 2024

In June 2024 we brought together our rail industry partners to support our second Primary Schools Rail Safety Event at Locomotion, Shildon. 180 year-6 students from Bishop Auckland, Shildon and Darlington attended the 2-day event which aimed to prepare the students for safe, independent train travel. They enjoyed a carousel of activities delivered by railway professionals covering rail safety, journey planning, mental well-being and driver experience. They heard what it's like to work in the rail industry from drivers, customer services staff, and those behind the scenes in roles like train performance. And for a hands-on experience, they explored the tools and vehicles used by colleagues and officers of Network Rail and British Transport Police who work to keep us all safe on the railway.



## Secondary Rail Safety and Careers Event

Following the success of the Primary events in 2023 & 24, in February 2025 we collaborated with our partners to host our first Secondary Schools Rail Safety and Careers Event. Over 100 Year 8 students from secondary schools along the Bishop Line attended the event at Locomotion. They spent the day learning about rail safety and potential careers in the rail industry so they not only could become rail safety ambassadors but also be inspired to consider rail when choosing their GCSE options.

They engaged in interactive sessions covering rail safety with virtual reality headsets, potential rail careers, looking after their mental well-being, designing anti-trespass messages and understanding the impact of anti-social behaviour. There was also an opportunity to find out what it's like to work in the rail industry from Drivers, Travel Safe Officers and British Transport Police Officers, as well as the less well known roles like train performance, planning and strategy. They also met representatives from local colleges who introduced the students to relevant courses to access roles in the rail industry.



Young people experiencing the primary and secondary rail safety and careers events.

# Leisure & Tourism Projects



## Tourism Marketing Campaign

The Bishop Line is part of the original Stockton & Darlington Railway which would be a focal point for tourism in 2025 linking to the 200th anniversary of the S&DR. It is home to world class attractions which tell the story of the railway and local culture such as Weardale Railway, Locomotion, The Auckland Project and the North East's newest attraction Hopetown, Darlington along with cultural attractions like Darlington Hippodrome and Theatre Hullabaloo; the only purpose-built theatre for children and young people north of London. Each attraction is successful in attracting visitors, but many arrive by car. The CRP aimed to deliver a campaign which would bring all the attractions together as a whole tourism offer, increase the number of people travelling by train to the attractions using local rail services and connecting from the east coast mainline and encourage all the attractions to feel proud to be part of the Bishop Line offer, cross-promoting each other and collaborating on content to build an exciting and attractive package of events throughout the summer. The campaign ran through July and August with print adverts and a busy schedule of social media posts.



The campaign was a success. Northern Ticket Sales increased for all the stations with attractions featured in the campaign; The Auckland project saw an increase in visitors claiming 20% discount for arriving by train and an annual increase in visitors; Hopetown Darlington opened on 17th July welcoming 51,000 visitors in its first 2 months; Weardale Railway saw an increase in passengers connecting from Bishop Line services.

The artwork was updated at Christmas to promote winter events along the line.

**Explore the Bishop Line by train this summer!**

**Weardale Railway**  
Kids for a Quid! During the summer holidays up to 2 children can travel for £1 each with one adult.

**Auckland Castle**  
Ideal for families, with three new gardens and 150-acres of parkland to explore, plus family fun activities during the summer holidays including Knight School and Open Art Space.

**Locomotion**  
Experience a Summer of Steam, with special guest Flying Scotsman. Enjoy train rides and family activities throughout the summer holiday.

**Hopetown Darlington**  
Discover new family-friendly activities like Wagon Woods adventure play park plus an immersive tour through the world of transport constructed entirely from LEGO® bricks!

**Hullabaloo**  
Fantastic free family festival for 0-10s. From the 26th-28th July, South Park will be transformed into a magical land of creativity and fun!

**Darlington Hippodrome**  
This summer's sparkling season of sensational shows includes Bluey's Big Play, David Walliams' Awful Auntie, Fireman Sam, Cirque - The Greatest Show and lots more!

**Opening Tuesday 16th July!**

The Bishop Line is part of the original Stockton & Darlington Railway so its bursting with history and packed with exciting attractions and places to explore and the train is the perfect way to get around.

To find out more about the Bishop Line and the Community Rail Partnership visit [www.bishopline.org](http://www.bishopline.org)

# Heritage & Culture Projects



## Storylines

Launched in 2023, Storylines aimed to raise awareness of the upcoming S&DR 200th Anniversary.



Led by Sam Slatcher, local artists gathered memories & stories from passengers on the Bishop Line and S&DR route which were then translated to poetry, songs, illustrations and a play. Over two years the project's creative outputs have been shared at live events and viewed online. The stories, memories and voices from the communities along the S&DR and the beautiful interpretation of those memories as songs, poetry and illustrations now live on through celebratory films, posters, music, poetry and an album which will continue to inspire others long into the future, to remember and celebrate how the journey on the 27th September 1825 changed the world forever.

## Last Train Home Festival

We were keen to support Last Train Home Festival for a second year following the success



of the collaboration in 2023. Rail industry funding in 2023 enabled festival organisers Tracks Darlington to increase marketing and attract more people than in previous years - ticket sales increased by 67%. In 2024 we supported the festival again with funding from Northern and CrossCountry with the aim of attracting more people to travel by train, make the festival more accessible and deliver social value to the local community. 2024 saw an additional increase in ticket sales by 37%. We also secured an additional late train service run by Northern to Bishop Auckland.

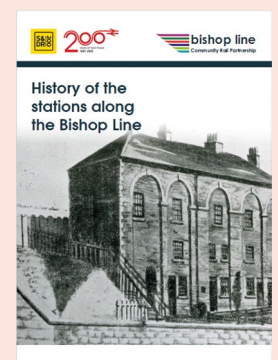
## Write on Track

Led by Ann Cuthbert and Pam Plumb, Write on Track started as a creative writing competition concept but it grew into an impactful creative project celebrating the skills and creativity of local people along the S&DR route. Over a few months 12 workshops were delivered in inspiring railway settings and on trains, resulting in around 100 entries into the competition categories of poetry, short story and memoir. All entries have been celebrated in one form or another. Winning entries are published in an anthology available online and to purchase in paperback, selected pieces have been performed at live events at venues along the line and runners up entries are displayed at stations along the Bishop Line ensuring that all participants can see their work celebrated in print.



## Reprint of the Bishop Line History Booklet

Originally compiled in 2016, the history of the stations booklet comprises the artwork from the interpretation boards along the line. This booklet was reprinted for 2025 with minor updates to the introduction and photography.



# The Coming Year



2025 is set to be a year of celebration as we approach the 200th anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway on 27th September. Much of the partnership's activity will be focussed on the anniversary.



We will continue to improve rail safety awareness and travel confidence for more people through our Rail Education Programme and Northern funded Try the Train Programme. We will be showcasing the work from projects such as Write on Track and Storylines at our stations. Naturally we will continue to promote rail travel to our wonderful tourist attractions, and we will be supporting projects which will bring our communities together to celebrate this historic event.

## Tracks Darlington CIC Collaboration

### – making live music and events more accessible

Throughout 2025 our partnership is supporting Tracks Darlington CIC to deliver their Big Little Gigs and Hark events free of charge making them accessible to a wider audience.

**Big Little Gigs** is a family music project which aims to inspire a love of live music in children by introducing them to the wonderful diverse world of music at an early age. Research has shown that early experiences with music can help boost children's creativity, mood and language learning abilities – as well as just being lots and lots of fun!

**Hark** events deliver music inspired by stories. Featuring a wide variety of artists and themes, Hark events bring together history, the written word and music to new audiences. The events will be delivered at community venues which can be accessed by train and some railway themed songs will be woven into the sets. The programme will also feature a SEN event where a signer will perform the songs along with the headline artist. We look forward to reporting on the events.

## Mental Health Projects

The North-East has the highest number of deaths by suicide in the country. Darlington has the highest number in the North-East. Our partnership wants to help support people with their issues 100 steps back before they get to the platform edge. Throughout 2025 Bishop Line CRP are collaborating with local charities and organisations to make small steps to help tackle the issue of suicide in our area.

We are supporting **Mind Darlington** to help fund a Stockton & Darlington Railway themed Mental Health Trail in Darlington named '**Railways to Wellbeing**' which will be relocated to several locations around the S&DR.

We are also supporting **ManHealth**, who support men in County Durham and the Northeast of England through local meetings and organised walks. Our support will fund a series of **monthly walks** starting and finishing at Bishop Line stations, engaging with men of any age, living or working in Bishop Auckland, Shildon, Newton Aycliffe and Darlington throughout 2025 up to the end March 2026.

# Partnership Membership and Funding



## Membership

Membership of our partnership is open to any organisation 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 local businesses. If you have an interest in helping steer the work we deliver for our communities please get in touch with our partnership officer to register your interest in joining the steering group.

## Funders



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council



**NORTHERN**



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

Felicity Machnicki

Community Rail Officer

The Bishop Line

Room 417 Town Hall

Darlington DL1 5QT

Email: [felicity.machnicki@bishopline.org](mailto:felicity.machnicki@bishopline.org)

Tel: 01325 406334