

The Bentham Line

Chairman's Report 2022-23

Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership



Community Rail
Accredited Partnership
2022-23



The Bentham Line



A Window on the Dales and Bowland

The Bentham Line - Chairman's Report 2022-23



This is my 9th annual report as chairman and covers the period from August 2022 until now. In this summer report, I outline the major developments for the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership and the Bentham Line during the past twelve months. We are now into our seventeenth year of working with the train operating companies in the North of England and the communities and organisations along the Bentham Line. This report reflects on a further busy and rewarding year for the partnership, as we continue to move on from the challenges placed on us by the coronavirus pandemic.

The core funders of the partnership remain Northern Trains Ltd., along with CrossCountry, the London North Eastern Railway, the Avanti West Coast Partnership, TransPennine Trains and North Yorkshire County Council.

Northern has maintained a genuine all-round interest in the work of the partnership. Its students have again been participating in the

projects on the line. CrossCountry Trains continue to take a keen interest in the work of the partnership, in particular our Ingleborough Triangle project, and the Bentham Line website. We continue to look at possible community developments at Lancaster station with Avanti West Coast. We were pleased to attend and contribute to the community rail and stakeholder conferences arranged by all the above mentioned train operating companies, during the past 12 months.

Having welcomed and taken onboard the new Community Rail Strategy in November 2018, The initial accreditation meeting took place in early October 2020. Re-accreditation was confirmed exactly one year later and now follows a yearly cycle. The latest re-accreditation being successfully completed in October 2022; the next will be in October 2023.

The **Bentham Line Strategy to 2042**, a major advance for the LMCRP, was completed and published last year as the Full Strategy and an Executive Summary. The strategy is now playing its part in the development of future projects for the line.

With the award, in January 2023, of £50m by the government from the 'Levelling Up Fund' to the Eden North project at Morecambe, there has since been a focus on the future public transport provision for Morecambe and the project. The Bentham Line Strategy which proposed that, the Lancaster to Morecambe branch line would benefit from low-cost electrification between Morecambe South Junction and Morecambe station, has formed the basis for the development of discussions on the Bentham Line and the local line services and on Morecambe station itself. The electrification of the

western end of the route would also enable the introduction of bi-mode services on our line and offer greener journeys to the seaside.

Reactions to the Strategy continue to be very favourable and have raised the profile of the Partnership both with stakeholders and in the press.

For the fifth successive year, the Partnership has been working with Northern's year-in-industry students. Their projects this year were based on the theme of 'Destination Wellbeing'. With us, they looked at five aspects of wellbeing which journeys on the Bentham Line, and other routes, could assist with, namely; embracing culture, exploring our heritage, getting active, reconnecting with friends and the great outdoors.

The booklets are now published, the associated poster campaign is up and the video created are now part of the Bentham Line website. I am pleased that the Northern Seed-Corn Fund was able to support



the booklet and posters with a grant for £4,500, alongside funding from the partnership.

We were able to hold a launch event at the beginning of July at the Met Hotel in Leeds with their managers, Northern directors and representatives of the LMCRP present.

All five groups of students have displayed a lively and positive outlook towards developing their own community initiatives and we now look forward to welcoming a sixth group of students to our line this autumn.

I am delighted to report that at the 2022 Community Rail Awards in Manchester the 'Access for All' project was awarded third place in the 'Most Effective Communications Campaign' category.

Details of the 'Access for All' project by the fourth cohort of students and the Dementia and Community Rail project have recently reached the Great British Railways Transition Team with several of its members taking a genuine interest in the content. This was a result of our attendance at CrossCountry's Accessibility Forum earlier this month in Birmingham.

After all, a certain White Paper associated with the review of Britain's railways, stated:

'Best practice, such as that demonstrated by the work of the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership and Northern Trains to improve facilities for those with invisible disabilities and enabling staff and volunteers to become Dementia Friends, will be supported more widely across the network and incentivised in Passenger Service Contracts.'

Work associated with the Dementia and Community Rail project has continued throughout the past year with new itineraries developed. It



has been pleasing to hold further in-person dementia awareness sessions, which involved the Year-in-Industry students and supporters of care groups in the Bentham area. The sessions are definitely more successful and rewarding 'live' than by video call. Rod Tickner leads these sessions for us in his new role as a Dementia Friends Ambassador with the Alzheimers Society.



No.150214, has continued her travels across the north and has covered a further 200,000 miles carrying its 'dementia-awareness'



message. Its daily journeys are recorded by Phil Wallis, on the units

own Facebook page, which also receives photographs of our unit in action.

CrossCountry has continued to support us in developing our new dynamic website to promote both the line and the work of the Partnership to the wider world. The development of the website is of course ongoing. The site reflects the many initiatives of the CRP and includes many opportunities to download and print items, such as the station history panels and the 'Rail to Trail' walks and cycling routes. Our regular press releases are added to the home page and social media posts feed into the home page too. The Destination Wellbeing project is currently being added to the site. We have started to make use of Instagram for social media purposes.



Bentham station, as well as being home to the Partnership and Friends Group (FOBS), remains a focal point for, and a window on, the community. North Yorkshire Council minibus services have continued to be based at, and operated from, the station. A new service is presently being trialled between Bentham and Hornby to connect with a bus to and from Lancaster, partly for those challenged by the

hills near Bentham and Lancaster stations. The Bentham News group have continued their regular schedule of monthly meetings and editing sessions in the building. Their newsletter is distributed across the parish from the station each month. The Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group, LASRUG, have bi-monthly meetings at the station. There are other one-off users.

The past year has proved to be a calmer and more positive time for the volunteer station adopters at Morecambe, Bare Lane, Bentham, Clapham, Cononley, Keighley and Bingley but they have continued their endeavours to enhance their stations.

It is pleasing to note that the defibrillator installed by the Friends of Bentham Station, for which they raised a substantial part of the cost within the community and through donations, has already proved useful on two occasions in saving a life.

There are now defibrillators at the majority of stations on the route; at Morecambe, Bare Lane, Lancaster (3), Bentham, Clapham, Skipton, Keighley, Bingley, Shipley and Leeds stations with other units close by at Wennington, Gargrave and Cononley. It would be good to complete a Bentham Line chain. Volunteers are now seeking classes on the operation of the units.

FOBS recently held another of their quiz and supper evenings in Bentham Town Hall. Over 50 guests raised £150 towards their



activities at the station and consumed huge portions of steak pie and mushy peas. Last month they opened their new 5*+ hotel in the station gardens, thanks to the Hardman family. Plenty of insect-friendly plants surround the classy abode. Plans are afoot for a festive celebration at the station too - a pallet-recycling experience for community groups throughout the parish.

The memorial stone for David Alder, 'A true friend of Bentham' and our former treasurer, has now been carved and is about to be painted and installed adjacent to the platform in the gardens.

The Lancaster and District Conservation Volunteers have continued to develop their range of station information panels and historic signage, as well as working with the local primary school at Bare Lane and extending their gardening activities on both platforms and beyond, at Bare Lane.

The full 8-train weekday service returned to the line in December 2021. Sadly, the service has been punctuated by numerous strike days, over the past year, when no trains have run with other days having reduced services. The local services between Lancaster, Bare lane, Morecambe and Heysham Port have been particularly inconsistent and have not operated for some periods. Whilst some services have run or 'bustitutions' introduced, many have not, particularly on Sundays, with Morecambe only being served by the 5 through trains to and from Leeds at times. Cancellations affecting are still affecting services at present.

Platform 2 (westbound) at Wennington station had to be closed for over two months at the start of 2023 because of decay to the wooden footbridge steps and supports. Temporary steps had to be craned in and are still in place. The CRP was able to advise Northern on a better bus replacement possibility to the one initially introduced.



For the past seven months at Bentham it has been a question of having 'water in all the wrong places'. A crack developed in the mains water pipe to the building, where it passes beneath the tracks, resulting in the water being turned off. This has led to various investigations by Network Rail who eventually decided last week to involve United Utilities in providing a new mains supply from the north of the site which wouldn't pass under the track. Thankfully, Network Rail have provided welfare facilities in the station car park through this long period. Unfortunately, FOBS and Bloomin' Bentham could not undertake their usual summer planting because of the lack of a regular water supply. To top it all off there have been a fair number of flooding incidents in the car park and station entrance, which are also being looked into by Network Rail.

The partnership officers have met with myself at Bentham at least once per week throughout the year with numerous video and telephone calls in-between. I fear a legacy of of the pandemic will be video calls and hybrid meetings. It is good to be increasingly out and about along the line meeting stakeholders and groups. In particular, it is always great to be visiting schools, to deliver presentations and

activities, and also to welcome school groups back to the railway for journeys.

During the year, interactive railway safety and heritage presentations were given to the Year 5 pupils of St. Peter's Church of England Primary School, Heysham, and Year 2 pupils of Bentham Community Primary Schools. The in-school visits were followed up by educational days out to Carnforth Heritage Centre by train. The pupils looked at the local history and created further 'Suzy', to panels extend the 'Sheep on the Line' project. The original artworks created by the pupils were presented to the schools and the pupils came along to their local stations to unveil panels based on their works. Everyone participating received a certificate marking their involvement, a copy of our children's story and created their own safety badges.

Our activity packs continue to be used on train journeys and our 'A Grand Day Out to the Seaside' story book has been particularly well received by



families on the route and will again be widely distributed this summer. As an extension of the project, panels featuring the characters from the story have been installed at all stations, on the westbound platforms, for the youngsters to spot as they follow the story.



To complement the creation and installation of station history panels between Skipton and Carnforth, the new ones have been installed at Lancaster, Morecambe and Heysham Port. That now just leaves Cononley and our West Yorkshire Stations to be covered.



This work has led to the development of further panels to celebrate the unique history of the Pioneer Line; the local electric service instigated by the Midland Railway at the beginning of the 20th century to link Lancaster Castle, Lancaster Green Ayre, Scale Hall,

Morecambe Promenade and Heysham Harbour. The panels at Lancaster Castle, Morecambe and Heysham Port are in place and the CRP is working with the local councils to install the panels for Scale Hall and Lancaster Green Ayre at the original sites of the stations and adjacent to the Morecambe to Caton joint footpath and cycleway, which was built on the old trackbed.

The LMC RP is currently working with Avanti West Coast to arrange a formal unveiling of the panels at Lancaster Castle and provide an exhibition of the Bentham Line's history posters and photographs of the Pioneer Line.

The LMC RP has continued its work with Bowland on a new active-leisure programme for the AONB and the neighbouring AONB at Arnsdale and Silverdale, called 'Eco Escapes' with the railway a key element of exemplar itineraries.

During the year we have reviewed our core leaflets; the Line Guide and Rail to Trail versions. Thanks go to the Bowland folk for their new suggestions for the walking and cycling leaflets which will link well with the Eco Escapes project. These will now be prepared over the coming months.



Recent meetings with both the Forest of Bowland AONB, and subsequently Sustrans, have led to interesting discussions on the extension of the Morecambe to Caton (Bull Beck) joint cycling and walking path to Wennington station. This is a project, which is being supported by Lancashire County Council and by Lancaster City Council, is based on the former 'Little' North Western Railway route between Morecambe and Wennington. The CRP is keen to present the history of the route to its users, encompass the route within our Rail to

Trail programme and establish good accessibility to the proposed route from both sides of Wennington station.

Work has continued on 'The Ingleborough Triangle' project in association with the Settle-Carlisle CRP. A green-tourism, active-leisure and family-travel initiative, based on the triangular area bounded by the 2 lines with corners at Bentham, Ribbleshead and Settle Junction. A particular aim is to boost tourism by rail to, and within, that area. Following a successful application to CrossCountry, a grant of £8,000 was awarded for the project to cover both the electronic and printed promotional materials. A three-minute video has been prepared and edited on the highlights of the area. This is now receiving its finishing touches. An accompanying booklet, with various itineraries and wallet-friendly family visits based around the natural attractions of the area, is also nearing completion.



Following a detailed look at Heysham Port Station in 2022, the Partnership, alongside Lancashire County Council, is planning to vastly enhance the overall experience of passengers using the station and the services with the 'Rail and Sail' project. We have held meetings with Peel Ports Ltd., the Isle of Man Steam Packet Co. Ltd., ISS Ltd., Network Rail LNW and Northern to initiate ways forward to bring the community, schools, railway, shipping company and port together.

The pupils of Year 5 at St. Peter's C of E Primary School thoroughly enjoyed working on the art-based elements of the project, in school, at the port and at Carnforth Heritage Centre. There was an opportunity to go behind the scenes at the ferry terminal to make drawings of the port and view up close the arrival of the passenger vessel from the Isle of Man.

With the students creating passengers, local landmarks and a few fantasy elements, it was our artists task to blend them all into two 16-foot-long panels for the platform wall entitled Rail to Sail and, not surprisingly, Sail to Rail. A third 8' by 3' panel for the passenger lounge was also created by Alastair Nicholson to showcase the IoMSPCo's new vessel, 'Manxman'. The resulting pieces of artwork look stunning in their surroundings and I am sure that they will generate interest for many years to come.

The other parties came together on several occasions to smarten up to s t a t i o n environment on and around the platforms. A host of new informative panels were introduced on the platform fencing and the artworks mounted outside and indoors. It all brought a new



sense of caring to the area and was topped off by the school indicating that they would like to become the Station Adopters at Heysham Port. We will help to facilitate this when the autumn term begins.



All involved in the project took part in a grand unveiling of all aspects of the project, on the station and in the terminal building at the end of June, and were joined by CRP directors together with representatives from Northern and the local councils, including the Mayor of Lancaster City, Councillor Roger Dennison. He truly recognised the spirit of the event and ensured all, especially the children, were fully involved in the proceedings.

Pleasingly, Train operators are engaging with the IoMSPCo to look at the publicising of joint Rail and Sail fares.

The new purpose-built vessel, 'Manxman', having sailed from the builder's shipyard in South Korea to Douglas comes into operation on the Heysham-Douglas route in the next few weeks.



A sound level of funding for the Partnership has continued, making it possible to extend the part-time partnership officer contract for Brian Haworth for a further year. Thus for a fifth year, there will be 44 hours of officer time available each week.

During the spring of 2023 the Department for Transport requested that the Train Operating Companies carefully review their spending with a view to reducing costs. Not surprisingly, this also included their funding of Community Rail Partnerships, which resulted in some TOCs delaying payments this year. Fortunately, the majority of TOCs, but not all, have sought to protect their core funding to CRPs at last year's levels. However, a number of their funding pots, open to bids from CRPs, have been suspended this financial year. The Community Rail Development Fund for accredited CRPs remains open, as does Northern's Station Adoption Fund, with a reduced pot of gold.

The LMCRP remains an active member of the Community Rail Network and the Chairman continues his role with the Community Rail Executive Group, representing the East Area Community Rail Partnerships. The Partnership has also maintained its membership of Co-operatives UK and the Bentham and District Dementia Friendly Community.

It has been great to see increasingly larger numbers of passengers returning to our line during 2022-23, with a lot of trains close to being full, heading both west and east. There appear to be more families, walkers, cyclists and dogs using the services. Let us hope that these are signs of a green-travel revolution, with more active leisure travel. Students have returned to our route and the number of connections being made to and from the Furness Line has again increased. Our line is also proving popular for journeys between Scotland and West Yorkshire with the good connections at Lancaster.

Benthamers continue to make the greatest number of local journeys within the route and have shown considerable resilience to the hoped-for intentions of the numerous strike days.



Amongst the returning passengers have been groups from SELFA, a children's support charity, based in Skipton, with an outreach group in Bentham. We are again looking forward to seeing some of the local dementia groups travelling on the line this summer for their 'Grand Days Out'; there have already been a number of bookings, including returning groups, and enquiries for new visits.



Following a successful initial visit to the Brief Encounter Bistro and the Heritage Centre by the members of Low Bentham Lunch Club, a group containing many

members with physical and hidden disabilities, we have developed a day programme to include lunch and a museum visit with the establishments, to encourage more groups to try a journey. The onboard Northern staff were exceptionally supportive of the group and the visit and really demonstrated again that journeys for those with disabilities are a definitely possible.



The curved ball to round off the year, came from the Department for Transport via the Train Operating Companies, in the form of a consultation on the proposed closure of the majority of the remaining ticket offices at stations. On the Bentham Line Northern Trains has proposed the closure of the Shipley, Bingley, Keighley and Morecambe ticket offices, whilst Avanti West Coast has proposed the closure of the Lancaster office, (along with all their other ticket offices). However, Northern intends to keep open their offices at Skipton and Leeds. Where there are proposed closures, Northern intends to introduce 'Journey Maker' roles, on the platform or concourse, to provide customer service and support. There will be a similar role with Avanti West Coast namely, 'Customer Ambassador'.

In September last year, it was great to be able to hold a joint event with FOBS at Bentham station again - the first since the pandemic. Everyone was in good spirits and ready to come together again. The occasion was used to celebrate the



installation of the community defibrillator and the life of David Alder who did so much for Bentham and the Bentham Line through numerous organisations.



My sincere thanks go to all the directors, management committee members, Northern, CrossCountry, Avanti, LNER, TransPennine Express, Network Rail, rail user group members, friends groups, station adopters, sponsors and the many additional volunteers who have together contributed a vast amount of time to developing the Bentham Line and enhancing its stations, as well as helping to secure a brighter future for the line with a considerable emphasis on the communities it serves.

May I offer my personal thanks to Catherine Huddleston (CRPO), Brian Haworth (CRPO), Hugh Turner (Treasurer), Rod Tickner (Vice Chair and Secretary) and Mike Cliffe for their support and help with all the ideas and schemes.

My thanks also go to Pete Myers, Darren Allsopp and Richard Isaac of Northern's East Area team who have continued to support the work of the partnership, along with Alex Bray of CrossCountry.

The Partnership is moving forward positively having resumed a wide range of activities and brought new projects into play. It is important that we continue to develop our long standing projects which were originally chosen because of the many aspects to explore, as well as developing new initiatives. The outstanding characteristic of this partnership remains its caring family-orientated approach to all it undertakes.

May I conclude on a personal note by saying I was delighted to receive a Legacy Award at the end of March, at the final meeting of

Craven District Council, for services to the Bentham Line and the Railways in Craven.

Finally, to accompany this report there is a photographic slideshow reflecting on the past year of Bentham Line activities. This can be found on YouTube by searching 'The Bentham Line 2022-23' or visiting our website.

Gerald Townson

Gerald Townson
Chairman, LMCRC Co. Ltd.

July 2023.



the
Bentham line

LEEDS - MORECAMBE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Lancashire County Council Report to the Partnership

Access for All Studies

12 Lancashire stations were submitted for consideration within the Department for Transport's National Access for All programme for Control Period 7 (2024 - 2029) in partnership with Community Rail Lancashire, the Leeds Morecambe Community Rail Partnership, District Councils, Northern Trains and Network Rail. Proposals to deliver level access and platform to platform accessibility have been developed and submitted for Carnforth and Silverdale stations. Ministerial decisions are now expected from Autumn 2023 onwards.

Lancaster Changing Places Project

A new accessible toilet facility that meets the needs of all people with a disability is being developed for Platform 3 at Lancaster Station by Avanti West Coast. Listed Building Consent was granted by Lancaster City Council on 12th January 2023 with design progressing to integrate the facility within the existing station building. The scheme is jointly funded by Lancashire County Council and Avanti West Coast and on-ground delivery is programmed by late 2023.

Lancaster Station Platform 1

Lancashire County Council has worked closely with Avanti West Coast and Lancaster City Council to open up the gate on platform 1 of Lancaster Station to maximise accessibility for cyclists. The initiative has been welcomed by cyclists and users of the station. Usage of the gate is being monitored on an ongoing basis by station staff and the City Council are undertaking additional landscaping maintenance on land adjacent to the gate at West Road / Station Road to maximise sight-lines.

Manchester Recovery Task Force – December 2022 Timetable

The December 2022 timetable change delivered a number of structural changes designed to improve cross-Manchester services in order to benefit the rail network across the North of England. Northern Trains' Barrow-in-Furness / Windermere services now operate via Chorley and Bolton to Manchester giving faster journey times and new direct travel opportunities for Silverdale / Carnforth / Lancaster and Chorley / Bolton. Transport for the North continue to monitor day to day reliability, planned and unplanned cancellations, with performance data reported via the Rail North Committee.

Dalesrail

Northern Trains have confirmed that the Sunday "DalesRail" service will not operate from Summer 2023. However the aim is to reinstate the service from Summer 2024. Lancashire County Council and Community Rail Lancashire have commissioned consultants to look at alternative service options for Dalesrail. Options will be worked up with Northern Trains and a preferred option presented to the Rail North Partnership for consideration within future Annual Business Planning rounds.

Eden Project North

Central Government Levelling-Up round 2 funding was awarded in January 2023 to the Eden Project North via Lancaster City Council. A Project brief has been scoped for improvements to rail infrastructure and services Lancaster - Morecambe with input from Northern Trains and Network Rail, using the Bentham Line Development Study as the basis to build on. Areas to consider include further business case work on upgraded rolling stock, service enhancements, station improvements and network infrastructure. Further discussions will take place with Eden Project North regarding the sustainable future

transport offer to and from Morecambe and with funders in order to deliver identified improvements.

Mike.

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Alfie from Bentham meets 'Whistle', Northern's mascot, at Leeds. Patrick, one of the Year-in-Industry students in disguise!





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*Photographs courtesy of Ollie Rouse, Brian Haworth,
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