



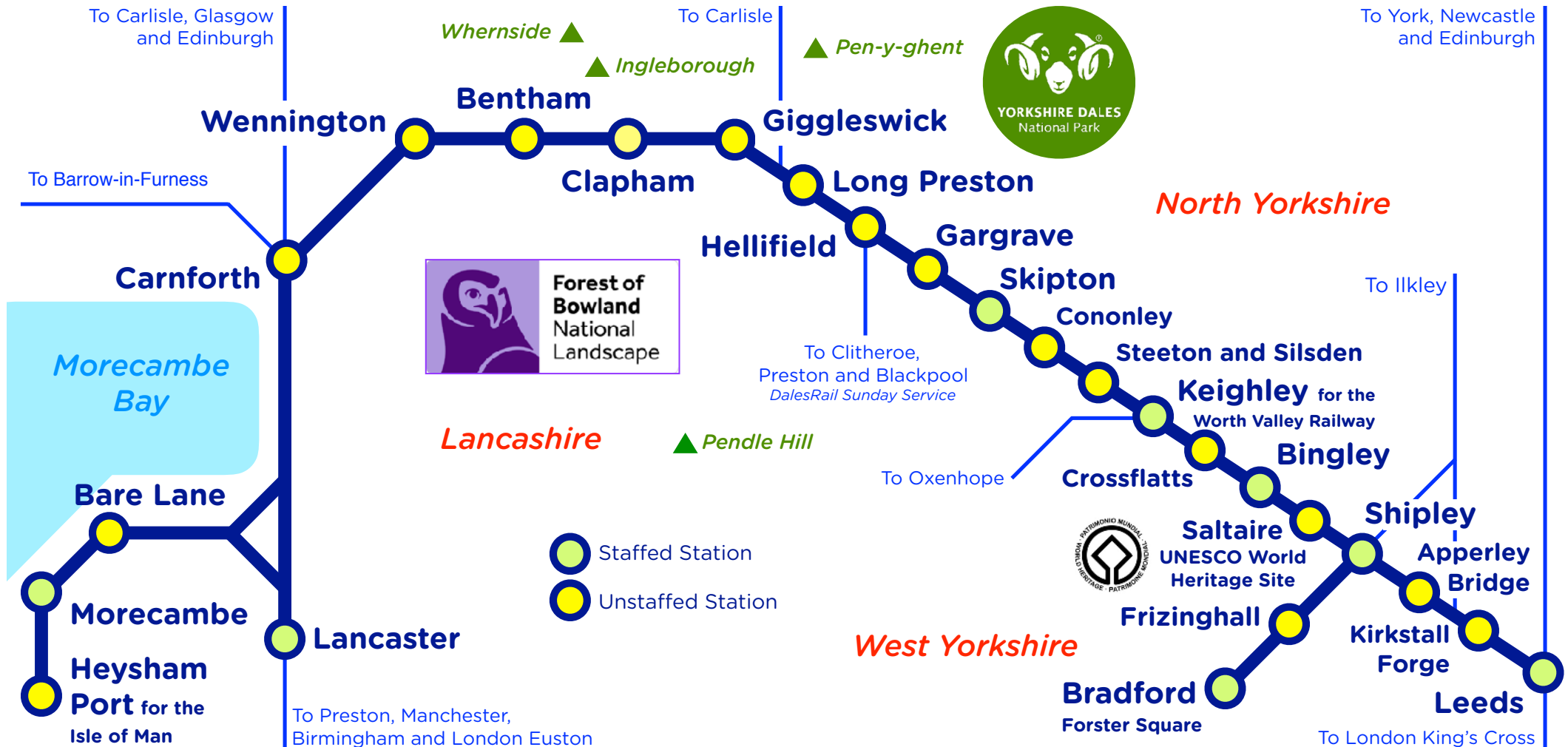
The Bentham Line

Chairman's Report 2025 - 26

Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership



The Bentham Line



A Window on the Dales and Bowland

The Bentham Line - Chairman's Report 2025 - 26



On the 1st June 1850, the then 'Little' North Western Railway opened the final section of its route between Clapham and Bentham to make rail travel possible between Leeds and Morecambe. This year we continued to celebrate not only 200 years of the passenger railway, the 175th anniversary of the route, now the Bentham Line, but will also celebrate the 20th anniversary of the formation of the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership, the first ten years of our acclaimed 'Dementia and Community Rail' project and the fifteenth anniversary of the formation of the Friends of Bentham Station.

This is my 12th annual report as chairman and covers the period from August 2025 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 twentieth 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.

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 along with North Yorkshire Council. However, again for the financial year 2025/26 TransPennine Trains have opted to offer project rather than core funding.

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



We celebrated Catherine's ten anniversary at the LMCRP with a commemorative lunch and cake.

Some time ago David Alder and Rod Tickner were looking to record the history of the LMCRP. Sadly, David is no longer with us, but over the past two years Rod has been determined to bring this to fruition for our twentieth

anniversary. After a great deal of research and having contacted previous members of the LMCRP, he has produced a document in various formats which has now gone off for preparation and printing.

He has also spent time recording the first ten years of progress of our Dementia and Community Rail project. This too is about to set up for printing.

A big 'thank you' for undertaking both these projects, Rod.



We are grateful to CrossCountry Trains for supporting all of these publications

With the closure of the British Transport Police Station at Lancaster Castle station, we lost our local BTP representative. However, there appears to be moves a foot to open a new BTP Office on the upper floor on Platform 3.

Last September, Richard Rollins, past Chairman and director of the LMCRP, and Lancaster & Skipton Rail User Group representative,

stood down. Sadly, Richard passed away last year after being unwell for a time following a fall abroad. All parties expressed their sincere thanks for his longtime support of the Railway and, in particular, the Bentham Line.

Northern and our other funders have maintained a genuine all-round interest in the work of the partnership. 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, either in person or online. The Partnership also continues to be a frequent attendee at in-person conferences and online gatherings organised by the Community Rail Network. We have also been a regular attendee at Northern's community rail education network, each quarter.

The LMCRP remains an active member of the Community Rail Network and the Chairman continues his role with Northern's 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.

The latest re-accreditation was successfully completed in October 2025; the next is scheduled for October 2026. After several positive annual re-accreditations it would now seem to be a suitable time to extend the period between re-accreditations.

The Bentham Line Strategy to 2042, is continuing to play its part in the development of future projects for the line and beyond, particularly the Eden Morecambe project and the TriLink project for the West Coast Main Line north of Crewe.

Our Class 150 DMU, No.150 214, has continued her travels across the North and has now covered well over 1,000,000 miles carrying

its 'dementia-awareness' message, since its naming in 2019. Its daily journeys continue to be recorded, by Phil Wallis, on the unit's Facebook page, which also has many photographs of our unit in action. It has recently crossed the Pennines and is now in Greater Manchester and Lancashire.



I-Creation continues to help us in developing our dynamic website to promote both the line and the work of the Partnership to the wider world. The site reflects the many initiatives of the CRP and includes many opportunities to download and print items, such as the station history panels, the 'Rail to Trail' walks and cycling routes, and the Access for All and Destination Wellbeing literature.

We now receive a host of statistics about those who use the website. Most users head to the site directly, whilst others are referrals from Scenic Rail Britain and other travel and tourism sites.

We continue to make progress with the development of our social media, which now includes Instagram and Tic Tok. We have now taken out a subscription to the professional version of 'Canva'. It is proving to be a useful tool for creating posts suitable for the variety of media channels we use and a good way of developing a new animated style of posts. The posts frequently relate to topical and national themes and given a Bentham Line twist by Catherine.

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. The Bentham News group have continued their regular schedule of monthly meetings and editing sessions in the building. The Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group, LASRUG, have bi-monthly meetings at the station. There are also other one-off users, giving a community flavour to the building.

The volunteer station adopters at Heysham Port, Morecambe, Bare Lane, Bentham, Clapham, Cononley, Keighley and Bingley have continued their endeavours to enhance their stations, on both the gardening and information fronts. The Bare Lane adopters have now created even more history panels and signage the station, whilst the Bingley adopters have created further new artwork for the front of their station and the ramp down to Platform 2.



The Friends of Bentham Station continues to hold coffee mornings to raise funds for their activities. The new automatic watering system to the baskets and planters along the front of the station building is working well and can easily be controlled by mobile phone from anywhere.

FOBS has also been successful with two further grant applications, to Northern and Bentham Town Council, for funds to create a more secluded wellbeing area within the gardens on Platform 1, which has a new 'listening bench', hedgehog house and sculpture plinth, as well as aromatic planting all around.

The Partnership Officers have continued to meet with myself at Bentham at least once per week throughout the year with



numerous video and telephone calls in-between. It is always good to be out and about along the line meeting stakeholders and groups. In particular, it is always encouraging to visit schools, to deliver presentations and activities, and also to welcome school groups

to the railway for educational journeys.

Brian Haworth CRPO continues his work with, and for schools, supported by local professional artist Alastair Nicholson, where appropriate.

We returned to St. Peter's Primary School at Heysham in September this time to present the Birds of the Bay 'welcome' sign which had been designed around contributions from all 240 pupils in the school, and the staff too.



Each of the three-foot square panels was linked to the others by creating a seascape of Morecambe Bay to the background, thus forming an impressive 24-foot long mural for Heysham Port station and a copy for the school. The presentation

assembly was a super success with the pupils swapping pairs of the giant letters to reveal the correct sign. Smaller framed presentation



copies of the signs letters were given to the school. After the assembly, the original artwork was put in place at Heysham Port station.

The Head immediately, requested a full-sized copy of the art work for an outside wall at the school. This was installed in December.

The biodiversity work with the Year One and Two pupils from Gargrave Primary School has continued with a colourful mini beast and bird panel to accompany their bug hotel at the station. These were put in place at the station in the autumn and a framed copy of the original artwork presented to the school. The school had already been presented with one of the two hotels the pupils created.

Earlier in the year we also welcomed students and tutors from Keighley College and Lancaster and Morecambe College to the Bentham Line. The former arts group took the train to Morecambe with a view to creating tourism posters for the railway, based on an Art-Deco theme. The Art-Deco style has had a strong influence on many of the resort's buildings in the past.

The business students from Lancaster and Morecambe joined us at Bentham station to hear about how the LMCPR was formed and



operates as a not-for-profit company. The later group will be joining us again later this year.

The LMCPR has continued its work with the Forest of Bowland on a new active-leisure programme for the National Landscape and the neighbouring National Landscape at Arncliffe and Silverdale, called 'Eco Escapes', with the local community railways a key element of exemplar itineraries which have now been expanded from six to twelve itineraries. The folks at Bowland have recently filmed at Bentham station and in the surrounding area to create a video to help promote the escapes by rail.

The CRP, the Friends of Cononley Station and the Friends of Bentham Station were short-listed for the National Community Rail Awards 2026, in five categories, but being in the 'final three' was out of grasp this time around for all. Cononley was given a silver award in the 'It's Your Station' category.

It has been great to see increasingly larger numbers of passengers returning to our line during 2023-24 to 2025-26, with a lot of trains well loaded, heading both west and east. There appear to be more families, walkers, cyclists and dogs using the services than ever before. Let us hope that these are signs of a continuing green-travel revolution, with more active leisure travel. Walkers are to be seen on most services, frequently making use of the Partnership's 'Rail to Trail' programme of walks.

The latest footfall figures, for the financial year 2024/25, were published by the Operator of Road and Rail in December 2025. This provided a better opportunity to compare the post-pandemic figures to earlier ones. Usage figures for the line are continuing to rise, with many commuter journeys having been replaced by ones for leisure. More stations have seen growth since beyond the pre-Covid levels,

but the larger towns and cities at both ends of the line have still to fully make up lost numbers of passengers.

Benthamers continue to make the greatest number of local journeys within the route and have shown considerable resilience to the industrial actions. In fact, the number of people using Bentham station post pandemic is 45% higher, at almost 42,000 journeys, than the 29,000 trips before Covid.

The number of students on our route and the number of connections being made to and from the Furness Line has again increased. Our line continues to prove popular for journeys between Scotland and West Yorkshire with the good connection times at Lancaster.

Spring saw the start of a new project, in association with Abbie Hampshire from the Bowland team, about getting adults in recovery programmes, in the Lancaster and Morecambe area out into the countryside along our line and reflecting on the experience. An early visit saw them enjoying river bank walks around Bentham and writing about their experiences of the fauna and flora they encountered back at the station.



The LMCRP and the Furness Line CRP have continued meeting together, at two-monthly intervals, to look at ways of improving the outlook for Carnforth station. The Heritage Centre has now been refurbished and is fully open, thanks to the new operational team.

With help from Northern, Network Rail and Lancashire County Council, the CRPs were able to encourage positive improvements to the environment at the station. Platform areas have been cleared and tidied. Paint of the station has got underway but has been hampered by the damp conditions in the subway and getting the necessary line closures. The cause of the subway frequently flooding is now thought to be beyond the station area.

A new set of brighter information screens have been installed on the station platforms, supplemented by a new screen in the subway.

Thanks to LCC, better joint rail and bus information has been put in place at the station and nearby bus stops. Real-time information screens have been installed at neighbouring bus stops and are under test. A further joint rail and bus screen is currently being installed at the station entrance. Use of the parking



payment app has proved problematic for sometime, so payment through the ticket vending machines has also been introduced. There's much more that still could be done.

April saw the long-awaited return of

Carnforth station clock with a 1940s themed unveiling celebration. There are still adjustments to be made to get it ticking over smoothly.

The Partnership participated in both Dementia Action Week and Community Rail Week this May. They were different weeks this year.

We were invited by Network Rail - Northwest & Central to have a stall on the concourse at Manchester Piccadilly again this year. This proved very successful with our materials 'flying' off the stall and a great many positive conversations about the line and Community Rail.

We were pleased to be able to invite along our friends from the Forest of Bowland National Landscape. They were amazed at the interest shown by the travellers, particularly, in their 'Eco-Escapes' initiative, which now offers twelve itineraries based around rail travel.

We made a particular point of operating one of our group days out



that week, as well as taking part in a dementia organisation gatherings at Pudsey and Leeds, for all the groups in the area offering support. Our new leaflet, which gives details of possible itineraries was on display,

including a new itinerary for Cliffe Castle at Keighley.

We continue, this summer, to have some of the local dementia groups and lunch clubs travelling on the line for their own 'Grand Days Out'. There have already been a number of bookings, including returning groups, and enquiries for new visits from groups in Leeds. Dementia Friendly Skipton visited Carnforth Heritage Centre with its thought provoking memory displays and enjoyed lunch at the adjacent Brief Encounter.

The onboard Northern staff are exceptionally supportive of the group visits and we have again demonstrated that successful journeys for those with hidden disabilities are a definite possibility.

We are looking forward to welcoming to welcoming back a Calderdale dementia group from beyond the line. The lively collection of Yorkshire folk from Halifax will again be accompanied all the way to Morecambe.

In September last year, with support from Forest of Bowland National Landscape, we were able to take the residents and supporters from a care home in Morecambe to Shed 24H, the café at Hellifield station. A splendid afternoon tea was enjoyed by all followed followed by a tour of the railwayana collection. The residents will be repeating their adventure next month.

The CRP continues to work with Northern's East Area Team on improving the Bentham Line timetable. The 06:41 service from Bradford Forster Square to Carnforth has been extended to Lancaster to give an 08:35 arrival and a much better onward connection to Bare Lane and Morecambe. This was introduced in the summer timetable. It now would be good to see a further extension to Bare Lane and Morecambe, to create a much earlier through service to and from Bare Lane and Morecambe.

The last service from Lancaster to Skipton now has had its journey time decreased by two minutes, after last year's extension, to give a 22:44 arrival once more. This again makes available an onward connection to Leeds which departs Skipton at 22:49.

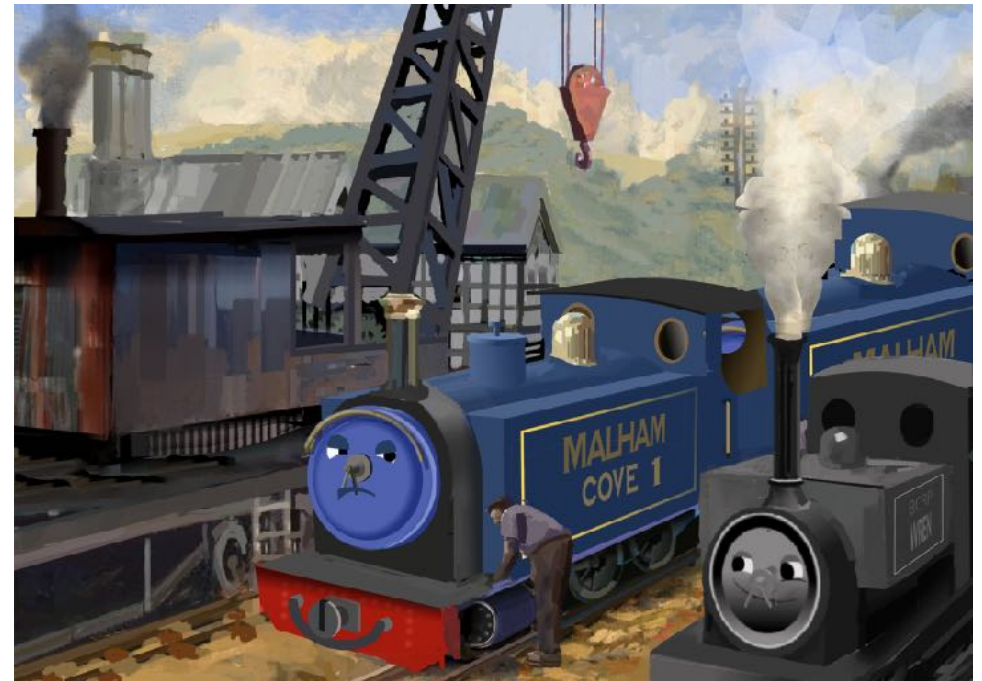
Northern's services over the past twelve months have continued to be disrupted in the western area, particularly on Sundays, because of industrial matters. These include our local services between Lancaster, Bare Lane, Morecambe and Heysham Port. making the service unreliable at a time when Morecambe is looking to reviving its fortunes with the new Eden Morecambe project.

Of particular concern, over the past year, has been the reliability of the 17:12 Lancaster to Morecambe and the 17:32 Morecambe to Leeds. Disruptions on the West Coast Main Line, and other factors, have meant that Western Area crews have not arrived in time to operate the services, with the result that short notice cancellations take place and passengers towards Leeds are stranded at Morecambe and Bare Lane. We would urge that these services be operated by Skipton crews to improve reliability.

The CRP is continuing to support initiatives on improving integrated transport in the Craven District Corridor. Discussions centred on a better understanding of the periods needed for timetable setting in the rail and bus industries and how the setters could better link with each other. A joint bus and rail timetable has again been produced by Dales Bus CIC for this summer and Hawes, Ingleton and Kirkby Lonsdale have become rail-bus destinations this spring.

We have, for a second year, continued to support a young man, Max, who has hidden disabilities and needs additional support. He has a great passion for anything connected with railways. We were only too pleased to help and glad that Max has continued to volunteer with the CRP on a weekly basis. The first of his children's

stories based on the fictional Malhamdale Light Railway, featuring two narrow gauge locomotives, not surprisingly, called Cove and Tarn. The illustrations for the book are now well advanced and the book will go for preparation and printing in the near future.



He is an ideal partner for Brian Haworth when it comes to developing materials of an historical nature. Together they have created the materials for history panels for our West Yorkshire stations, as well as two further panels for the waiting room at Lancaster station about the Glasson Dock Branch and Lancaster's Locomotive Legacy. These are all prepared and ready ready for printing.

The ladies of 'Outside it is Beautiful' who joined us in autumn 2024 to undertake an initial trial for their whole-line project, aiming to bring the passengers closer to the line's communities and the beautiful surroundings.

They initially engaged with pupils in Bolton-le-Sands, former prisoners in Leeds, a dementia group in Bentham and passengers on the trains, amongst others. This was rounded off by creating a short ghost story with a Settle group.

The group has kept in close contact with the LMCRP and has now successfully obtained a further £17,000+ in grants, with the assistance of the Partnership, from Northern and the Community Rail Development Fund.



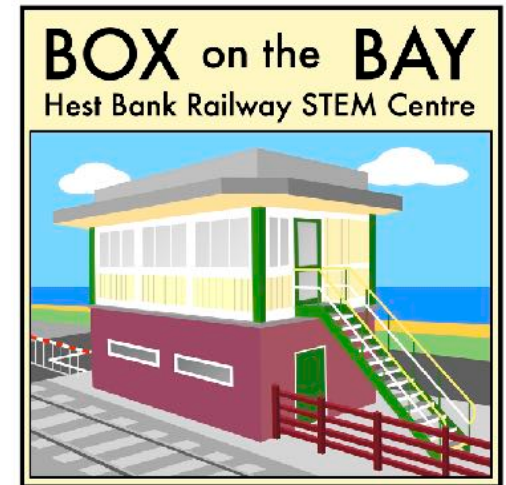
This autumn they are looking to expand their engagement to a far wider range community groups and local residents and create a series of interactive panels for stations where the public can find out much more about the project through linking QR codes.

Ultimately, they are planning to create a smart app for our route where a GPS signal triggers stories by local people about the communities and surrounding scenery.

Jack Warbrick, LASRUG Membership Secretary, has expanded his collection of poems about the stations on the western half of our route, between Heysham Port and Skipton to mark the local anniversaries. These will be published in a booklet entitled 'Station by Station, Line by Line' and will also be on displayed on plaques at the appropriate stations.

Without question the highlight of the past twelve months has been the 'Box on the Bay' project. The Box has now opened and has received it first guests.

Working with colleagues from Network Rail - Northwest & Central the LMCRP has undertaken the repurposing of the upper floor of the decommissioned Type-15 Hest Bank Signal Box, dating from December 1958, into a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education centre, both for the railway and the ecology of Morecambe Bay. This is a reflection of the box's position on the West Coast Main Line adjacent to the shore of the Bay.



After initial discussions with Andy Griffin and Ian Croucher, during 2024/25 Network Rail carried out the necessary works to bring the box to a suitable standard with new kitchen units and a small toilet and washroom. Externally, they erected fencing to keep visitors safely away from the line. From the beginning of 2026 the LMCRP



has worked tirelessly to refurbish and equip the box to a good standard ready to receive school groups and others.



We are grateful to Avanti, TransPennine Express and Northern for creating a community funding pot of £12,000 for the works and equipment and to CrossCountry for supporting a promotional video by I-Creation. A great deal of in-kind support, volunteer time

and generous donations of equipment have added considerable value to the project, as has careful purchasing and the use of local contractors.

The box was officially opened on July 10th by Amelia Routledge of Network Rail and the first pupils, from St. Peter's Primary School at Heysham, enjoyed rail safety and bridge construction activities developed by the CRP.



All who have visited have been impressed by the location, high standard of the refurbishment and the presentation of the space.



It is rare that so many rail organisations come together like this with such a fruitful community outcome. There are 50 schools within five miles of the 'Box on the Bay' and we look forward to welcoming them in the coming months. The promotional video is available on our website and can be viewed on YouTube;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nsBbdf_05Y

The CRP has recently begun working with corporate partners CAF. They are keen to be involved with the dementia work we undertake and will be joining in group visits shortly. They have also been very impressed by the Box on the Bay project and would like to offer sessions for the young people in the area.

We recently began working with representatives from the Marsh community to the west of Lancaster station. They are looking to map their area and gather residents thoughts on living there, in order create a station panel and large mural on the over bridge which Network Rail agreed to.

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.

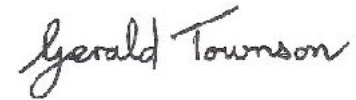
May I offer my personal thanks to Catherine Huddleston (CRPO), Brian Haworth (CRPO), Hugh Turner (Treasurer), Rod Tickner (Vice Chair and Secretary) and Max (our volunteer) for their support and help with all the ideas and schemes, and to all who assisted in bringing our many projects to fruition. Thank you to Phil and others who send us wonderful photographs from along the line for our use.

My thanks also go to Darren Allsopp, Danielle Clarkson and Richard Isaac of Northern's East Area team, as well as all our other Train Operator partners, who have continued to support the work of the partnership.

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 2025/26' or by visiting our website.

We look forward to the National Community Rail Awards 2027 being on home territory at the Royal Armouries in Leeds next March and playing a part in this annual celebration.

After 176 years, the Bentham Line is still here for the benefit of all and will shortly be part of Great British Railways.



Gerald Townson
Chairman, LMC RP Co. Ltd.

July 2026.







Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership Co. Ltd.
Bentham Station Building
Station Road
Bentham
Lancaster
LA2 7LF

Telephone: 015242 98940
Email: the.bentham.line@gmail.com



*Photographs courtesy of Chris Peach, Brian Haworth,
Phil Wallis and Gerald Townson*