

2016/17

Community Rail Chairman's Report

In the last 12 months we have entered a brave new world with the letting of new franchises for the Northern and TPE networks, the creation of Community Rail Lancashire as a not for profit company and the securement of funding to support the development of our award winning school engagement programme.

The key word to be taken from the last 12 months is 'investment'. The new Northern franchise, which has been split into 4 business units, has set in motion exciting plans for accommodating passenger growth and delivering the transformational railway many of us have been campaigning for over a number of years. New services and timetable improvements will be supported by the introduction of new and refurbished trains which will operate from more staffed and better stations and mobile apps will be developed to make checking and booking more flexible tickets easier for the general public.

But the franchise must also ensure it is able to deliver the basics and ensure it is fully customer focussed. Ensuring our trains are reliable and operate from clean attractive stations is unfortunately still proving to be something of a challenge in the early months of the new franchise and with figures realised by the ORR for 2015/16 highlighting some notable reductions in passenger numbers at many of our local stations, owing to a mix of forced possessions and poor performance, I just hope that we are able to quickly recover lost ground.

Improvements to the quality and performance of both the Clitheroe and East Lancashire rail lines is therefore vital if we are to regain passenger confidence and support East Lancashire's ambitious sustainable economic growth proposals.

Lancashire is a dynamic economic region within the North West and the wider North of England and has a unique offer to make and role to play in the Northern Powerhouse. Connectivity is however fundamental to maximising our growth potential and the CRP will continue to have an important role to play in ensuring the right outcomes for passengers, communities and businesses locally.

Additional resources within the Northern franchise for CRP activity is greatly welcomed and I think we can be rightfully proud of our contribution to this shift in the franchise focus given the time and money invested in our local rail network over the last decade and our development of Community Rail Lancashire which has been supported by many hours of volunteer activity.

Once again we owe a great deal to the hardworking volunteers tending to our stations, campaigning for better services and facilities and championing the role of our railways in the future development and growth of Lancashire.

As public services continue to be affected by the ravages of central government funding cuts the volunteers in our community and at our stations are now as important as ever. Whether it's our friends of stations groups, rail user groups, local in bloom groups or even individuals with a simple passion for improving their local area they are all making a huge contribution to the quality of the local environment but more importantly the quality of life of residents and visitors.

On behalf of the Clitheroe Line and East Lancashire Line CRPs I would like to thank all those undertaking a number of selfless tasks within the community that benefit the railway and surrounding neighbourhoods.

I would also like to thank the Community Rail Lancashire team and all of you for the hard work in helping to deliver the Action Plan for our two lines. A number of successful projects have again been delivered in partnership with local community groups, schools and colleges and thanks to the assistance of our resident artist Alastair Nicholson passengers can see for themselves the impact that this has made.

2017 looks set to be another fascinating year and I am particularly keen to start marketing the new improved service frequency between Blackburn and Manchester on the Clitheroe line now confirmed as starting in Dec 2017 and to continue the marketing of the Todmorden curve service as an attractive option for commuting and leisure travel between East Lancashire and Greater Manchester.

I am also extremely keen to ensure that a masterplan for Blackburn Station is fully endorsed by the rail industry and can be used to unlock further investment to create more commercial and community opportunities at the station to compliment recent investment in the Cathedral Quarter by BwD and partners and that we maximise the potential opportunities for timetable enhancements resulting from the mini diesel stabling depot being developed at Blackburn Wrangling site which should be operational by September.

James Syson
Chair CL & ELCRPs
April 2017