

## **UPPER CALDER VALLEY RENAISSANCE SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT GROUP**

### **RESPONSE TO THE DfT AND RAIL NORTH CONSULTATION ON THE NORTHERN RAIL AND TRANS PENNINE EXPRESS FRANCHISES.**

**12 August 2014.**

**Lead author: Nina Smith, Railway Issues Lead: [nhrawsons@googlemail.com](mailto:nhrawsons@googlemail.com)**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The UCVR Sustainable Transport Group exists to promote improved and sustainable transport in, to and from the Upper Calder Valley in West Yorkshire. It started as part of the Upper Calder Valley Renaissance (UCVR) programme, initiated by the former regional regeneration organisation Yorkshire Forward to create a connected, creative and sustainable valley. The upper valley of the Yorkshire River Calder covers an area from the borders of the former Todmorden Urban District (Walsden to the South West and Portsmouth to the North West) through Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, Luddenden Foot to Sowerby Bridge and Copley. The area also embraces a number of hilltop villages and settlements which rely for most of their services on the towns and large villages in the valley bottom. Our area is about 10 miles long and 5 miles wide. Our interest extends beyond our valley, because our residents travel throughout the region, the wider UK and beyond. Much of the Upper Calder Valley's economic development and prosperity is related to the railway links that enable residents to commute easily to the major employment centres in the Leeds – Manchester –Preston triangle, and to the inward tourist trade, which is strengthened by our rail links. Reasonable as those links are, local residents and business would welcome further improvements.

To provide evidence and our response to this consultation, in July 2014 we carried out a local questionnaire-based consultation in Hebden Bridge, seeking the views of rail users. Whilst this methodology precluded statistically significant results, the survey nevertheless gave a fair indication of rail users' views and the fact that many questions were open/qualitative produced much useful information. The fact that the survey was not carried out amongst car commuters means that latent demand for train services could not be ascertained. *The survey report and its appendices are being sent with this response as supplementary material containing evidence.*

This response has been endorsed by the Friends of Hebden Bridge Station.

## **SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Calder Valley lines require:**

- **Later evening trains from Leeds, Manchester and Blackpool/Preston**
- **Earlier services on Sunday mornings.**
- **A full, seven days a week service on the Leeds –Brighouse-Manchester route.**
- **New direct service from the Upper Calder Valley to Huddersfield, and to Manchester Airport.**
- **Other new direct services**
- **More capacity on Sundays**
- **The new service from Blackburn to Manchester via Burnley to be in integral part of the new franchise.**
- **More capacity on commuter trains**
- **More modern, more comfortable, more reliable rolling stock.**
- **Speed enhancements.**
- **An enhanced service and staffing at Sowerby Bridge.**
- **A new station at Elland, and possibly one at Cornholme.**
- **A new link to join up the railway between Bradford Interchange and Bradford Forster Square to facilitate a wide range of new through service possibilities.**
- **More robust response to anti-social behaviour on trains.**
- **Electrification.**
- **Achieving modal shift to be a key objective in the next Northern Rail franchise specification.**

**TRANS PENNINE EXPRESS (including impact on Northern Rail and possible transfer of some Scarborough services).**

The Trans Pennine Express (TPE) network does not serve the upper Calder Valley, nor the Calder Valley line as a whole. However, it does impact on it.

We will therefore confine our comments re TPE to the following.

Firstly, **re NTP1 & 2**, we are concerned that the nature of services on our line is subjugated to the needs of TPE. This happened with the May 2014 timetable changes. All Calder Valley line services were recast so that an extra (fifth) TPE service could be routed via Manchester Victoria to Liverpool. The most important knock-on effects have included:

- **A reduced service at Walsden station, with no trains to Halifax, Bradford, New Pudsey and Bramley outside the morning and evening peaks; this includes Saturdays,**

whilst on Sundays Walsden has no trains east of Todmorden. Halifax is the major town and administrative and shopping centre of Calderdale, and is the location of the acute hospital. We are concerned that these service changes, because they inconvenience potential passengers, will result in a decreased use of the station and may thus be the start of a spiral of decline.

- On the Greater Manchester section of the Calder Valley line, Moston in Greater Manchester now only has an hourly off-peak service. Littleborough and Smithy Bridge, just across the Greater Manchester border, only have an hourly service east of Todmorden and, like Walsden, outside the peak periods they have no direct train service to Halifax and Bradford (to rub salt into the wound, West Yorkshire Combined Authority/Metro is now consulting on a proposal to discontinue the hourly Rochdale/Littleborough to Halifax bus service).

The following quote from our recent survey illustrates then problems caused by timetable changes, especially when these are done without reference to bus operators and the bus section of an ITA. *“Why oh why did they have to change the train times in May, especially after all the bus timetables had been changed to connect better with the trains. The connections in the morning are now worse. It's given me big problems for my morning commute - I had to negotiate with my employer to start half an hour later each morning as I couldn't get to work on time without getting up hugely earlier and then hanging around. I would appreciate it if Metro would renegotiate the bus timetables as that's probably easier than putting the train timetable back the way it was.”*

We are therefore extremely concerned at the suggestion of a sixth TPE service, as this will inevitably have a further adverse impact on our line. Furthermore, it will mean an inferior service to the secondary stations on the Huddersfield/Diggle route between Manchester and Leeds, thus making travel to these stations less convenient. This will also impact on the possibility of a much needed direct service from the upper valley to Huddersfield, which we refer to in detail later.

Finally, re consultation questions **NPT4 & 5**, we consider that there should be two trains per hour between York and **Scarborough**. One of these should be a direct service from Manchester Airport – either via Huddersfield as at present or re-routed via the Calder Valley and the Odsall Curve from the 2018 timetable changes (whether operated under the TPE or Northern franchise). We consider the second service should be achieved by extending the Northern Rail cross-Pennine service from Blackpool North via the Calder Valley to Scarborough; this would make it easier for Calder Valley residents to be able to have an easy day trip to Scarborough (although the first train on as Sunday should be three hours earlier). This service would also need to omit all existing stations between Leeds and York excluding Garforth, but should stop at new stations at Haxby and Strensall, as well as Malton and Seamer. Both these services should be operated with high quality, inter-regional rolling stock.

## **NORTHERN RAIL SERVICES USING THE CALDER VALLEY AND COPY PIT LINES.**

### **FID1.**

Despite the fact that Northern Rail were only awarded a no-growth franchise in 2004, passenger growth on the Calder Valley (CV) lines has been dramatic. Ten year growth figures are as follows (*source: ORR*)

#### **Footfall at CV stations 2012/13 compared to 2002/3:**

Hebden Bridge: 736k (303k); an increase of +433k or +143%

Todmorden: 542k (251k); +291k , = +116%

Brighouse: 349k (-) +349k (opened 2004)

Sowerby Bridge: 348k (112k); +236K, = +211%

Mytholmroyd: 158k (72k); +86k, = +119%

Walsden: 102k (? – I cannot locate 2002 data)

**Total: 2,235,000 (738,000 +Walsden); +1,497,000, = +203%**

As the service has not improved in line with this 200% passenger increase, the result has been significant and at times unacceptable levels of overcrowding. Our research amongst passengers in July 2014 shows major concern about overcrowding, and a very high level of serious dissatisfaction regarding the 20 -30 year old units used on the line. Other concerns include inadequate cycle and luggage space, cramped seating, and poor disabled access.

We are aware that two areas of the Calder Valley (CV) are lacking a railway station and that there is a need to rectify this. The case for a new station at Elland has been well-researched by the Halifax and District Rail Action Group (HADRAG), and will be presented in some detail in their response. The other area needing a station is that of the Cornholme/Portsmouth area at the northern end of the Todmorden area. The introduction of a stopping service from the deprived East Lancashire towns of Blackburn, Accrington and Burnley to Manchester in December 2014 provides the opportunity for a new station to be built to serve this relatively poor area of Calderdale.

We are disappointed that the consultation document (3.50) confines the shortly-to-commence **Blackburn to Manchester via Burnley service** to a three year dependence on third party funding. We feel that this service, so important for the regeneration of the areas it will serve, should be an integral part of the next franchise specification, and should become a half hourly service from December 2018, with one train per hour providing a bi-directional circular service to and from Manchester Victoria via Bolton, Blackburn and

Todmorden, and the other possibly being a direct service from Blackburn to Manchester Airport via Todmorden.

### **NTSR1.**

We anticipate that this high level of demand will continue to increase substantially during the lifetime of the franchise. This is because of population growth, especially in Bradford, Halifax, and Rochdale; increasing white collar and retail employment in the cities and towns along the route and beyond; increasing numbers of higher education students commuting daily or weekly; and increased leisure travel.

Because of this, we consider that the consultation document's focus on trade-offs and its implied lack of ambition is inappropriate. This implied lack of ambition is personified by the fact that achieving modal shift, is not listed in Table 1.1 as one of the priorities for the next Northern franchise, (unlike that for TPE). **We consider it vital that achieving modal shift is part of the next Northern**

### **Rail franchise specification.**

We need a much improved train service serving the Calder Valley, and a better service to destinations further afield. As well as more convenient connections and interchanges, this requires new direct services. Current service gaps and poor connectivity results in people choosing to use their cars, with all that that implies in terms of road congestion, carbon emissions and air quality issues.

As a prime example, our research shows **a very considerable demand for a direct service to Huddersfield**. Huddersfield is a university town, many of whose staff and students live in the upper Calder Valley, as do a significant number of other people who work in Huddersfield. As a result, there is much commuting from the Calder Valley to Huddersfield, and currently most of it is by car, reflecting the fact that bus services are slow and uncomfortable and that travel by rail is also slow, as it involves a change of trains, usually at unstaffed stations (Mirfield and Brighouse). Such a new service could either start in the Calder Valley at Todmorden, be a through service from Blackburn or, and perhaps ideally, be a bi-directional circular service from Manchester Victoria serving all stations via Rochdale, Brighouse, Huddersfield and Ashton-under-Lyne. Whichever is chosen, we recommend that at least a Todmorden- Huddersfield hourly service is included in the next Northern rail franchise specification to commence as soon as rolling stock availability and track access allows.

This last point leads neatly into another need for the Calder Valley borne out by our research - **faster trains**. The line is due to be re-signalled in 2017, and line speed improvements are part of the Northern Hub. This should enable a more intensive service, with a mix of semi-fast and stopping services. To achieve this, passing loops may need to be provided at key points along the route; this should not present great difficulties as the curtilage is wide enough in places to accommodate this.

There is also significant demand for a **through service to Manchester Airport**, the north of England's premier airport; this will become possible once the Ordsall Chord has become operational as part of the Northern Hub improvements, and we urge that this is included in the next franchise specification, to commence no later than the December 2018 timetable changes.

Our research highlights **demand for other new through journey opportunities**, most of which could be achieved by running trains to new destinations along existing track. One such service would run from the Calder Valley via Brighouse to Wakefield, Barnsley and Sheffield, and possibly onwards to Leicester; the service could originate at Blackpool or Preston. A through service to Liverpool could be introduced as and when the Calder Valley lines are electrified.

We also identify one valuable development, which will require significant capital investment. This is **the cross-Bradford rail link**, originally planned a century ago but a victim of the First World War. This link will join up the Calder Valley line at Bradford interchange with the Airedale/Wharfedale lines at Forster Square. This link will not only facilitate through services between towns and cities to the south and east of Bradford to those in the north and west, but will also be highly beneficial to Bradford, a city and metropolitan district with major regeneration needs.

As well as new direct services referred to above, our research shows a high level of demand for the following:

- **Later evening trains from Leeds (via Bradford), Manchester and Blackpool/Preston seven days a week.** The two prime reasons for this are that many shows/concerts/events finish too late to be able to catch the last train, which means people are either (a) driving, (b) leaving a show early or (c) not attending a show they would like to have seen. The situation in Manchester has been made even more acute by the Lowry in Salford Quays, as the journey from there to Manchester Victoria station takes longer than the journey from city centre venues. The demand for later trains from all three destinations is also to enable later connections from other train services, especially long distance ones. This especially applies to Preston, for connections from Scotland, as the last train from Preston is at 20.56 (21.37 on Sundays). It should be noted that the Calder Valley is home to many people, including a particularly large number of incomers, who have family and friends scattered across the country.

### **NTSR3.**

Other service improvements for which there is significant demand are:

- **A much improved service on Sundays.** This has two aspects. Firstly, earlier trains. Calder Valley stations should have trains on Sundays from between 7 and 8am, to

enable people to connect with services to longer distance destinations in time to have a full day out, and to enable those who work on a Sunday (or wish to) to have a train service to get them there. Secondly, the daytime Sunday service needs to be adequate to cope with current and latent passenger demand. We recommend that this should be a more intensive service, akin to that on a Saturday, and that trains should have sufficient carriages to cope with demand from shoppers, sports fans, commuters and other passengers. Currently, too many units lie idle in their depot on Sundays. Overcrowding problems are especially acute in the Christmas shopping season, with some passengers unable to get on their train. The continuing and most welcome expansion of the Manchester Metrolink tram network is also increasing demand for rail travel into Manchester; when the route to the Trafford Centre (an enormous out-of-town shopping centre) is opened, this will become even more acute.

- **An evening and a Sunday service between Leeds and Manchester Victoria via Brighouse.** Currently on a Sunday the residents of Brighouse (population 32,000 in 2001, with a station serving a wide catchment area) have one train in each direction every two hours to Huddersfield in one direction and Halifax, Bradford and Leeds in the other. On weekday and Saturday evenings, this service is hourly. The direct Leeds –Brighouse-Manchester service currently only runs until (Brighouse time) 19.00, with the last return leaving Manchester at 19.26. This need will become greater as and when the much needed station at Elland is opened.
- Although not covered by our research, we know anecdotally that there is considerable local demand for all the Blackpool- York services to stop at Sowerby Bridge. This station serves a wide catchment area, including the Ryburn Valley (Ripponden etc) and has experienced the highest percentage passenger growth on the line. These trains already serve Sowerby Bridge in the morning and evening peaks, but an all-day service is required, both to serve destinations in Lancashire and to increase the service to Halifax, Bradford (both currently one an hour) and Leeds (currently two per hour).
- Our Mytholmroyd members ask that additionally the case is examined to stop at least the Sunday morning outward services to Blackpool North at Mytholmroyd in the summer timetable, as the connection at Hebden Bridge in this direction is poor; this would make it easier for Mytholmroyd families and other residents to have a summer Sunday day out in Blackpool.
- Walsden, Littleborough and Smithy Bridge (the station for the important leisure destination of Hollingworth Lake as well as being a commuter area) should have an all-day service to Halifax, and Bradford, and a minimum of two trains an hour to Leeds and Manchester.

#### **OTHER TRAIN SERVICE AND RELATED ISSUES.**

Our research showed a reasonable level of satisfaction here, with respondents recognising the constraints that Northern Rail is operating under. Weekday daytime **frequency** from Hebden Bridge was felt to be reasonable to good. More semi-fast services were requested by a significant number of respondents, but not by reducing stops at other stations. More people were dissatisfied than those satisfied regarding **punctuality**, and there were felt to be too many **cancellations**. Both these issues may be related to the below-par reliability of the units in the ageing Northern Rail diesel fleet. This is another reason why **new or recent trains are urgently needed**. We strongly recommend the Government to ensure that new diesel or bi-modal trains are built. We cannot wait for cascades of older units made surplus by electrification schemes, or for our line to be electrified.

Respondents also mentioned the need for better **bus/train connectivity**, and of the need for a **taxi rank** at Hebden Bridge; at present, our understanding is that there is not one because the responsible agency (we are not sure if it is Northern Rail, Metro/WYCA or Network Rail) wants to charge too high a fee for operators to use one. In our view, a rank should be available for all licenced taxis to use free of charge as a service to passengers, as for some people they are a necessary constituent of the door-to-door journey.

#### **FRANCHISE OBJECTIVES (Table 1.1) AND LENGTH**

We consider it essential that the next Northern Rail franchise includes **modal shift** as one of its core objectives. We also consider that, as the new franchisee will be carrying revenue risk, it is essential that they have the flexibility to grow both services and the network itself.

We recommend that the Northern Rail and TransPennine Express franchises should have the same end-date. This is so that they can in future be combined in one north of England franchise should that be seen at the time to be in the best interests of the railway system.

**ON-TRAIN STAFFING (3.28-3.35).** We appreciate that the railway should be run as efficiently as possible, with waste reduced to a minimum, but we are opposed to cuts that reduce passengers' experience or convenience, and which may increase fears for safety on trains or at stations. **Trains must continue to have two members of staff on-board.** We consider it unfortunate that the consultation document refers to Driver Only Trains (DOOs) when what is proposed is a re-definition of the current Guard/Conductor role to a customer and revenue focused on-board role. We are in favour of train drivers, who are well remunerated, being given the added responsibility of opening and closing train doors, provided that that means that the second member of train crew is collecting fares and dealing with passenger issues. This will make it easier for passengers boarding at unstaffed stations, or who have been delayed en route to the station, to pay on the train. We favour sophisticated "stings" to catch those out to defraud. Moving door-opening responsibilities to the driver will also reduce the delays caused when the conductor is in the middle of a ticket sale when a train arrives at a station.

Our research shows considerable concern over the **behaviour of a small minority** of passengers, particularly on late evening services, and after football and some other sporting events. Other common concerns are people conducting loud phone conversations, and people using mobile devices including children's playthings, but especially audible bass music. We want the next franchise to make addressing these concerns part of the contract, and this requires a customer-focussed member of on-train staff. Indeed, on some trains (e.g. late Friday and Saturday trains and those convenient for League football matches), there may need to be security personnel on the train as well.

### **TO1. FARES AND TICKETING (2.32-2.34)**

Whilst we agree that revenue should be raised by reducing ticketless travel, **we reject the view that some train fares in the North are too low.** Our respondents consider that fares wholly within West Yorkshire are reasonable (with one anomalous exception, to Huddersfield, which we are currently taking up with Northern Rail and with the Combined Authority), although a number of respondents consider West Yorkshire fares to be high enough given the poor quality of the rolling stock and the slowness of journeys. We believe the same is true for fares wholly within Greater Manchester, although these are only applicable to upper valley residents should they drive to Littleborough. However, the same cannot be said for walk-on tickets from the upper valley to stations beyond West Yorkshire. Some fares are astonishingly high. The return fare for the 12 mile journey from Hebden Bridge to Burnley is £7.80 (peak) and £7.70 off-peak, i.e. 32/33p a mile; consequently, nearly all commuters to Burnley go by car, many using a rat-run on unsuitable narrow lanes. Mytholmroyd to Manchester off peak is £9.80, Sowerby Bridge to Hull is £29.10, Hebden Bridge to York is £17.90 off peak. These are not cheap fares. Many respondents to our survey commented on how expensive fares are outside of West Yorkshire.

An easy win that we would like to see is the introduction of a discounted "carnet" of tickets so that part-time workers, and those who do not access their work-base every day, can have similar fare discounts to season ticket and Metrocard holders.

We are opposed to Penalty Fares as these penalise the honest passenger who has no intention of defrauding the railway.

### **OTH 1. SUBSIDY (2.35-2.38)**

We are very concerned at your use of a 53p/passenger mile figure as being the subsidy received by Northern Rail, and the implication that the Northern Rail network is too expensive. We feel that this is not a fair figure to use. We refer you to the consultation response being submitted by Andrew Whitworth, an accountant. In it, he shows that if the funding to Network Rail is excluded, (as is normal practice as this is passed to a public body), the subsidy drops to 24p/pm. He also points out that Northern Rail's subsidy per pm is

higher than it would be in other parts of GB because the north of England is covered by two regional franchises; if the Northern Rail and TPE subsidies are combined, the figure becomes 15.4/£pm, lower than other areas (e.g. Scotland and Wales) that also cover large, sparsely populated rural hinterlands as well as the conurbations and commuter belts.

Furthermore, we would point out that the costs quoted do not take account of the income to the Exchequer arising from railway operations, including the employment of staff, and the direct and indirect taxes paid by employees and the TOCs; the benefits to the various supply chains to the TOCs and the Exchequer arising from these; and the economic and social benefits arising from the employment of commuters. Trains have considerable environmental benefits over cars and modal shift makes a significant contribution to the UK meeting its global warming and air quality related targets. Additionally, the more that modal shift can be achieved, the freer the roads will be for those who really need to be using them; this also has economic benefits. We urge the Government to look at the net cost/benefit of the railway rather than questionable headline figures.

## **TO2 ROLLING STOCK**

**We consider that better rolling stock for the services using the Calder Valley routes is an absolute priority, and there should be no question of it being dependent on trade-offs elsewhere.** The Government and Rail North have recognised the sub-standard nature of most of Northern Rail's rolling stock. It will not come as any surprise that respondents to our survey were almost united in their condemnation of the current rolling stock, most particularly the hated Pacers (class 142/144) but also to a considerable extent the other units used on the line. The Class 150 and 155 units are extremely cramped, and the 150s do not have tables. Even our best units, the class 158s, were felt to be too cramped, to have unsatisfactory air conditioning, to have insufficient accommodation for luggage and bicycles, and to have poor disabled access. All the Sprinter classes used on the line need major updating to improve passenger comfort. There is also a very common view that the number of units currently available is inadequate and that as well as better trains, more trains/carriages are needed.

The most common specific criticisms (written in, as opposed to specific questions) include cramped/uncomfortable, decrepit, dirty/shabby, stuffy, cold in winter, and need more tables. People want to be able to work on trains.

It is clear that new or updated units are urgently required, and that this cannot await electrification, as this has not yet been agreed. We recommend that class 185 units no longer required by Trans-Pennine post electrification be transferred to Northern Rail for use on the Calder Valley lines (and some other longer distance routes)

## **TO3**

**We are concerned about any reduction in staff presence on stations.** The great majority of respondents to our research feel that the ticket office hours at Hebden Bridge are about right; some wanted two booths open in the peak period. Ticket office staff are highly regarded, and perform other roles including checking the toilets, unlocking the waiting rooms, informing passengers via a chalk board of delays etc. We also consider two busy stations on our line without ticket offices or decent waiting facilities (Sowerby Bridge and Brighouse) should be upgraded to include these. We accept that, as the franchise may run until 2024, changes in ticketing practice during the intervening period may in time necessitate an adjustment in the role of station staff, but their presence and expertise will always be required. On the question of tickets, a good smart card system akin to the Oyster in London will be welcomed, but until there is a national system there will be considerable demand for conventional ticketing. Whilst stations do have ticket machines, these have limited functionality and are difficult for impaired and older people to use, and should also be regarded as an extra rather than as a substitute for a staffed booking office.

#### **OTH 1. ELECTRIFICATION (3.15 -3.16)**

We welcome the fact that the core north TPE route will be electrified from December 2018. Traditionally, the Calder Valley line via Brighouse has been used to divert TPE service when, for any reason, the line between Mirfield and Manchester is obstructed; whilst the Calder Valley line via Bradford and Halifax is used when the line between Leeds and Huddersfield is obstructed. Such diversions will only be possible after December 2018 if the electric units are hauled by a diesel locomotive, which will present all sorts of logistical and perhaps technical issues. For this reason, the otherwise very strong case for the early electrification of the Calder Valley secondary main line routes via Brighouse and via Bradford becomes of critical importance, and we urge the Government to approve funding for and to start the electrification of the Calder Valley routes as soon as the Diggle/Huddersfield line electrification has been completed. We consider 2020 should be the target date for the completion of Calder Valley electrification.

**Submitted by:**

**UPPER CALDER VALLEY RENAISSANCE SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT GROUP, Calderdale,  
West Yorkshire, 12.8.14**

