

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

LOCAL AND REGIONAL RAIL

A SPECIAL  REPORT

A SPECIAL REPORT outlining
how the UK's Community Rail
approach is taking root in Europe



 **Citizens' Rail** 

Our train

Our station

Our citizens

Investing in Opportunities



This project has received
European Regional
Development Funding
through INTERREG IV B.



INTERREG IV B



Sharing experiences: the Citizens' Rail team, drawn from several different EU countries, met in France in July and sampled the Pays de la Loire's Beach Train - they are seen here at the seaside station of Les Sables d'Olonne. KEITH FENDER

SPREADING BEST PRACTICE

For more than 20 years, the UK's Community Rail sector has developed local and regional railways by involving residents and businesses.

Now, thanks to the European Union's Citizens' Rail project, this approach is taking root in France, Germany and the Netherlands too – with the British partners also learning much from their Continental colleagues.

Begun in May 2012, the Citizens' Rail programme has a €9.03 million budget, 50% financed by the EU Interreg IVB programme.

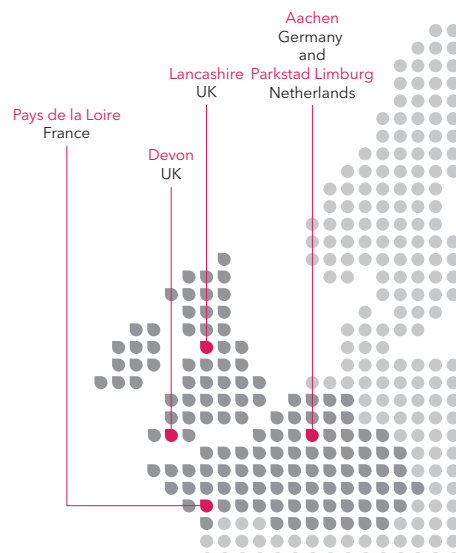
Through new and refurbished station buildings, more frequent services, volunteering, social outreach and local marketing campaigns, the project is helping more people to use and engage with their local train services. 'It's an innovative, low-cost way to boost the economy, tackle local transport needs and re-connect isolated populations' says Richard Burningham of the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, lead partner in the programme.

Each local area has its own rail and community engagement expertise. The partners in the Citizens' Rail programme are sharing the approaches that have been adopted (a key Interreg theme), with many ideas for developing local rail services outlined in the following pages. They are urging other authorities and support groups to adapt them and use them in their own areas and have set up a Toolkit at www.citizensrail.org/toolkit to help them do this.

The EU funding unlocked by Citizens' Rail has helped the citizens of Burnley get a top quality new station, replacing one shut in the 1960s. It has helped planning for new stations in Germany and the Netherlands, increased service frequencies on the south Devon coast line and helped revitalise a French cross-country route that operator SNCF had all but given up on. The aim is that the best practice these initiatives represent can be replicated elsewhere. [\[1\]](#)



Enjoy yourself at the beach: publicity for the Pays de la Loire's Beach Train. © RÉGION DES PAYS DE LA LOIRE/DBB



RIVIERA BOOST

EXTRA TRAINS, MARKETING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR THE PAIGNTON TO EXETER LINE

South Devon's Riviera Line is a scenic feast. Local trains thread the coast from Paignton to Exeter and Exmouth, taking in the delights of the seaside, the historic Powderham estate and the Teign and Exe estuaries en route. But views alone will not sustain a railway, so it was a welcome move when the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, Devon County Council and Torbay Council sought to get involved in the promotion and development of the line with the help of funds from the European Union's Interreg programme.

Work began in the summer of 2012, with a principal aim being an increase in frequency on the route, a long-held local aspiration. The Exmouth to Exeter branch enjoys a half-hourly service, with the ultimate destination of these services alternating between Barnstaple and Paignton. So the focus was on the Exeter to Paignton stretch, where the target was to up frequencies to those on the Exmouth line by providing at least two trains an hour. Timetable planners established that, as a first stage, some strategic insertion of extra local services would achieve the desired frequency levels between Newton Abbot and Paignton (although a clockface pattern was not immediately feasible).

But the extra services would require an additional train, plus two sets of train crew – so there would be a cost. That is where the EU funds would come into play, with £1 million from the Interreg IVB fund helping to kickstart the project, together with funding from Devon County Council, Torbay Council, First Great Western (now Great Western Railway) and the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership.

EXTRA '153'

Diesel multiple-units are in short supply in the UK, with virtually all the available trains tied up. But with the Interreg funds promised, Riviera Line operator First Great Western was in a position to bid for any units that might be spare. FGW scoured the country and was able to strike a deal with neighbouring operator South West Trains that yielded sufficient rolling stock for the job. SWT hired a two-car Class 158 to FGW, enabling FGW to shuffle its stock and cascade two single-car Class 153s to local services – one to the TransWilts line between Swindon, Melksham and Westbury, and the other to the Riviera Line.

Turmoil over bidding for the West Coast main line franchise had a knock-on effect for the Great Western that delayed matters slightly, but by the December 2013 timetable change FGW was in a position to institute the extra services on the Riviera Line. Two extra sets of crew were hired in Exeter and the additional Class 153 was present on the patch, allowing six additional round trips, Mondays to Fridays (see table overleaf). Now the challenge was to ensure that the trains were filled.

STORM!

The Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership recruited a Communications Officer and Riviera Line Project Officer in September 2013 to help devise a strategy to boost ridership. But they had scarcely got their feet under the table before a natural disaster hit the Riviera Line: on the night of 4 February 2014, a severe storm ripped apart the sea wall at Dawlish and services were suspended for two months while repairs were effected.

Thrown in at the deep end (almost literally) was FGW man Ian Mundy: he had taken over as South Devon Station Manager, covering Dawlish and the whole of the Riviera Line, just three days before the storm hit!

With no services between Newton Abbot and Exeter, the peninsula rail system was cut in two. An emergency service was instituted on the western side of the collapse, including a Paignton to St Erth HST service, with buses connecting Newton Abbot to Exeter.

Once the railway was restored, the resources were in place to promote the line. A large-scale marketing programme was begun, with newspaper adverts and a poster campaign on bus shelters appealing to both local residents and the summer holidaymaker market. This was repeated in the autumn of 2014 and the spring of 2015.

A website, therivieraline.com, was set up by the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership. As well as train times and fares, the website gives ideas for outings using the train, from shopping destinations to walks from stations and pubs easily reached from the line.



Citizens' Rail: unit Nos 153325 and 150247 at Dawlish Warren en route to Paignton, with No 153325 wearing the promotional livery. COLIN J. MARSDEN





More Torbay trains: partners including Torbay Council, Devon County Council, First Great Western and the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership celebrate the launch of the additional services in December 2013 at Paignton station.



Harrington hump: the raised section of the down platform at Exeter St Thomas, with the listed edging stones at left.

By the time the schools returned in September 2014, the project promoters were in a position to market the Riviera Line to school students – the rail travellers of tomorrow. A series of outings by train were organised, with 22 classes

from 13 schools participating. Altogether 650 children, along with 120 adults, took part.

In the spring of 2015 this theme was taken one stage further, with a 'passport' to travel on the Riviera Line issued to 180

children at two schools. This was inspired by Community Rail Lancashire's award-winning Passport to Safe Travel. The children took part in an organised trip on the line and then, thanks to First Great Western and CrossCountry, as long as accompanied by a fare-paying adult, were free to use the trains with the passport for the following three months, helping to inculcate the idea of train travel and giving practical experience of how useful the line could be. The children were encouraged to record their trips in the passport, giving a usage record.

One of the aims of the Interreg programme is for participating EU countries to learn from each other and for ideas to cross borders: the success of the school passport scheme in Lancashire and Devon prompted the Région Pays de la Loire in western France, another Citizens' Rail participant, to imitate it.

Coming in the other direction was an idea from France: the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership team was impressed by the way the French promoted their line using advertisements on bags for baguette loaves and sought a British equivalent. 'We decided to use beer mats!' smiles Richard Burningham, manager of the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership. Riviera Line beer mats are in use in pubs along the coast, promoting the Riviera Line to those wishing to leave their car at home. These are complemented by window stickers in a style similar to the beer mats: these have been distributed to local shops and cafés.

SIX ADDITIONAL ROUND TRIPS

MONDAYS TO FRIDAYS, DECEMBER 2013 TIMETABLE

08.23	Exeter St David's – Paignton (all stations)
12.11	Newton Abbot – Paignton (all stations)
12.49	Exeter St David's – Paignton (fast to Newton Abbot, then all stations)
14.10	Newton Abbot – Paignton (all stations)
15.07	Newton Abbot – Paignton (all stations)
15.59	Newton Abbot – Paignton (all stations)
09.34	Paignton – Exeter St David's (all stations)
11.44	Paignton – Newton Abbot (all stations)
13.38	Paignton – Newton Abbot (all stations)
14.39	Paignton – Newton Abbot (all stations)
15.32	Paignton – Newton Abbot (all stations)
16.30	Paignton – Exeter St David's (calling Torquay, Torre, Newton Abbot, Teignmouth, Dawlish and Dawlish Warren)

STATION REFURBISHMENT

Great Western Railway and Network Rail have worked in conjunction with the Riviera Line project team to push forward

a raft of station improvements along the route.

Exeter St Thomas station is freighted with history, as the original building here was the headquarters of the South Devon Railway. The edging slabs on the Down platform, dating from Brunel's time, have listed protection, so care had to be taken when a Harrington hump was installed here with the aim of making it easier to join and leave trains for people with poor mobility and those with heavy luggage, bicycles and small children.

Celia Minoughan, the Riviera Line project officer, is implementing a photographic murals project at Exeter St Thomas with local groups that will depict the history of the station and local horticultural landmarks. New shelters have been installed and ticket machines and CCTV are awaited.

At Starcross, the station for the ferry across the Exe to Exmouth, collaboration with Easter Hill nursery has seen planters installed on the platforms. Dawlish Warren now sports tourism banners advertising the nearby Blue Flag beach.

VOLUNTEERS

At Dawlish, as part of the fight back from the storm, the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership worked to rejuvenate the previously dormant Friends of Dawlish Station volunteer group. For the reopening of the station following the storm reconstruction work in the spring of 2014, the Friends teamed up with local TV gardener Toby Buckland, who donated specimens for 10 new planters on the platforms from his nursery at Powderham Castle. For the Up side waiting room here, heritage and sustainable transport interpretation panels are planned. Brand new Friends of the Station groups have also been set up at Teignmouth and Exeter St Thomas.

Torre station is heavily used by pupils attending nearby schools (the 16.19 departure is rostered for six cars due to the heavy schools traffic). Torquay Girls' Grammar School is working on murals for the station, which are themed on the work of local author Agatha Christie, who was born and grew up close by. The large Up side shelter has been replaced, new seating has been installed and work is in progress on a new border, with the Robert Owen Communities charity for disabled people helping with the landscape work. Great Western Railway plans to install a ticket machine as part of the project.

As part of Citizens' Rail, the Riviera Line Community Forum has been created to identify issues of concern and to agree work and project priorities. The Forum brings together organisations including local authorities, the health service, rail user groups and other community groups. It has got off to a flying start with over 30 organisations represented at its initial meetings.

WHAT IS THE DEVON & CORNWALL RAIL PARTNERSHIP?

Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership is a non-profit organisation that works to:

- promote travel on the counties' branch lines;
- seek improvements to services and facilities;
- promote the places served by the branch lines and help the local economy;
- promote engagement and two-way communication between the community and the rail industry.

The core funding partners are First Great Western, Cornwall Council, Devon County Council and Plymouth City Council. The group is based at Plymouth University.

RESULTS

All this work has shown impressive results, with journeys on the Exeter to Paignton and Plymouth local services now regularly exceeding 200,000 a month in the summer. Journey figures for the first half of 2015 were running at about 15% above the levels of 2013 (2014 is not comparable due to the Dawlish collapse).

The Interreg seed money has made the case for increased frequencies on the Riviera Line. Now a half-hourly service throughout the day is planned from December 2018, when a westwards cascade of DMUs following electrification in the Thames Valley will allow Class 150/2s to be allocated to the Riviera Line. These units feature superior seating capacity (147 seats in a two-car, as against 106 on a Class 143) and end corridor connections. The twice-hourly

Exmouth trains will all be directed to Paignton under the planned scenario, with the Barnstaple service converted to Class 158 operation and terminating at Exeter Central (convenient for the Exeter city centre shops) and possibly, in time, continuing on to Cranbrook and Axminster.

That is not all that is planned. Building on the recent opening of Newcourt station on the Exmouth branch, more new stations are in prospect on the Riviera Line. Torbay Council is pressing the case for a new station at Edginswell, north of Torre, to serve Torbay hospital and an adjacent residential area: the opening target date is December 2017. Meanwhile, in the same timeframe, Devon County Council is leading on another new station at Marsh Barton, south of Exeter St Thomas, to serve the industrial estate of that name. [m](#)





Interchange: an Interloire train to Tours (left) provides a connection at Saumur to the Beach Train (right) on 9 July 2015. KEITH FENDER

THE BEACH TRAIN

PAYS DE LA LOIRE HAS DECIDED TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE RAILWAYS IN THE REGION

French regional governments have been responsible for local rail services since the late 1990s. While local political indifference means that some Régions have done little to revitalise rail lines, the Région Pays de la Loire has made the most of its powers and taken a proactive role.

Pays de la Loire, with a population of 3.5 million, is centred on Nantes and

includes the cities of St Nazaire, Angers and Le Mans, plus a large area between the ports and holiday beaches on the Atlantic coast and the world famous chateaux on the Loire and the wine making centre of Saumur.

The 64km-long line from Nantes to Châteaubriant, closed to passengers in May 1980, reopened in February 2014. Formerly diesel worked, it has reopened as

a high quality 25kV AC electrified line with regular interval services operated using new Alstom-built Citadis Dualis light rail vehicles (LRVs). Whilst nominally a tram-train, the LRVs do not actually share any tracks with the extensive Nantes tram system, running parallel to the tramway for a few kilometres near the main station, albeit using 750V DC rather than high voltage AC power supply for this section.

Regular interval services are seldom found in rural France, but in Pays de la Loire the concept has been extended from the Châteaubriant route to encompass the line south from Nantes to Clisson, where the services are also operated using Citadis Dualis tram-trains.

HOLIDAY ROUTES

One of the most underused railway lines in the Pays de la Loire region stretches from Saumur on the Loire to La Roche sur Yon on the line from Nantes to Bordeaux via Thouars and Bressuire (the Saumur to Bressuire section is the responsibility of the neighbouring Poitou-Charentes Région). The route was used by Paris to Bordeaux trains before World War 2, after which traffic was re-routed via Poitiers. In common with many French secondary lines, parts of the route were singled by the occupying German army in 1941 to provide track for the dual gauge conversion of Soviet Railways as the



Tram-train: Citadis Dualis LRV at Châteaubriant on 7 July 2015. KEITH FENDER

invasion of the USSR got underway – the second track has never been replaced.

The first 39km from Saumur to Thouars is electrified and has substantial freight traffic serving quarries around Thouars, as well as several TER services daily between Saumur and Bressuire 30km further south. But the rest of the line (around 87km) was largely ignored by the state railway SNCF, the Région and passengers for several decades. The current ‘service’ on this part of line consists of one (largely empty) train from Thouars to La Roche sur Yon at 05.24 on weekdays – operated at this time as SNCF uses it to move crews and DMUs. The return working at 18.55 is more user-friendly, but without a balancing working when most passengers are awake it is not likely to generate much traffic. The line costs €3 million a year to maintain in operational condition and has revenue of €250,000.

The Région believed the line – which has been threatened with closure for years (unsurprisingly as the service is so poor) – has scope for more use. It proposed a summer-only Train des Plages (Train to the Beach), connecting Saumur and the beach resort of Les Sables d’Olonne. Following initial planning and using Citizens’ Rail funding, the first Trains des Plages were introduced in 2013, operating only at weekends during July and August. SNCF had told the Région it anticipated no more than 20 passengers per train. The Région was sure this was too low and reckoned on around 40 – but the actual figures were an average of 171 passengers per train!

This led to serious overcrowding as the single 80-seat X73500 railcar originally rostered by SNCF was nowhere near big enough. By the end of the 2013 season, two or three X73500s were used for each train and from 2014 a higher capacity 220-seat AGC four-car DMU was used instead for an extended operating season (May to September). From 2015 the Région’s latest trains, the four-car Régiolis bi-mode units, are being used. These operate as an EMU on electrified tracks and under diesel power elsewhere.

In 2015 a daily service was offered in July and August to coincide with the peak holiday period and initial results look promising with around 100 passengers daily during the week, whilst weekend numbers are double this. An innovation for 2015 has been the operation of a train pair between Les Sables d’Olonne and Saumur at weekends: called the Train des Châteaux, it aims to give people living or holidaying on the coast the opportunity to visit the castles and châteaux by train. Initial results show lower passenger numbers – around 30, perhaps reflecting that in mid summer trips to the beach are more popular than those to other attractions.

As a result of these two services part-funded by Citizens’ Rail, the line has had the best service for years in 2015. Evaluation of the success of the experimental services will be undertaken



from September and decisions on funding for 2016 taken afterwards. The EU funding will not be available next year – it accounted for €130,000 of the €280,000 net subsidy paid to SNCF for operating the trains in 2014 (Pays de la Loire and Poitou-Charentes paid €97,000 and €53,000 respectively).

The experience of community rail groups in the UK inspired the Région’s planners to try and mobilise local communities along the route to generate interest in the new service and the line – creating in the process a core of people interested in saving the line from closure. Advertising – including 40,000 bread bags used by 25 local bakeries to wrap bread and more traditional posters/leaflets and social media activity – raised awareness

of the new services. The Beach train timetable is designed to connect at Saumur with Interloire services, meaning that people living elsewhere in the Loire valley can access the services – surveys show around 12% of users connect to another train.

Days out on the coast have universal appeal, if there is a way of getting there and the weather is good: higher ridership figures correlate to sunny weather! Special low family fares for the Train des Plages/ Châteaux have been used by nearly 60% of passengers.

In 2014 the Région launched a new beach train route with similar special family fares on the electrified route from Le Mans to Le Croisic (via Nantes). *mr Keith Fender*

Awaiting renovation: Batz sur Mer station on the line to Le Croisic in July 2015. Région Pays de la Loire is working with local communities to identify new uses for redundant railway buildings. KEITH FENDER



BIKES BY RAIL

The Loire valley is popular with cyclists. Recognising this, the Région and SNCF have provided specially-converted bike-carrying coaches. These are used in loco-hauled long distance regional trains operated under the ‘Interloire’ banner using Corail coaches and electric locomotives between Orléans and Le Croisic. Cyclists use the train one way and cycle the other!



Aachen West: DB electric loco No 111 112 arrives with an RE4 service from Dortmund to Aachen formed of double-deck coaches on 26 January 2014. On the left can be seen a small diesel shunter and other vehicles used by the city's technical university as part of rail engineering courses. KEITH FENDER



CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION

AACHEN AND PARKSTAD LIMBURG SHOW THE WAY

The European Union's Interreg programme is intended to stimulate institutional co-operation across borders within the EU, so the cross-border rail service linking Aachen in Germany with the Parkstad Limburg area of the Netherlands fits the criterion well.

In May 1992 a service was introduced from Aachen to Heerlen in Parkstad Limburg on a cross-border line that had lost passenger services in 1944. Since 2001 regular services have been operated on a growing network of regional lines around Aachen under the Euregiobahn brand name. The service from Heerlen was incorporated into this, extended across Aachen to the town of Stolberg, 10km further east.

The Euregiobahn network has a range of attractively priced tickets: the premium fares often found on cross-border journeys in Europe have been scrapped, resulting in substantial passenger growth in the last 15 years.

NEW AND REOPENED STATIONS

Both Aachen – via the city council and the transport authority Aachener Verkehrsverbund (AVV) – plus the

regional authority for Heerlen in the Netherlands, Parkstad Limburg, joined the Citizens' Rail initiative and shared their experiences in developing and enhancing regional stations. The German and Dutch partners have been keen to involve local communities in the shaping of plans for new and refurbished stations.

Much of the infrastructure that has been (and still is being) rebuilt is now owned and managed by a Stolberg-based private company, Euregio Verkehrsschienenetz GmbH (EVS) – although substantial public funds have assisted in the infrastructure upgrades. EVS has been responsible for renovating the track and subsequently acting as infrastructure manager to Euregiobahn passenger trains (currently operated by DB Regio) and freight operators.

The branch from Stolberg Hbf to Stolberg Altstadt and the Stolberg Hbf - Weisweiler - Langerwehe loop line have been reopened. The Weisweiler - Langerwehe section was newly built in 2004.

Progressive reopening of the ring line to the north and east of Aachen resulted in the 10km from Herzogenrath to Alsdorf

reopening by 2014. Work to complete the ring and connect Alsdorf with Stolberg Hbf is underway – this is due to be finished by mid 2016. Extension of passenger services south west from Stolberg Altstadt to Raeren in the German-speaking part of Belgium is under discussion.

CONSULTATION

A new station is planned for the suburb of Richterich to the north of Aachen city centre. The previous station in Richterich closed in the 1970s. As part of the Citizens' Rail project, 660 Richterich area residents were consulted by students from RWTH Aachen University, with more than 70% saying they would use the station – from which direct services would run to Heerlen, Aachen and Düren. 1,000 passengers a day are forecast to use the new station and planning for its location is underway, with local residents asked for their views on possible sites.

EILENDORF

Several projects were undertaken as part of the Citizens' Rail initiative at Eilendorf, in the eastern suburbs of Aachen. The first was a study of options led by AVV and Nahverkehr Rheinland (NVR) for

improving accessibility to Eilendorf station, as it currently has very poor access for people wishing to get from one platform to the other, involving a long walk via the bridge to the west or tunnel to the east. Passengers have been known to illegally cross the tracks, which are intensively used by Thalys and ICE high-speed trains plus freight trains as well as regular Euregiobahn and other regional trains. As part of Citizens' Rail, the local community has helped to plan solutions to make the station safer and more user-friendly.

Having seen local marketing undertaken by the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, AVV has trialled local marketing in the Eilendorf area, promoting journey possibilities and fare offers.

Eilendorf was also chosen as the location for a schools engagement project modelled on experience from Lancashire. The city of Aachen coordinated assistance from DB, the railway police, AVV and NVR. An art project for 12-year old pupils resulted in selected artwork being applied to the station buildings and structures.




Art project: school pupils have brought a splash of colour to Eilendorf station.

AACHEN WEST

Another major initiative has been planning the redevelopment of Aachen West station, serving the fast-growing RWTH Aachen University (with around 40,000 students). The area is projected to generate 5,000 to 10,000 new jobs in the coming decade as eight new research clusters will be built close to the station. An ambitious plan has been developed with the local stakeholders that will make the station much more accessible, thanks to a new bridge and lifts.

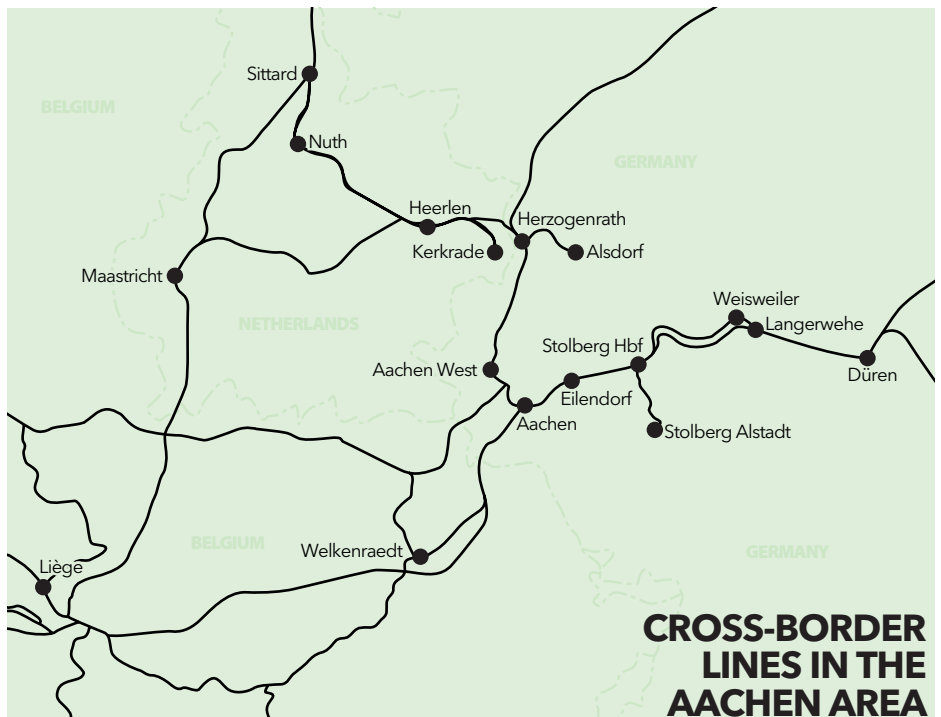
DEVELOPING CROSS-BORDER LINKS

In the Netherlands regional authority, Parkstad Limburg has used the Citizens' Rail initiative to make progress with development plans for three localities – in all cases involving early community involvement in discussing options, resulting in wider and quicker acceptance of proposals. The projects involved improving existing stations at Kerkrade Centrum (new station front and parking planned) and Nuth (rail/bus interchange designed and built) and developing plans for an entirely new one at Kerkrade West, south east of Heerlen and on the route of a proposed new cross-border line known as the Avantisline, which will link Heerlen, Kerkrade and Aachen with the nearby Avantis business park located directly on the border between Aachen and Heerlen.

The Avantisline, for which funding has yet to be agreed, will re-use part (but not all) of the old route via Sempelveld that closed in 1992. Even if the cross-border section is not built Parkstad Limburg is considering extension of existing services from Kerkrade Centrum to the new Kerkrade West site, although this line is currently owned by a heritage railway.  Keith Fender



The Avantisline: before it shut! NS Plan DEII DEMU No 178 arriving at Sempelveld with a service to Maastricht on 1 August 1989. This line to the south of Heerlen could reopen to serve the Avantis business park. KEITH FENDER



CROSS-BORDER LINES IN THE AACHEN AREA



Right away: Mason, a pupil from Padiham Green Primary School, waves off a Manchester-bound service from Burnley Manchester Road station on the day of the launch of the new service to Manchester via the Todmorden Curve. COMMUNITY RAIL LANCASHIRE/ANDY FORD

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

CRPs ENGAGE WITH THE CITIZENS OF TOMORROW

The foundation of every state is the education of its youth.' Thus said the philosopher Diogenes, although he could just as easily have been talking about our railways as the state. School children and students are the passengers of tomorrow and everyone benefits if they learn the value of the railway.

Involving schools and other organisations that deal with young people, such as the Probation Service, is an important part of the work of many Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs).

PRO-ACTIVE

Lancashire has a vibrant programme for children, aiming to help them understand how to use trains and stations safely. The Lancashire programme is supported by the county council through Community Rail Lancashire (CRL), an umbrella organisation for the local CRPs. The vice chair of the Clitheroe and East Lancashire CRPs (a volunteer) plus one of the small team of

community rail development officers lead much of the schools work. CRL deliberately targets Key Stage 2 in the National Curriculum – so the children are aged 9-11 and not yet teenagers. Many of them are about to become commuters themselves when they move to secondary school.

The basic aim is to encourage rail use by the children and their families and to encourage the children to regard the railway and stations as something useful, environmentally-friendly and of value to the community, as opposed to somewhere to hang out or vandalise! Every school term five schools are included in the programme – which in turn means around 15 classes (so around 450 children a year).

The typical programme starts with a visit to the school by the Lancashire team and the basics of train travel are explained. The emphasis is on planting the idea that you can actually use trains – the majority of the children in the Lancashire schools involved had never been on a train when they took



Passport to travel: student passes used to encourage travel in Devon and the Pays de la Loire.

a ride as part of the programme. The ride is normally to Accrington, where the rebuilt station has space available, affectionately known as 'the bunker', suitable for school groups of up to 30 children.

Whilst there, the children learn for example about how to read a timetable, how

to buy a ticket, rail safety and map making. They learn about sustainability, as Accrington station is one of a handful of specially designed eco stations.

The British Transport Police also assists with railway safety sessions. On return to school, classroom work led by the teacher can develop some of the themes through artwork, essays, map making etc.

Since 2009 the Lancashire programme has involved 6,000 local children. A version of the programme that can be delivered by schools without direct involvement from the Lancashire team has been prepared.

Lancashire has developed a Passport to Safer Rail Travel with both BTP and Northern – this gives the child free travel for a period of time on selected routes when accompanied by a fare-paying adult. A similar project has been pursued on the Riviera Line in Devon and the approach impressed the Région Pays de la Loire when shared as part of the Citizens' Rail initiative: a French language version is now in use throughout the Région. BTP believes the work with schools has paid dividends in terms of reduced vandalism and trespass in the areas served by the schools involved.

STUDENT MASTERCLASSES

University students have a huge amount to offer the railway, and the Citizens' Rail project has tapped into their creativity and fresh ideas through a pair of transnational masterclasses. The two-day events brought together students from the UK, France, Germany and the Netherlands and set them challenges ranging from designing station improvements to devising rail marketing campaigns.

Through site visits and talks by expert speakers, the students quickly developed an understanding of the rail landscape and local context. They then developed solutions, working in teams spanning different nationalities and also different disciplines – including geography, tourism, design and civil engineering.

The results were extremely impressive. At the first masterclass held in Aachen (Germany) and Heerlen (the Netherlands) the students created imaginative and eye-catching concepts for improvements at a pair of local stations. These included more radical use of greenery and integrating the area's mining heritage into the design of the station. At the second masterclass held in Preston, the students developed innovative marketing plans for local and regional routes, with different teams targeting audience groups including tourists, young people, commuters, families and older people.

The students' ideas have already begun to be implemented by the UK rail industry. Just three months after the marketing masterclass, the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership worked with First Great Western to use the on-board Wi-Fi on HSTs as a way to promote leisure trips on the operator's scenic branch lines – an idea that came directly from the

masterclass. Read about more of the students' ideas at www.citizensrail.org/masterclass.

THE STATION ENVIRONMENT

On the Severn Beach line, the City to Seaside school arts project was launched in 2013 by the Severnside Community Rail Partnership. The initiative was sparked by requests from local secondary schools and the British Transport Police for help in finding ways of engaging secondary students, with the aim of improving their behaviour during their journey by train to and from school.

Using funding from the Arts Council England and First Great Western, four secondary schools have engaged in the project, which sees groups of older students working with local community artists.

In April 2015 the CRP secured funding from Bristol City Council and First Great Western to reproduce 39 images taken as part of the project - one image for each alcove along the canopy at Avonmouth

station. The station has gained a much-needed refresh, making it feel safer and more welcoming to passengers. The images reflect the variety of this unique line.

In a separate initiative on the Severn Beach line, groups of young offenders work with a supervisor who has been through Probation Service training (and who is employed part time by the CRP one day a week) to keep station gardens in good order. **m** Keith Fender



Masterclass: students work on marketing ideas.



Stand behind the yellow line: children from Torre Primary Academy visit their local station in June 2015.



Brainstorming: students discuss station design in a masterclass in the cross-border district of Aachen / Parkstad Limburg.



Cheerful: celebrating the My Mill Hill community artwork project at Mill Hill station in Lancashire. Project partners included Blackburn with Darwen Council, Northern Rail and The East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership.

COMMUNITY RAIL FORGES AHEAD

UK PARTNERSHIPS PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW

Community Rail has made huge progress in Britain over the last 20 years. It is now a mainstream element in many new franchise awards, enjoying strong support from the Transport Secretary downwards. Community rail partnerships (CRPs) have enabled people all over the UK to get involved in improving the appearance of their local stations, promoting rail travel and encouraging other business uses for railway buildings that no longer have an operational purpose.

The Government's Community Rail Development Strategy provides a framework for partnerships to improve the effectiveness of local railways in meeting social, environmental and economic objectives – with specific emphasis on increasing usage (and revenue), reducing cost and engaging the local community. Such work enables the local rail service to play a bigger role in wider economic and social regeneration.

ACORP - PROVIDING GUIDANCE AND ASSISTANCE

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships – ACoRP – acts as an umbrella

body for the community rail sector in the UK, promoting and sharing best practice and communicating with the wider rail industry and other stakeholders. ACoRP is a federation of over 50 community rail partnerships and rail promotion groups. The Association's focus is on involving the community in their local railway and on practical improvements – station facilities, better services and integration with other forms of transport – leading to an improved and more sustainable local railway.

The community rail sector includes a wide variety of different types of organisations – some formal, others more informal – including CRPs representing routes formally designated by Government. Currently 37 routes have Government designation, but CRPs cover other routes as well. In addition there are over 110 station friends or adoption groups, and 400+ other local volunteer-run groups such as more traditional rail user associations, line promotion groups and small groups of volunteers working at a single station with a train operating company or Network Rail.

England and Wales have led the way in terms of formal CRP arrangements but Scotland will catch up fast in the next few years - the first Scottish CRP for Carrick and Wigtownshire was launched in June 2014. As the new franchisee in Scotland, Abellio has promised a new Community Programme with up to 10 new CRPs envisaged, whilst maintaining support for existing local station adoption and station regeneration efforts.

LOW COST BUT HIGH IMPACT

Community Rail is a form of public – private partnership, but one that relies on large numbers of volunteers and few full-time employees. Funding from franchisees has increased as a share of the total – a trend that is set to continue as local authority budgets are pared back further over the next few years, removing a source of funds CRPs relied upon in many cases in the earlier years. However, the total funding provided is minuscule in rail industry terms – the much bigger support is the industry-wide framework that effectively gives CRP groups and more local groups of station friends 'permission' to get on with

things like looking after stations and wider community involvement.

Even long distance operators such as Virgin West Coast have seen the advantage of local community engagement outside of the formal community rail umbrella. Virgin has sponsored pop up shops at West Coast main line stations, where 150+ local traders have been able to reach a new wider audience by selling directly to station users. This has had the beneficial result for small businesses of helping to reach new customers and has made the station itself more of a destination, encouraging more people to visit.

The success of community rail can be measured in several ways. Research on this has been undertaken for the National Community Rail Implementation Steering Committee, which includes central and local government, Network Rail and the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), plus ACoRP. Published in January 2015, the document on the Value of Community Rail Partnerships / Community Rail Volunteering showed:

- 2.8% additional growth per annum is achieved on community rail routes;
- CRPs add value in improving environments and bringing together communities for a common purpose;
- CRPs add significantly more economic value than they cost to run (running costs are in all cases low anyway);
- community rail relies on volunteers to undertake much of the work to improve how stations look and to staff local promotional activity etc. ACoRP estimates that 3,200 people regularly volunteer, giving



In the cab: Claire Perry, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, arrives at Newcourt for the station's official opening in July 2015. TONY JACKSON, AVOCET LINE RAIL USERS GROUP.

around 250,000 hours a year – valued at £3.4 million annually;

- station adoption – whether as part of a CRP or by a local group of station friends – adds value and is very low cost relative to the benefits in terms of perceived security by rail users and reduced or avoided costs for dealing with vandalism for train operators.

OUTLOOK

Given the backing of central government and guaranteed funding from future franchisees, the future appears bright for community rail. However, whilst the costs to the industry and taxpayer are low relative to the benefits gained, there is a danger that reductions in funding may threaten the model. Reductions in local government funding (across the board,

not just for transport) have led to cutbacks. For example, Norfolk, although it still supports the objectives of community rail, has ceased funding the CRPs serving the county, leaving the CRPs to find alternative finance from the franchisee and other sources. Franchisees funding CRPs would appear to be the model going forward and ACoRP best practice suggests that CRPs need someone employed for at least three days a week to manage and lead activity.

The bigger innovations will always require additional funds. Those CRPs and local authorities which have been the most innovative in finding sources of funds have achieved major change, one example being through the Citizens' Rail project. **mf** Keith Fender

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

How you can make it happen



Want to involve local people in your line or network? Get started with the help of the free toolkit of advice and resources created by the Citizens' Rail project:

www.citizensrail.org/toolkit

The online "how to" guide is aimed at audiences including the rail industry, local, regional and national government, other public sector organisations, Community Rail Partnerships and volunteers. It's full of practical tips, examples, photos and videos from across Europe and beyond.

Learn how to:

- Make stations more welcoming through art and gardening projects with volunteers or local charities
- Find new community uses for disused station buildings
- Promote your line in innovative ways
- Integrate the views of local people
- Appeal to new audiences

By doing so you'll benefit from local energy and insights and make your stations and lines more characterful, inclusive and successful.



Blue fin: the smart new station at Burnley Manchester Road.

RED ROSE RESURGENT

REOPENING OF THE TODMORDEN CURVE IS PART OF A WIDER REGENERATION STRATEGY

Lancashire is a large and diverse county. With an area of 3,045 square km and a population of just under 1.5 million, the county ranges from big towns and cities to open country and seaside. It boasts a

railway network that includes sections of the West Coast main line and secondary lines serving Colne, Ormskirk and Blackpool. Not surprisingly, the network has strong links to the two major cities that sit on Lancashire's

borders, namely Manchester and Liverpool – both important destinations for commuters and shoppers.

Lancashire was one of the early pioneers of the community rail concept, developing what became the West of Lancashire CRP covering the two lines in West Lancashire, Preston - Ormskirk and (Manchester -) Wigan - Southport, in the late 1990s. Support for the West of Lancashire CRP was provided from one of the team of Rural Transport Partnership Officers employed by Lancashire County Council.

In other areas the County Council was a partner in the Clitheroe Line Development Group (the forerunner of the Clitheroe Line CRP) that successfully secured funding to introduce an all-year hourly Sunday service between Clitheroe and Manchester. Lancashire now has four CRPs covering six lines that are collectively branded as 'Community Rail Lancashire'. In addition, Lancashire also supports the Bentham and Furness Line CRPs.

Lancashire has also led infrastructure development – something that remains rare for shire counties, compared to better-resourced metropolitan areas. For example, in 2010 Lancashire led the rebuilding of Accrington station on the Blackburn to Burnley route. The new eco building includes rooms designed for



Eco building: the new station at Accrington.

use by community rail educational visits, especially ‘the bunker’ in the basement. In keeping with its ‘eco’ status, the new station has a rainwater harvesting system plus photovoltaic cells and solar hot water generation panels – the station picked up the Environment Award in the 2011 Railway Industry Innovation Awards.

TODMORDEN CURVE

In the 1980s and 1990s Burnley, around eight miles east of Accrington, had the unwelcome distinction of being one of the fastest de-populating towns in the UK, having been one of the world’s leading cotton producing towns in the 19th century. The town’s economic problems were not helped by the paucity of its rail services: the Copy Pit route from Blackburn to Hebden Bridge was effectively closed to passengers by British Rail in 1965 when local services ceased, leaving Burnley with one main station – the misnamed Burnley Central. This station had a couple of drawbacks: despite its name it is not in the centre of the town and it is on the branch line from Colne to Preston, so offered no useful connections to Manchester, the closest metropolitan area.

The Copy Pit route reopened in the early 1980s, initially with a two-hourly Preston to Leeds service part-funded by the National and Provincial Building Society (formed by the merger of the Burnley Building Society and the Bradford-based National Provincial Building Society, which wanted an easy means for employees to travel between Burnley and the new headquarters in Bradford). The old Burnley Manchester Road station building on the route had been sold by BR after closure in 1961 so a new low-cost wooden-platformed station, modelled on those pioneered by nearby Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive, was built for the new service in 1986, costing just £139,000.

Burnley’s council, keen to spur economic regeneration, applied for Regional Growth funding in 2011 for a programme of work centred on the ‘Weavers Triangle’ area of the town, near Burnley Manchester Road station. This is close to the newly-enlarged UCLAN university campus, where British Aerospace sponsorship has assisted in developing new courses and infrastructure. Burnley is positioning itself as a regional education centre, and good transport links are vital to help students get to and from college, especially as – since the introduction of tuition fees – many local students now commute from the parental home rather than live near college, in order to minimise future debt.

Centrepiece of the £11 million project was a new section of railway around eight miles east of the town at Todmorden, linking the Manchester to Hebden Bridge (– Bradford) route to the Blackburn – Bradford ‘Copy Pit’ route, enabling through trains from Burnley to Manchester for the first time in over 50 years. Lancashire County Council supported the preparation of the Regional

Growth fund bid approved by Lord Heseltine in July 2011 and supported Burnley Council in ensuring the infrastructure part of the project was delivered by Network Rail. Lancashire took the lead in agreeing the train service provision over the new route with current franchisee Northern.

Delivering the infrastructure – a 300-metre, bi-directionally signalled single track with junctions at both ends – was to prove substantially more challenging than anyone expected. The construction of the track itself was simple, but the signalling interfaces at the ends less so – the new curve ended up being used as a turnback siding for a year whilst signalling was commissioned.

NEW STATION FOR BURNLEY

Lancashire County Council played an important role in the development of the Citizens’ Rail project. Through its participation in the project it has been able to secure funding to enable a new station to be developed at Burnley Manchester Road in partnership with Burnley Council, which saw the new station as a gateway to the town and its new education campuses. Rail industry partners Network Rail and Northern Rail were also key participants.

The new Burnley Manchester Road station was formally opened in November 2014 and is located on the site of the old Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway station it replaces – the building’s footprint is almost identical. The original concept for the station was to refurbish the old building, which after 50 years of use by a dairy firm still existed – but the condition of the building was such that it was cheaper to build a new structure in its place. The stone cladding from the old building has been reused to clad the new

one. The modern building is distinctive, with a purple ‘fin’ to advertise its presence: the station is located below the level of local roads on the side of a valley.

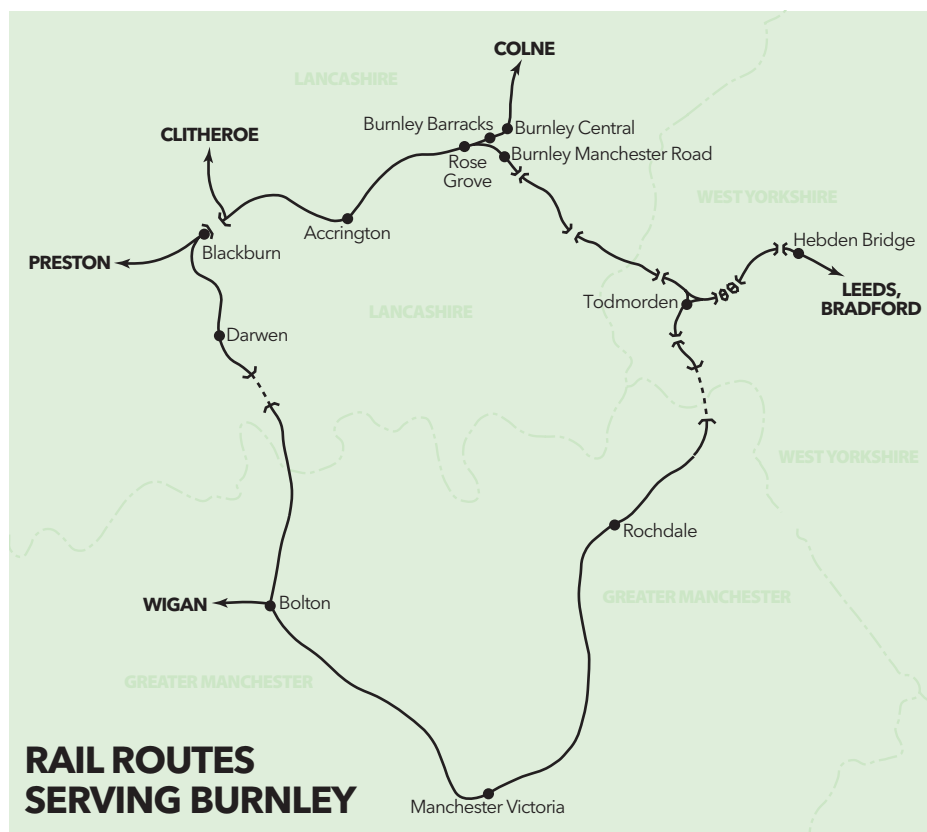
The station is staffed, with two shifts in the modern booking office. Space has been found for a Community Rail meeting space – used by small school groups, community ambassadors and volunteers. The station is now being used by around 336,000 passengers a year (around 680,000 journeys, as most are round trips), and this is expected to increase to nearly 500,000 as the new Manchester service develops.

INNOVATIVE CONTRACT

Lancashire County Council took responsibility for ensuring Burnley got its new direct service from Manchester via the Todmorden Curve. Services are operated from Manchester Victoria via Rochdale and Burnley – terminating in Blackburn, which already has trains to Manchester via Darwen.

Blackburn was chosen as the turnback point as additional infrastructure spend could thus be avoided, plus Accrington and Rose Grove gained direct trains to Manchester. A decision by transport authorities in neighbouring West Yorkshire and Manchester to fund the services between Rochdale and Todmorden reduced the total cost for Lancashire.

The agreement between Lancashire and operator Northern covers hourly trains, seven days a week and is a three-year agreement. Given the end of the current Northern franchise is in April 2016, the transition was pre-agreed with the Department for Transport: the agreement will transfer to whichever operator wins the new franchise. The agreement between





New infrastructure: a unit traverses the Todmorden Curve on opening day, 17 May 2015. RUSSELL WYKES

Lancashire and Northern took 18 months to finalise and is an incremental revenue-sharing arrangement – it is expected to generate a small surplus for Lancashire for possible reinvestment in local rail services. Lancashire was required to underwrite driver recruitment and training costs, as the new services required additional staff at operator Northern.

The revenue-sharing approach taken by Lancashire has attracted interest from other neighbouring transport authorities that are looking to develop new services on existing infrastructure.

As part of the planning for the new service, additional car parking spaces are planned at Rose Grove and at the new Burnley Manchester Road station.

EAST-WEST ROUTE

It seems likely that more east-west services via Blackburn and Burnley would be successful, given road traffic levels and the general lack of east-west rail connectivity in England. A Blackpool to York service is included in the new Northern franchise as a possible new regional express service: it remains to be seen what Northern bidders suggest for this service, but it would not be unreasonable to suppose that some of the minimum 120 new DMU vehicles specified in the Northern Invitation to Tender would be deployed on it. Other developments might include seat reservations and advance tickets. 'I certainly see developments taking place with this service over the next few years to



Burnley-bound: the impressive new roof at Manchester Victoria station, with a Blackburn via Burnley service waiting to depart, on 27 July 2015. KEITH FENDER

the benefit of East Lancashire and east-west connectivity' says Richard Watts, Rail Development Team Manager with Lancashire County Council.

CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT

Direct services via the Todmorden curve from Blackburn, Accrington, Rose Grove and Burnley to Manchester started in May 2015. On Sundays the service also calls at Church & Oswaldtwistle to serve the nearby Oswaldtwistle Mills. The service is forecast to attract nearly 330,000 passengers a year. After the first few weeks it was

apparent that most journeys, as anticipated, are to or from Manchester.

From December 2017 journey times from Burnley to Manchester are expected to drop to 45 minutes from the current 52 minutes, thanks to introduction of more Manchester - Rochdale stopping services, enabling the Burnley trains to omit some intermediate stops. There are also plans, track access permitting, for additional services in the evenings and at other times. Already, the service from Burnley to Manchester is better now than it has ever been since the line opened in 1849. [mf](#) Keith Fender