



# The Bentham Line

**Chairman's Report 2021-22**  
**Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership**



# The Bentham Line



## A Window on the Dales and Bowland

# The Bentham Line - Chairman's Report 2021-22



This is my 8th annual report as chairman and covers the period from August 2021 until now. In this summer report, I outline the major developments for the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership and the Bentham Line during the past twelve months. We are now into our seventeenth year of working with the train operating companies in the North of England and the communities and organisations along the Bentham Line. This report reflects on a further busy and rewarding year for the partnership, as we recover from the challenges placed on us by the coronavirus pandemic.

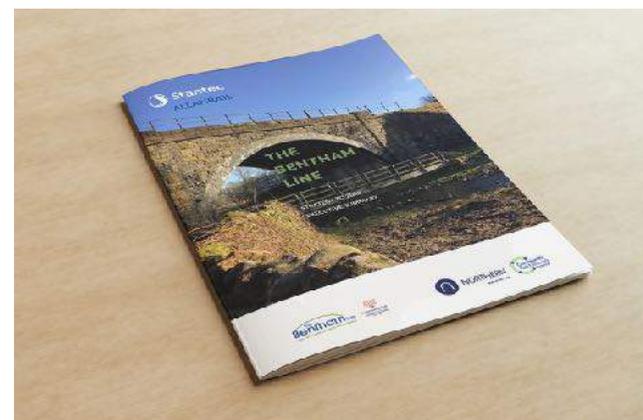
The core funders of the partnership are Northern Trains Ltd., along with CrossCountry Trains, the London North Eastern Railway, the Avanti West Coast Partnership, TransPennine Express and North Yorkshire County Council. TransPennine Express became a new funder of the Partnership in July 2021, when it entered its latest agreement with the Department for Transport.

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

projects on the line. CrossCountry Trains continue to take a keen interest in the work of the partnership, in particular the Dementia and Community Rail Project, the new Bentham Line website and helping our route recover from the restrictions. We continue to look at possible community developments at Lancaster station with Avanti West Coast. We were pleased to attend and contribute to the community rail and stakeholder conferences arranged by the above mentioned train operating companies, during the past 12 months.

Having welcomed and taken onboard the new Community Rail Strategy in November 2018, The accreditation meeting took place in early October 2020. Re-accreditation was confirmed exactly one year later and now follows a yearly cycle. The latest re-accreditation being successfully completed in October 2021.

During the first half of 2021 a subgroup of the directors worked on our major project for 2021-22, the development of plans for a detailed Bentham Line Study. The project, led by David Alder, our treasurer, initially involved the production of a detailed Invitation to Tender and evaluation materials. The LMCRP received 3 completed tenders. These were evaluated and interviews followed. The successful consultants, Stantec UK Ltd. and AllanRail, then carried out the study between September 2021 and February 2022.



The study developed from extensive discussions with over 30 stakeholders and in excess of 500 constructive responses to the associated online survey, which truly rooted the study within the Bentham Line communities.

We made two successful applications for grants for the study; to the Community Rail Development Fund for £25,000 and to Northern's Seed Corn Fund for the same amount. The Partnership will be adding £10,000 to the funding pot to enable a £60,000 study.



The resulting **Bentham Line Strategy to 2042**, a major advance for the LMCRP, has been completed and published as the Full Strategy and an Executive Summary. Stantec UK Ltd. and AllanRail, the consultants, undertook a 'grass roots' study with a 'leave no stone unturned approach' to produce an extensive 214-page document for

use in the development of the LMCRP and provide a basis for discussions on the future of the line over the next two decades.

Highlights of the Strategy include: the use of the line, with two additional miles of electrification, as an early example of route decarbonisation utilising suitable battery-electric units, possible station improvements, timetable developments, better understanding of ticketing possibilities and clearer targeting of leisure and tourism markets through ticketing and promotion.

Early reactions to the Strategy have been very favourable and have raised the profile of the Partnership both with stakeholders and in the press. There have been positive responses from Lancashire and North Yorkshire County Councils. Lancaster City Council has immediately adopted the Strategy and Lancaster Civic Vision has indicated their support too. The CRP recently met with the Northern's East Area team to discuss and develop the best way forward with the new strategy.

The Full Strategy and Executive Summary contain a dedication to David Alder, the long-standing treasurer and director of the LMCRP, who sadly passed away on 8th April 2022. He will be greatly missed by us all. The dedication is included at the end of this report.

For the fourth successive year, the Partnership has been working with Northern's year-in-industry students. Their projects this year were based on the theme of 'Access for All to the Bentham Line'. With us, they looked at three aspects of accessibility, namely: low cost structural improvements at our stations, creating 21 3-minute, 360-degree interactive

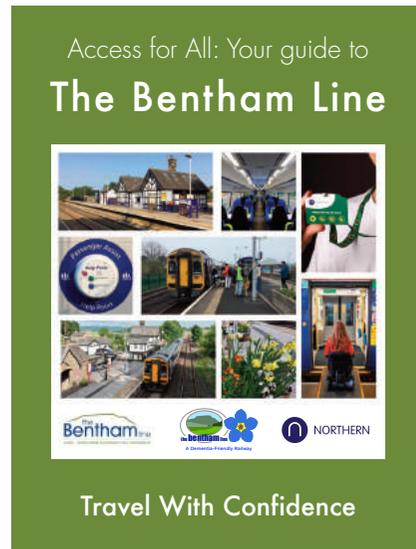


station videos for our websites, to give customers online previews of our stations, and producing a welcoming 'Access for All' guide to the line. There is a further video for our Class 158 trains.

The booklets are now published, the associated poster campaign is up and the videos, which have been created by the students themselves, are now part of the Bentham Line website. I am pleased that the Northern Seed-Corn Fund was able to support the booklet and posters with a grant for £3,600, alongside funding from the partnership.

The 'Access for All' project has also enabled the addition of handrails to platform steps at Bentham, the installation of a dropped kerb at Steeton & Silsden, new way-finding signage at Bentham, Long Preston and Shipley, and accessible parking spaces at several stations are planned.

I am delighted to report that the fourth cohort of students successfully completed their 'Access for All' projects and were able to hold a launch event at the end of June at the Novotel in Leeds with their managers, Northern directors and representatives of the LMCRC present. All four groups of students have



displayed a lively and positive outlook towards developing their own community initiatives and we now look forward to welcoming a fifth group of students to our line this September.

Work associated with the Dementia and Community Rail project has continued throughout the past year with new designs created for banners and posters, which are now on display along the the line. It has been pleasing to hold further in-person dementia awareness sessions following the pandemic restrictions, which included the Year in Industry students. The sessions have proved to be more successful 'live' than by video call.

Following the reference of support for our project in the William-



Shapps Plan for Rail (below) we have received further enquiries from rail groups looking to make facilities and journeys more dementia

friendly. the latest engagements have been with TransPennine Express, Northern and the Friends of Buxton Station

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

No.150214, has continued her travels across the north and has covered approaching 400,000 miles carrying its 'dementia-awareness' message. Its daily journeys are recorded by Phil Wallis, on the units own Facebook page, which also receives photographs of our unit in action.



Whilst speaking of photographs, I would like to again thank our young volunteer, Ollie Rouse, from Morecambe, who captures great shots of the Bentham Line, our communities and the beautiful scenery, on a regular basis. His excellent photographs can be seen throughout our website pages, in our social media posts and in this report.



CrossCountry has continued to support us in developing our new dynamic, modern-looking website to promote both the line and the work of the Partnership. The development of the website has been ongoing throughout the Covid pandemic and during this year too. The number and range of pages on the site has continued to increase steadily over the past year. The site reflects the many initiatives of the CRP and includes many opportunities to download and print items, such as the station history panels and the 'Rail to Trail' walks and cycling routes. Our regular press releases are added to the home page and social media posts feed into the home page too.



During Community Rail Week 2022 this May, the LMCRP invited all East Area CRPs to join them at Leeds station on the Thursday for a promotional event Together. A positive experience was had by all with no mention of the pending strikes.



Earlier, at the opening event of Community Rail Week at Bingley, the CRP met with Rail Minister, Wendy Morton MP, to give an update on the Dementia and Community Rail project and to present her with a copy of the new Line Strategy and discuss the main highlights.

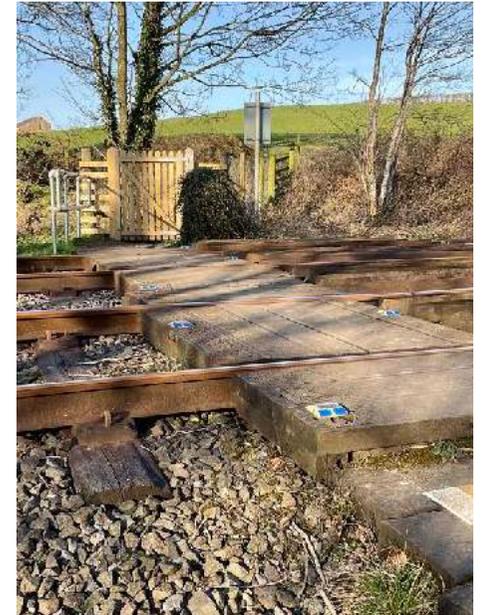


Bentham station, as well as being home to the Partnership and Friends Group (FOBS), remains a focal point for, and a window on, the community. Two local North Yorkshire County Council minibus services have continued to be based at, and operated from, the station. The Bentham News group have recommenced their regular schedule of monthly meetings and editing sessions in the building. In addition, their newsletter is once again being distributed from the station. The Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group, LASRUG, have restarted bi-monthly meetings at the station. There are other one-off users.



Train operator and Network Rail enhancements, both large and small, at stations have been taking place throughout the year. Renewal of track

and improvement of foot crossings in differing styles, and the introduction of further new CCTV systems and customer information screens, at our smaller stations, have taken place. The Year in Industry students "Access for All" endeavours also improved station accessibility at Bentham, Long Preston and Steeton & Silsden



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

The Friends of Bentham Station remain determined to press ahead with their 'green energy' project to provide a 32-panel photovoltaic array on the station roof to meet the needs for electricity by all parties at the station. The project which is being facilitated and supported by the LMC RP is about to seek landlords consent having reached an appropriate way forward with new lease appendices.



On a more shocking but pleasing note FOBS have now installed the

defibrillator and safe for which they raised a substantial part of the cost within the community and through donations. The cost of the electrical installation has been covered by the CRP.



FOBS recently held another of their quiz and supper evenings in Bentham Town Hall. Over 50 guests raised £250 towards a memorial bench and plaque at the station for David Alder, a founding member of FOBS and former Bentham Post Master.

A similar defibrillator project by Clapham Parish Council has also been supported by the CRP through the necessary electrical works. Both defibrillators form part of the respective local parish networks, as well as being part of the national network.

There are now defibrillators at Bare Lane, Lancaster (3), Bentham, Clapham, Skipton, Keighley, Bingley, Shipley and Leeds stations with other units close by at Wennington, Gargrave and Cononley. It would be good to complete a Bentham Line chain. A number of classes on the operation of the units is being looked into.

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

Unquestionably, the most positive and long-awaited improvement continues to be the use of Class 158 'super sprinters' on all services on the route. The refurbished units have operated throughout 2021-22 and brought back a sense of enjoyment to Bentham Line travel, with their light and bright interiors, customer information screens, air conditioning and the far smoother ride they offer. An increasing number of the units have been equipped with WiFi systems and charging points. It is a shame, however, that these essential resources in modern life distract passengers from fully enjoying the routes beautiful scenery The units.

From 17th May 2021, 6 services each way were operated by Northern with the full 5 services each way on Sundays. The full 8-train weekday service returned in December 2021 and has operated since then, with the exception of the three recent strike days and the days in-between them.

Sadly, the local services between Lancaster, Bare lane, Morecambe and Heysham Port have been particularly inconsistent and have not operated for some periods. Whist some services have run or 'bustitutions' introduced, many have not, particularly on Sundays, with Morecambe only being served by the 5 through trains to and from Leeds. Cancellations are still affecting this service at present.

We were delighted to reopen the offices at Bentham on 19th July 2021 and bring the building and station back to life; an event welcomed by the local community.

The Partnership's offices at Bentham Station have been in full swing since then. The operation of the scheduled local minibuss services by North Yorkshire County Council and cleaning and maintenance services have continued throughout.

The partnership officers have met with myself at Bentham a least once per week since the relaxation of pandemic restrictions last summer with numerous video and telephone calls in-between, to help progress planned activities and keep spirits up. It is good to be out and about along the line once again meeting



During the winter term railway safety and heritage presentations were given to the pupils of Hellifield and Giggleswick Community Primary Schools. The in-school visits were followed up by educational days out to Carnforth

stakeholders and groups.

In particular, it has been great to visit schools once more, to deliver presentations and activities, and also to welcome school groups back to the railway for journeys and visits.

Heritage Centre by train. There the pupils looked at the local history and created a further 'Suzy', to panels extend the 'Sheep on the Line' project. The original artworks created by the pupils were presented to the schools and the pupils came along to their local stations to unveil panels based on their works. New badge and puppet making activities were tried out successfully with the two schools. The puppets are based on the characters from the 'A Grand Day Out to the Seaside' children's story, created by a previous cohort of of Year in Industry students.

The partnership also assisted with a visit to Saltaire and Salts Mill for a large group from the two schools together with Long Preston Primary School. We also provided materials to help with their visit to the David Hockney exhibition.

St. Peter's Primary School at Heysham has been the latest to have in-school visits. They are also participating in a visit to Carnforth Station Heritage Centre for a variety of activities. The school will also play a part in the new local 'Rail and Sail' project, mentioned on page 8.

The CRP is set to work with Bentham Community Primary School Years 5 and 6 who are undertaking an end of term project on how the Industrial Revolution changed Bentham, including the role played by the railway.

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



received by families on the route and will again be widely distributed this summer.

To complement the creation and installation of station history panels between Skipton and Wennington, the latest to be unveiled has been at Heysham Port.

This has led to the development of further panels to celebrate the unique history of the Pioneer Line; the local electric service developed by the Midland Railway at the beginning of the 20th century to link Lancaster Castle, Lancaster Green Ayre, Scale Hall, Morecambe Promenade and Heysham Harbour.



The LMCPR and the Forest of Bowland ANOB recently presented a framed local photograph to Housing 21 at the opening of the new extra-care housing facility at Bentham and will now work to encourage group visits using the line.

The CRP is working with Bowland on a new active-leisure programme for the AONB with the railway a key element of exemplar itineraries.

Work has continued on 'Project Triangle' in association with the Settle-Carlisle CRP. A green tourism, active leisure and family travel initiative, based on the triangular area bounded by the 2 lines with corners at Bentham, Ribbleshead and Settle Junction. A particular aim

is to boost tourism by rail to, and within, that area. The project is due to launch early in 2023.

As a development of our 'Strategy to 2042', the CRP's officers have undertaken detailed audits of all Bentham Line stations, using a standard format, and are preparing a full Stations Strategy for the next decade to share and discuss with Northern and Network Rail.



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

A new purpose-built vessel comes into operation on the Heysham-Douglas route early next summer will also provide inspiration for art, craft and STEM activities for pupils, as will tours of the port.

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

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



It has been great to see increasingly larger numbers of passengers returning to our line during 2021-22, with many trains close to being full heading both west and east. There appear to be more families, walkers, cyclists and dogs using the services. Let us hope that these are initial sign of a green-travel revolution, with more active leisure travel. Many students have returned to our route and the number of connections being made to and from the Furness line have increased considerably. The line is also proving popular for journeys between Scotland and West Yorkshire with the good connections at Lancaster. Benthamers continue to make the greatest number of journeys within the route.

Amongst the returning passengers have been groups from SELFA, a children's support charity, based in Skipton, with an outreach group in Bentham. We have been pleased to support them once again on their visits to Gargrave, Cononley, Williamson's Park and the

Lancaster Castle and to the seaside at Morecambe. We are again looking forward to seeing some of the local dementia groups travelling on the line this summer for their 'Grand Days Out'; there have already been a number of enquiries.

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) David Alder (Treasurer) and Simon Clarke (Secretary and CRDO) for their support and help with all the ideas and schemes. My sincere thanks go to Rod Tickner, our vice chairman, and David Alder, our treasurer; Rod for his regular press releases and, above all, his invaluable support of the Partnership's Dementia and Community Rail project and David for his extensive work in leading the line study development alongside Richard Watts, Graham North, Mike Cliffe and Rod.

My thanks also go to Pete Myers, Alison Bell and Lisa Maloney of Northern's East Area team who have continued to support the work of the partnership, along with Alex Bray of CrossCountry. Sadly, Alison has recently moved onto pastures new.

The Partnership is in a good position having resumed a wide range of activities and brought new projects into play.. It is important that we do not forget our previous ways of operating and our successful ideas, as we encompass the new modes of working developed during the Covid-19 crisis. This will be our second hybrid-style AGM.

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 2021-22' or visiting our website.

*Gerald Townson*

Gerald Townson  
Chairman, LMCRP Co. Ltd.

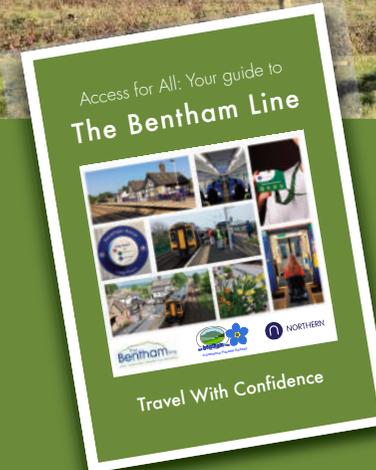
July 2022.



# The Bentham Line

## Travel with Confidence

Leeds - Skipton - Bentham - Lancaster - Morecambe



Accessibility Guide  
available from staffed  
stations, online at:  
[thebenthamline.co.uk](http://thebenthamline.co.uk)  
or by scanning the  
QR code



**David William Alder**  
**1st December 1946 - 8th April 2022**



David had been a director and treasurer of the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership since its formation in April 2006. He assisted with the formal service designation for the route by the Department for Transport, on behalf of the Partnership, in 2012, and contributed extensively to the accreditation of the partnership, by the DfT, from 2019 onwards.

David had a keen interest in railways and was a font of knowledge on the subject. He had a particular affection for the Leeds to Heysham Port route, the Bentham Line, which was also echoed in his volunteer work as treasurer and committee member of the Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group.

He was eager to explore all possibilities to develop the Bentham Line and recently worked at length on the preparation of the Invitation to Tender documents which led to the Bentham Line Development Study taking place in 2021/22.

This report is dedicated to David in recognition of his continued determination to raise the profile of the line, to see the line recognised as an important lifeline for local communities as well as a scenic trans-Pennine route, to develop the line's timetable and to secure a positive future for the route.

**Gerald Townson**  
**Chairman, Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership**





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Wellfield



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*Photographs courtesy of Ollie Rouse, Brian Haworth,  
Phil Wallis and Gerald Townson*