

REPORT TO SHEVINGTON PARISH COUNCIL, POLICY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE -DECEMBER 7TH 2017

CONSULTATION ON COMMUNITY RAIL POLICY

Community rail is well placed in ensuring the railway reflects the communities and customers it serves. Community rail policy was last reviewed in 2007 and since there has been considerable change, with community rail continuing to develop amid an evolving and growing rail network. The purpose of this consultation is to provide those with an interest in community rail in England and Wales an opportunity to inform future policy. Shevington Parish Council has adopted the two stations serving its area at Gathurst and Appley Bridge. On these stations planters supplied by the railway companies have been planted regularly by the parish council. Voluntary groups such as Shevington in Bloom have also improved the landscaping alongside one of the platforms at Gathurst. Gathurst and Appley Bridge are part of the West of Lancashire Community Rail Partnership.

FOUR KEY THEMES OF COMMUNITY RAIL POLICY HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED.

1. CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PLACES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This focuses on how community rail can improve journeys. A good quality transport network is a fundamental part of enabling people to live their lives. While there has been sustained passenger growth across the rail industry over the last two decades, many community rail lines have seen not just equivalent growth, but in some cases significant additional growth too. This growth brings challenges in terms of the ability for the network to provide rolling stock and timetable capacity to meet demand, and also for station facilities to keep pace with changes, for example by providing additional ticket vending opportunities.

There is scope for community rail to engage with Sub-national Transport Bodies ("STBs") which span regions. STBs can request bespoke functions and responsibilities which meet the needs of local areas allowing local people a greater say in strategic transport planning. This theme seeks response as to how community rail can better integrate people's end-to-end journey and to promote rail as a key part of sustainable, healthy travel, and make it easier for people to choose rail over less environmentally sustainable modes of transport. Finally, we want to hear how community rail can help to better meet the needs of passengers and communities in the future.

Question 1a: What role can community rail play in improving end-to-end journeys?

Question 1b: How can community rail help to:

- **Make journeys more sustainable?**
- **Encourage more healthy travel?**
- **Reduce the environmental impact of travel?**

This is about integrating community rail as part of a customers' end-to-end journey. This could include getting to and from the station, including a range of transport modes such as walking, cycling, local buses, community transport, taxi, as well as car.

How might this theme be delivered and how key delivery partners would be involved, and the role of community rail in helping to deliver improved journeys?. Where appropriate, respondents are asked to provide examples of best practice where locally-led initiatives are providing benefits for passengers, and the extent to which these could be replicated on a larger scale.

Comments: Community Rail can help to integrate the end to end journey. . Much of the information about bus timetables and availability of community services is available but information is rarely set out at stations .Community rail groups could study the catchment areas of their stations and suggest how access can be improved.

Question 2: How can community rail help:

a. Communities have a voice in influencing the provision of rail?

b. Complementary transport services and development of the rail network?

This is about developing our railways to better meet the needs of the customers and communities they serve. How does community rail reflect the communities it serves and how it communicates local priorities to decision makers within the national rail industry.

What suggestions are there on ways to strengthen how community rail experts provide advice? How can community rail enhance its reputation and visibility across local stakeholders and partners?.

Comments: The secrecy of the franchising process makes it difficult to influence the provision of rail. A major change to the Wigan-Southport services was proposed in the new franchise that was found unacceptable to many users of the line. It is difficult to give community rail a voice in rail provision unless they are party to the franchising process.

Question 3: Where should the Government encourage community rail to develop on parts of the network currently without active (Community Rail Partnerships)(CRPs) or other community participation?

Community rail pays for itself through adding economic, social and environmental value, supporting additional growth per annum on community rail routes, and delivering low-cost high-benefit outcomes such as improving perceptions of safety and security. There are currently around 60 CRPs, each distinct and with their own identity and ambition. Community rail has been particularly successful in encouraging community engagement in the north of England, where a large number of CRPs have been established. The strength of many partnerships stems from their committed grassroots involvement.

To date the Government's role in supporting the creation of CRPs in new areas has focused on requiring franchised train operators to support new partnerships and in providing funding to ACoRP which has a core objective of supporting new partnerships where they emerge. Government does not currently actively promote the introduction of Community Rail to lines and services without a partnership, or to encourage Community Rail to become established in urban communities.

We would be interested in responses that focus on the pros and cons of the Government adopting a policy position that more overtly and actively encourages the development of new CRPs across the national network and how such an expansion could be funded.

Comments: Difficult to answer as our stations are already covered by a CRP. As one of the results of encouraging community rail to develop on other parts of the network may spread funding too thinly. At the moment only the Preston-Ormskirk part of the West of Lancashire CRP is recognised as a community rail line. We would rather further lines within a CRP (like Wigan-Southport) were recognised as community rail lines before lines outside an active CRP were considered.

2. INTEGRATING COMMUNITIES TO CREATE A FAIRER SOCIETY AND ENCOURAGE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.

This strongly aligns with one of the Department's key priorities for continuing to increase the accessibility of the rail network, including customers with disabilities, as well as the Government's aim of achieving more integrated communities. Successful and strong communities are supported by public services that create the conditions for everyone to live and work alongside each other. This includes those in our communities that are from minority groups, living with impairments or disabilities, or who are disadvantaged or hard-to-reach and isolated.

This considers the wider contribution that community rail makes in helping to bring about fairer, more equal communities. There is a key role for community rail to engage and help provide leadership in delivering this theme. This could include the role of CRPs in working beyond the rail industry – especially with the voluntary sector. There are potential benefits from aligning the social and economic opportunities provided by rail with the ambition and innovation of social enterprises and community organisations, local schools, colleges, business groups and networks, and community leaders. How can this engagement can be promoted and supported?

Question 4a: What is the role of community rail in supporting:

- **Community cohesion?**
- **Promoting diversity?**
- **Enabling social inclusion?**

Question 4b: How is this best achieved?

This is about understanding the wider contribution of community rail in supporting community cohesion through bringing disparate groups together, promoting tolerance and understanding, and helping to bring about fairer, more equal communities. Are there any particular groups that are currently excluded from participating in community rail initiatives (e.g. station adoption, community art, music trains and special events) and the barriers they experience.

Is there best practice where locally-led initiatives are providing benefits for disadvantaged and minority groups or leading to greater community cohesion through bringing disparate groups together, and the extent to which these could be replicated on a larger scale or in other areas. How might this theme be delivered, including key delivery partners, and the role of community rail in helping local communities.

Comments: Community groups like Shevington in Bloom have helped improve the environment of Gathurst station along with the parish council. Community associations can bring disparate groups together to stimulate community rail initiatives.

3. SUPPORTING LOCAL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES AND SHARING OPPORTUNITIES.

This strongly aligns with all aspects of the Department’ s key strategic priorities, particularly boosting economic growth and opportunity. The national railway has an important role to play in building a stronger, more balanced economy as part of a modern industrial strategy that spreads jobs, prosperity and opportunity around the country, and which responds to local growth priorities.

A significant number of community rail routes operate in rural and coastal communities. These communities are becoming more economically diverse with tourism an increasingly important component of local economies, but also providing fast and reliable connections with other areas.

What role can community rail play supporting employment and training opportunities and, maximising the economic potential of local areas, and making better and more socially and economically productive use of underused or unused railway land and stations?

Question 6: How can community rail support local economies and railways grow through:

- **Increasing employment?**
- **Education and training opportunities?**
- **Supporting small businesses?**
- **Social enterprise development?**

This deals with the role of community rail in facilitating and supporting economic growth.

There is an opportunity for community rail to support the economic development of local areas and their railways, including developing and supporting initiatives that engage disadvantaged groups, and through social enterprise.

Community rail could also support and promote economic opportunities through initiatives such as engaging Local Enterprise Partnerships ("LEPs"), local authorities, and business groups, as well as the rail industry. What is the scale and extent to which this is already happening, and the opportunity and willingness of respondents to develop and support future schemes that facilitate social mobility and economic prosperity.

Comments: None

Question 7: What role can community rail play in making best use of:

- **Station buildings?**
- **Railway land?**

There is an extensive estate of land and buildings linked to the railway; some, but not all, owned by Network Rail and its predecessors. There is an ongoing programme to dispose of property assets as they become surplus to operational requirements. Where land and property remains under public ownership, is there an opportunity to consider maximising value for communities and to help address a number of wider Government objectives.

Through the rail franchising programme, Government requires (Transport Operating Companies) (TOCs) to develop and deliver a 'Social and Commercial Development Plan' the purpose of which is to require them to identify underused and redundant station assets and to work with passengers and local stakeholders to refurbish these and make them available for the community and small businesses to use.

What extent can community rail work with TOCs, Network Rail and local land and property owners to make the most effective use of station buildings and land (e.g. car parks, vacant land, etc.) in ways that support and enhance communities and local economies

Comments: We are unaware of the requirement for TOCS to develop and deliver a Social and Commercial Development Plan. Is this available to organisations such as parish councils and community rail groups? A lot of the railway land in our area was disposed of when railways were rationalised in the 1960's. Some of this land has passed into uses which complement community rail initiatives like a public house at Gathurst. Other activities do not contribute or create difficulties for community rail initiatives.

4. SUGGESTING INNOVATIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE THE WAY THE RAILWAY WORKS.

This is concerned with understanding the extent to which community rail can further develop, while retaining its unique and valuable position as a grassroots-led movement driven by local communities. Community rail is developing a reputation for delivering improvements to stations that are both good value for money, but also bring added benefits from involving the community.

This considers current industry structures and how these interact with community rail. There are questions about how community rail can champion industry sustainability and innovation; the role of Government support for community rail via existing grant funding mechanisms; and how designation can be developed in the future. This is an opportunity to look to the future and to set out the ambition and possibilities that community rail could deliver.

Question 8: How can community rail be best supported to act:

- **Innovatively?**
- **Effectively?**

Innovation involves continuous improvement and developing fresh approaches. This could include new and better ways to deliver an improved passenger experience or to manage services in a more effective and efficient manner. There are already good examples of community rail acting innovatively, such as the ‘Harrington Hump’ that was pioneered by community rail and has been adopted more widely by the network. What innovative approaches facilitate community rail schemes and what are the barriers to realising innovative schemes?

Comments: A lot of innovation requires ” thinking outside the box ” which often conflicts with conventional rail thinking. There is a need sometimes to adopt solutions to fit local circumstances.

Question 9: What opportunities are there to secure a:

- **Diverse income base for community rail?**
- **Sustainable income base for community rail?**

Currently, community rail and CRPs are supported via the Government's franchise programme with franchise competitions routinely requiring TOCs to become members of local CRPs and provide ongoing management and financial support. Some local authorities also provide funding and other support.

Community rail should thrive and have a sustainable and long-term future. An important part of this is will be considering the opportunities for community rail to develop additional and new sources of income. This could include linking the railway to the needs of the wider community and supporting the delivery of local services. It could provide for some CRPs to become more entrepreneurial, recognise social enterprise opportunities and provide services where these are not currently provided.

Comments: TOC's should be more supportive of local initiatives .Links between community rail and tourism and leisure is an area where where new sources of income could be developed.

Question 10: How can community rail designation be developed to more fully realise its potential?

Some CRPs have been recognised by Government through a formal process of ‘designation’ with the intention of allowing some flexibility in the operation of local services, including ticket concessions and derogations from some industry standards. Designation also offers access to the Government funded DCRDF that provides grants for small projects .To date, there are around 60 CRPs across Great Britain, and 41 Community Rail routes have been designated by the Government.

What role designation has played in embedding community rail into the rail industry, and its relevance for the future?. This includes consideration of the difference between line and service designation, and the link between designation and access to government grant funding. How can the intention and ambition of designation to differentiate from national standards be delivered in different ways?

Comments: As mentioned earlier not all of the West of Lancashire CRP is designated a Community Rail Route. This effects the access of part of the CRP to government funding. Service designation is also a barrier because of links to other parts of the network.

Question 11: How can community rail:

- **Support the development of rail line and stations improvement?**
- **Contribute to the development of rail line and station improvement?**
- **Make greater use of heritage railways?**

Supporting a sustainable expansion of the railway network into local communities is an important step in achieving socio-economic growth. Successful proposals for new stations and infrastructure require the support of local authorities, LEPs, developers, and other parties. Working with developers and local planning authorities can support housing delivery and improve transportation links to new homes. We believe there is also an important role for CRPs in ensuring that the voice of communities is understood in this process and are interested in the role of community rail in working with stakeholders to identify and develop the case for new rail infrastructure.

There is also a successful network of ‘heritage’ rail operators, who maintain lines and provide rail services. Is there an opportunity for greater collaboration with Britain’s heritage rail sector, which could include opportunities to work with independently owned ‘heritage’ railways to provide new journey options.

Comments: One of the problems about proposals for new stations and infrastructure is the timescale for implementation compared to the timescale for developing new housing.

CONCLUSIONS

This consultation closes at the end of January 2018 and has been brought to this meeting as there is no suitable meeting to consider it before February. The comments in italics in the body of the report could form the basis of the council's response to the consultation to be transmitted to the Department for Transport. A copy of the comments should be sent to Ormskirk, Preston and Southport Travellers Association(OPSTA) who have set up a working party to consider this consultation in early January.

Barry King

1st December 2017