

# **YORKSHIRE & HUMBER ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY**

## **Response by Sustainable Transport Group, Upper Calder Valley Renaissance**

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### **Context.**

The Upper Calder Valley Renaissance (UCVR) Sustainable Transport (ST) Group, formerly the UCVR Getting About Group, exists to promote improved and sustainable transport in, to and from the upper Calder valley. It is part of the Upper Calder Valley Renaissance (UCVR) programme, initiated by Yorkshire Forward to create a connected, creative and sustainable valley. The Upper Calder valley covers an area from the borders of the former Todmorden Urban District (Walsden to the South West and Portsmouth to the North West) through Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, Luddenden Foot to Sowerby Bridge and Copley. The area also embraces a number of hilltop villages and settlements which rely for most of their services on the towns and large villages in the valley bottom. It is about 10 miles long and 5 miles wide. The area has five railway stations, of which those with the highest footfall are Hebden Bridge and Todmorden. The other stations are Sowerby Bridge, Mytholmroyd and Walsden. All are on the Caldervale Line, and the ST group's interest in sustainable transport embraces the connectivity between the upper valley stations, other stations on the Caldervale Line, and other stations on the national network. Hebden Bridge is a junction station in that it is the last station before Hall Royd junction, where the Copy Pit line to East, Central and Fylde Lancashire departs. Although this route beyond Hall Royd junction falls within the Lancashire and Cumbria RUS, it is nonetheless of concern to the ST group both because of the regular services to Blackpool North from York via the Caldervale line and, because of the desire to reopen the Stansfield Curve at Todmorden. Opening the curve would enable through services to run between Manchester and East Lancashire via Rochdale and Todmorden. Indeed, being a border area with both Greater Manchester and Lancashire, those areas are as, or nearly as, important to upper valley residents as much of West Yorkshire, so the different RUS timetables are not helpful to us.

### **General comments on the RUS**

We welcome the RUS as far as it goes, as there is much to be welcomed in it. However, we do not feel that it is sufficiently ambitious, nor a document which reflects new realities. We want to see an ambitious RUS. By this, we mean one which attempts to seize the tremendous opportunity for a step change in railway and train service growth provided by "peak oil" and the combating climate change agenda, with an ambitious government target to cut greenhouse gases by 80% by 2050, and a growing public awareness that we all have to play our part in ensuring that our planet is one which can continue to sustain a rich diversity of human, animal and plant life. We realise that the 80% target was announced after the draft RUS was issued and we trust that Network Rail and the DfT will see fit to up their game to meet this critical challenge.

In this respect we have additional concerns about the passenger demand forecasts over the lifetime of the RUS. We appreciate that the passenger forecasts have been increased in line with the comments and “totally revised” estimates in the North West RUS (2007, sections 4.2.1-4.2.4). However, we feel that there continues to be an under-estimation of passenger demand. On a line which faces acknowledged problems of overcrowding, this issue must be addressed. There are numerous factors which have only recently come into play (apart from the increased target in greenhouse gas emissions noted above) which will affect passenger demand. These factors include: the probability of substantial long term increases in the cost of fuel with the attendant recently demonstrated price sensitive response of car drivers; the deepening economic recession which will, arguably, lead to a reduction in car ownership and increased use of public transport; road pricing and other fiscal measures to reduce the attractiveness of the private car; employer charging for providing parking facilities for staff; the impact of the numerous attempts to achieve a modal shift like travel plans, smart ticketing systems, etc. The recently announced improvements in station facilities planned by Network Rail should also impact on the demand for rail travel. In addition, mounting public concerns about global warming, climate change and environmentally-friendly lifestyles are undeniably going to result in an increasing move from private to public transport.

It has been estimated that the peak period trips to Leeds from within West Yorkshire have increased in the last 10 years by at least 74%. Government targets for house building also mean that the resident population in areas like Calderdale is likely to substantially increase. We, therefore, would like the strategy to plan for at least a doubling of passenger traffic in the next 10 or at most 15 years, instead of the modest 30% proposed by DfT. This much more realistic ambition can only be achieved by increasing rail travel options (i.e. new services) as well as by the proposed enhancements to existing services (which we, in general, support but with some reservations expressed later in this submission). New services are a critical component of tempting people out of their cars, for commuting, business and leisure trips. The step change required means operating services which will appeal to those for whom public transport is not a viable option at present, either because of a lack of train services, or because the route is slow and indirect, involving one or more changes. To achieve this requires:

- (a) new services over existing lines (including lines which are currently freight only)
- (b) as above, but also including reopening short curves/chords to connect nearby routes
- (c) As above, but also including increasing capacity by doubling or quadrupling track and installing passing (holding) lines (loops) for freight and slow passenger services
- (d) As above, but also reopening closed routes where the track bed is largely still complete
- (e) As above, but also opening brand new lines to meet changed settlement and commuting patterns.

We must also express our concern that no mention is made of increasing patronage by making the railway more useable for people with significant mobility problems, and that there is no reference in the RUS to Equality Impact Assessments.

### **Caldervale Line (including Copy Pit)**

With regard to Caldervale and Copy Pit line services, we give below examples of potential travel opportunities.

- (a) Increase the current hourly Lancashire to Yorkshire service via Copy Pit to half hourly, but run the second train to Sheffield via Halifax (reverse) and Wakefield Kirkgate (reverse) and Barnsley (or, to speed the journey to South Yorkshire, omitting Wakefield by reopening the chord from (approx) Healey Mills to Woolley). This may also require doubling between Mirfield east junction and Bradley Wood junction. The second service could start at Southport once the Burscough chord has been reopened, offering people in West Yorkshire (and east and central Lancashire) direct rail access to Southport – especially important for leisure purposes
- (b) Reopen the Todmorden (Stansfield) curve. This would enable a Manchester –Rochdale- Todmorden-Burnley service to run. This service would extend the current Manchester to Rochdale locals which it is proposed within the RUS to extend to Todmorden. Passengers for the Colne branch would change at Rose Grove, which could become an interchange and possibly turnaround station with connections to Burnley Central, Nelson, Colne and, once the line is reopened, to Earby and Skipton; also connections to semi-fast services to Accrington, Blackburn, Preston and Blackpool North, and to the stopping service to Blackpool South. This innovation would be further enhanced by the reopening of the line between Colne and Skipton, with onward connections to Carlisle and Morecambe as well as providing an alternative cross-Pennine route from Lancashire to Bradford and Leeds.
- (c) Enhance the capacity of Bradley Wood and Bradley junctions and the line connecting them. This would be achieved by doubling, thus allowing a through service from the upper valley and Rochdale to Huddersfield (and in doing so, doubling the frequency of Brighouse-Huddersfield). There is significant commuting from the upper valley to Huddersfield, the vast majority by car because of the current poor rail option. Again, the car commuters have a significant annual carbon footprint and add to the congestion on the Halifax-Huddersfield road.

Linked to the above, an aspect of the RUS which greatly concerns us is the advocating of demand management techniques through higher fares. Walk-on rail fares are, in our view, too high already (with the exception of off-peak and concessionary fares in PTE areas including West Yorkshire) and need reducing in real terms to help achieve the necessary modal shift. To give examples of current practice in our area which discourages rail travel, any anytime return for the 12 mile journey from Hebden Bridge to Burnley costs an astonishing £6.40 daily, or £26.70 for a weekly season. Unsurprisingly, most commuters to Burnley from Hebden Bridge travel by car at a fuel cost of say

£2.50-£3.00, with a significant carbon footprint and at a much higher risk of serious or fatal injury due to the excessive speed of some drivers on the minor hilltop road used by commuters. The commuter time York- Blackpool trains have considerable extra capacity for this stretch of their journey (although not on some other stretches). It would make economic as well as environmental sense to offer a return ticket which costs less than the petrol or diesel used by a car commuter. A second example is the cost of weekly ticket from upper valley stations to Manchester. This is because of the existence of two different PTE travelcard schemes and the linking section between Walsden and Littleborough which is not covered by either WY or GMPTE tickets (despite the fact that there is no such gap in the boundary between WY and South Yorkshire PTE fares). The result is that a number of upper valley commuters drive to Littleborough to take advantage of GM fares. In doing so, they drive unnecessary extra miles each day, adding to the pollution and congestion on the connecting road. The RUS should tackle these issues and advocate fare reductions where current fare levels deter train usage.

There is much in the RUS which we support. The need to address peak overcrowding is critical, as upper valley residents often find themselves standing on their return journeys from Manchester, Leeds, Bradford and, on occasion, Halifax. This overcrowding is not just a feature of the commuter peaks, but also of the shopping and other leisure peaks on Saturdays and Sundays, especially late afternoon. A weakness of the RUS is its failure to mention the overcrowding at weekends, another example of which can be Blackpool North trains especially in the summer. We support train lengthening. We are also happy to support the introduction of additional Halifax - Leeds trains, with the proviso that we would like the option of these being extended to Hebden Bridge should longer trains prove unable to rectify peak time standing west of Halifax on East bound trains. It is clear that the number of additional carriages being allocated to Northern Rail from the 1300 so far promised by government will be inadequate for demand, so the number of new vehicles needs increasing. We would like to see new class 185 units procured for the Caldervale Line, but unlike the TPE units, these should be fitted with inter-unit corridor connections to facilitate multiple working. They should first of all be used to replace pacers and class 150s, neither of which is fit for current purpose. New 185 or other units for the Blackpool – York service need to be at least of comparable internal quality to the TPE units; ideally the Manchester Victoria should be too. Longer commuter journeys such as those from the upper valley to Leeds and Manchester require rolling stock that commuters can work in; many upper valley commuters can be seen daily working on their laptops or reading documents on their journey to work, and that is one of the reason they choose the rail option.

Significant infrastructure enhancement is required on the Calder Valley and Copy Pit routes. Line speeds require raising in places. Current pathing headways do not allow services to be increased to the required level. We consider re-signalling the Caldervale line to allow headways no greater than 3 minutes is required. We also support the proposal for bi-directional signalling on at least the Bradford-Halifax section to enable by-passing of line blockages. The Copy Pit route is notoriously slow between Hall Royd and

Burnley and the engineering problems responsible for this should be tackled as a high priority. We are pleased that the infrastructure work at Bradford Interchange has now been completed (we assume that this is work for 2008-9 referred to in the draft strategy and that it includes the extra crossover referred to on page 78; if not, we support the need for the additional crossover sooner rather than later). We also support the high speed crossover at Church Fenton and the possible quadrupling of tracks between Leeds and Micklefield. We sincerely hope that the proposal for cross city trains from Micklefield will not cause the Blackpool North service to be terminated at Leeds as this through service is much appreciated by both commuters and leisure/business travellers. On the other hand, the proposed new Halifax-Leeds locals would be good candidates for cross-city working.

We are concerned that the strategy does not spell out the need to protect and, in some cases enhance, the services from smaller stations with significant passenger footfall. The footfall at these stations in the PTE areas is likely to be underestimated because the widespread use of PTE ticketing products means that the additional footfall to that shown in the LENNON sales data is not scientifically established. People in the upper valley have been most upset by the forthcoming December 2008 timetable revisions which will reduce the number of trains from Walsden, Mytholmroyd and Sowerby Bridge to Halifax and Bradford to one an hour for most of the day. This is to enable a small speeding up (6 minutes) of alternate Bradford to Manchester services so that an "under the hour" service can be advertised. The plan is going ahead even though it is most unlikely that the new service will attract anything like the number of passengers inconvenienced by losing services – some of whom will modally shift to their cars for either part or all of their journeys – exactly the opposite of what the climate change and regeneration agendas require. If there is demand for a fast Bradford- Manchester service, we would advocate an additional service, possibly running via Brighouse and Huddersfield to Piccadilly (especially if the Bradbury Fold junction were to be doubled). We welcome the extension of the Leeds – Hebden Bridge via Brighouse service to Manchester Victoria which increases the number of trains to Manchester from Hebden Bridge and Todmorden as well as links Brighouse to Todmorden and Rochdale. The current service is, however, run by Pacers and if these are also used on the extended service, it will highlight the urgent need for these 1980s stop gap vehicles to be replaced by more suitable and preferably new rolling stock.

We note with interest paragraph 3.4.9 which refers to the demand for off-peak travel currently being constrained by car parking capacity. There is a serious lack of capacity at Hebden Bridge and Todmorden, with both car parks filling up early in term time: Mytholmroyd has no car park. There is space for considerable enlargement at Hebden Bridge, as part of the railway land is occupied by a coal merchant who no longer needs a site next to the railway. Yet we have recently been told that expansion of the car park does not meet funding criteria. We refute this. We do not know what the funding criteria are, but this just does not make sense.

We have earlier mentioned that we believe an extension to Burnley and Accrington is the best option for the extended Victoria-Rochdale locals. Prior to this happening, we would welcome a new turnback facility at Todmorden or Hebden Bridge. HB makes more sense from the perspective of it being the busier station, and there is greater potential for increasing the car park capacity than there is in Todmorden.

Looking to the future, we advocate an underground connection being established between Bradford Interchange and Bradford Forster Square. This would increase direct travel opportunities across the region as a whole.

We have not mentioned freight in this submission. We support the aspiration to move freight from road to rail, but recognise the difficulty in increasing the loading gauge beyond W7 due to the number of tunnels on the line.

**Nina Smith, Secretary, and Dr. Lesley Mackay, Chair, Sustainable Transport Group, Upper Calder Valley Renaissance**

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