

Route Prospectus

for

Community Rail Service
Designation

On the Mid Cheshire
Railway Line

between

Chester and
Manchester via
Northwich

INTRODUCTION

The Community Rail Strategy (2004) sets out three objectives with a fourth objective added in March 2007:

1. Increasing ridership, freight use and revenue
2. Managing down costs
3. Greater involvement of the local community
4. Enabling local rail to play a larger role in economic and social regeneration

It is felt that the time is right to apply for community rail designation for Mid Cheshire. The line between Mickle Trafford Junction and Edgeley Junction is one of the routes listed in the Department for Transport Community Rail Development Strategy for line designation. See the link below:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/strategyfinance/strategy/community/crds/communityraildevelopstrategy.pdf>

However it is now apparent that service designation would be more appropriate than line designation because of freight and signalling issues on the Mid Cheshire Line and that this designation should be applied to the whole line.

The Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership considers that service designation for the Mid Cheshire Line service now will help the Partnership to continue to achieve community rail objectives and work with partners to deliver LTP and LEP initiatives.

THE MID CHESHIRE LINE AND SERVICE

The line links Chester and Manchester and the service stops at sixteen stations in rural Mid Cheshire and the environs of Greater Manchester. The service is important for local residents to get to Chester/Manchester and intermediate points. Commuters from outside Mid Cheshire wishing to access either city from the other use the service via Warrington Bank Quay. The hourly service is known as the “stopping service” because it stops at every station and the journey time from city to city is approximately 90 minutes. The time taken to travel between both cities on this line is perceived to be a weakness but in reality is the service’s strength in terms of access to services for residents of rural Cheshire.

The service is hourly between Monday and Saturdays with some service strengthening in the morning and evening peak periods. The Sunday service has

improved from 3 hourly to every 2 hours. Timetable changes in December 2008 saw reductions in train numbers and changes to timings resulting in reductions in commuter patronage as the new train times were not as convenient for travel to work and school.

The line has an active rail user group – the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association (MCRUA) – with some 600+ members and also has a Community Rail Partnership.

THE MID CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP (MCCRP)

The Community Rail Partnership was established in 2004 at a time when patronage on the line was poor, partly because the service was unreliable. The current MCCRP partners are: Cheshire Association of Local Councils (CHALC), Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester, the Forestry Commission, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), Knutsford Town Council, Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association, Northern Rail, Northwich Town Council, Stockport Borough Council & Trafford Borough Council.

A three year business plan has been adopted by the CRP to focus and develop the work of the CRO along the Line until the Northern Rail franchise ends in September 2013.

The MCCRP Vision is “An effective busy train service, linking Chester and Manchester through its intermediate stations, that encourages people to live in, work in and visit Mid Cheshire destinations.”

And it's Mission is “To work creatively with partners along the Mid Cheshire Line to achieve the priorities of the Partnership and maximise income and investment into the Line and its communities.”

The current priorities for the Partnership were developed in the Autumn of 2009:

1. To work with key partners through a Mid Cheshire Strategy Working Group to improve Mid Cheshire line services
2. To promote and market the line:
 - encouraging residents to use the MCL
 - encouraging tourism partners to promote the line
 - encouraging visitors to use the line
 - encouraging schools to think train & use the train
3. To improve stations on the line
4. To improve levels of community involvement on the line

These priorities have been agreed with all the partners taking into account the national initiatives such as active travel, sustainable tourism and carbon reduction. To ensure that these priorities are achieved an action plan has been developed which is updated and monitored regularly.

PARTNERSHIP CONTEXT

The CRP works closely with five local authorities – Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester Council, Trafford, Stockport and Transport for Greater Manchester.

Strategic partnership working through each authority's Local Transport Planning (LTP) processes is seen as key to ensure the CRP features as a key delivery partner to bring about behavioural change in travel choices, promote sustainable tourism and active travel.

The work and priorities of the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership support the national LTP themes - Economic Growth, Reduce Carbon Emissions, Promote Equality of Opportunity, Contribute to Better Safety, Security and Health, Improve Quality of Life and a Healthy Natural Environment – which are interpreted locally by each council.

The Partnership also seeks to influence the production of the Local Development Frameworks for each of the authorities by ensuring that new development is located in areas that are easily accessible by a variety forms of transport including rail. By achieving this aim, the need to travel is significantly reduced, sustainable communities can be developed and support can be given to those sections of the community that are the most vulnerable and often do not have access to the private car. In addition, the Partnership seeks to influence key development management decisions to ensure that major developments, that would significantly benefit from their proximity to the railway, contribute through Section 106 monies to improvements to the stations, their environs and to enhancements to the routes between the development and the station.

SERVICE DESIGNATION

It is anticipated that designating the Mid Cheshire service will give benefits in terms of flexibility in planning and operation of services even where it is not possible to apply different standards to the track and signalling.

Service designation should assist with:

- Improving the timetabling for Chester in the evenings
- Maximising the opportunities that re-franchising offers
- Creative working with other community rail partnerships, train operators, transport operators and the rail industry to maximise resources and rail/Line promotion
- Accessing extra funding streams available only for designated rail lines and services
- Raising the profile of the Mid Cheshire Line

- Reinforcing the importance and status of the Community Rail Partnership for the line
- Station Friend and volunteer projects along the Line

Designation is not intended to inhibit the operation of the line as an occasional diversionary route, nor will it affect the operation of freight services. Service Designation is intended to be a permanent arrangement, with it being reviewed periodically to ensure designation remains appropriate.