

Route Prospectus

For the lines between Liskeard and Looe (Looe Valley Line) and Plymouth and Gunnislake (Tamar Valley Line)

The lines between Liskeard and Looe and between Plymouth and Gunnislake are routes chosen for an SRA Community Rail Development pilot project. The pilot projects were chosen to demonstrate how the Community Rail Development approach can increase revenue, reduce costs through effective management, and encourage greater community involvement in the local railway.

The key measures of success of the pilots will be:

- establishing the contribution of Community Rail Development in achieving locally set objectives such as reducing road congestion and increasing accessibility;
- establishing the costs for the line and services;
- establishing the effectiveness of different methods for reducing the net financial loss of Community Rail lines by increasing revenue and reducing costs where practicable;
- determining whether one or both of these lines should be developed as a microfranchise, and subsequently tendered separately from the Greater Western franchise.

A remit has been agreed by a Client Group for each pilot project. This remit forms the basis for this Route Prospectus. Like the remit, it is expected that the route prospectus will be a flexible document that will evolve (in format and substance) as the pilot project develops.

The Client Group referred to brings together those authorities with operational management, funding, specification or statutory transport planning responsibilities for the Looe Valley and Tamar Valley lines as well as the St Ives Bay Line, and consists of Cornwall and Devon County Councils, Plymouth City Council, Wessex Trains, the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, Network Rail and the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA).

The Looe Valley Line is 8.75 miles long, and the line speed is 30 mph, with lower local speed restrictions. It is single line throughout, with no crossing loops and only one passenger train is permitted to operate on the line at any one time. The configuration of the line requires trains to reverse at Coombe Junction, where there is a ground frame operated by the train crew. To the north of Coombe Junction, a freight only line extends half a mile to Moorswater to serve a cement depot. The freight train currently runs twice a week and the signalling allows the passenger train to operate while the freight train is at Moorswater. The current capability of the route, on which the pilot scheme proposals are based, is that it has a capacity of one train per hour each way, operated by lightweight diesel units of classes 150 or 153.

The Tamar Valley line is 15 miles long, of which 12 miles between St Budeaux Victoria Road and Gunnislake is single line with no crossing loop and only one train is allowed to use the single line section at any one time. The line speed is 55 mph, with lower local speed restrictions. The configuration of the line requires trains to reverse at Bere Alston, where there is a ground frame operated by the train crew. A siding connection exists to the MOD site at Ernesettle, although no regular freight trains currently use the line. The current capability of the route, on which the pilot scheme proposals are based, is that it has a capacity of one train every 90 minutes each way, operated by diesel units of classes 150 or 153.

As part of the pilot scheme, it is proposed that engineering works on the Looe Valley Line would be continue to be planned to ensure the infrastructure was highly reliable and available during public holidays and for the school holiday period, particularly during July and August. Where possible, blockades on the branch should be planned in conjunction with the train operator to take place at times of low demand, preferably during November, or between January and March. The specification of the line's requirements includes provision for the operation of a freight train once a day during the day, between Liskeard and Moorswater, but does not require provision for freight operation south of Coombe Junction.

On the Tamar Valley Line, however, it is important that the service should be consistently reliable during the working week to meet the needs of commuters, as well as those of tourists. Here, blockades should be planned as far as possible for winter weekends (up to 72 hour possessions), but avoiding the pre-Christmas period from Mid November to end December. Where extended periods for possessions are inevitable, these should be targeted between March/April, but avoiding the Easter holiday period. In these cases, blockades should be split where possible, to allow a service to run from Plymouth to Bere Ferrers or Bere Alston for as long as possible, to minimise the road journey required on the narrow and congested roads of the Bere peninsula. The specification of line's requirements includes provision for the operation of a freight train once a day between St Budeaux Junction and Ernesettle, but does not require provision for freight operation north of Ernesettle.

Designation of the line between Liskeard and Looe and St Budeaux Junction and Gunnislake as a 'Community Rail line' is needed to progress these aspects of the remit:

- Establish the real profit and loss figures for current operating, maintaining and renewal of the two lines
- Show how Train Operating Company costs might be reduced on the line, using streamlined regulatory or franchising arrangements, working practices and operation
- Demonstrate how joint working of infrastructure owner, Train Operating Company and local community might reduce infrastructure costs, through joint planning of routine work, of work on track structures and stations, through sharing staff and through other cooperation
- Introduction of integrated ticketing, carnet and other types of simplified ticketing capable of being retailed off the railway;
- Assess the costs and benefits of improving the reversal of trains en route and simplifying their operation;
- On the Tamar Valley line, to evaluate the business case for increasing frequency on the line to hourly, using simple technology at an affordable cost;
- Identify affordable options for providing rolling stock to meet the peak summer requirement on the Looe Valley line;
- Assess the costs and benefits of developing one or both routes as a microfranchise to be locally managed and tendered separately from the Greater Western franchise at a later date;
- Evaluate the business case for providing a park and ride station adjacent to the A38 at Moorswater, using the principles outlined in the Community Rail Development Strategy to simplify operations and keep the costs to an affordable level, including those for associated infrastructure alterations, such as platform extension at Looe;
- Evaluate the business case for expanding the limited market base of the Tamar Valley Line by extending it to Tavistock using the principles outlined in the Community Rail Development Strategy to simplify operations and keep costs to an affordable level;
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Designation will also enable the pilot project to proceed, and therefore support the achievement of other objectives from the remit:

- Market development of both routes, to raise local demand and encourage green tourism;
- Extend the scope for station adoption
- Rolling stock branding

Without designation, the pilot project will not be able to deliver all its aims and objectives. The pilot project is expected to last up to five years – implementation and review of the larger capital projects may extend this period further. During the time of the pilot project the designation may be reviewed, and if there is a significant demand, then the consultation on designation can be repeated. This review process will enable designation to be reversed if circumstances change or the pilot has not been effective in delivering the objectives.

Community Rail Development
DfT Rail Group
76 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DR

Richard Burningham, Partnership Officer.
Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership,
University of Plymouth,
Drake Circus
Plymouth,
Devon
PL4 8AA

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