

The Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership
Nexus: the Tyne & Wear Passenger Transport Executive
Northumberland County Council

Tyne Valley Rail Study

Executive Summary



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The Tyne Valley Rail Study, commissioned by the Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership and Nexus, with additional support from Northumberland County Council, produces a series of recommendations for improving rail services and facilities, increasing patronage and better integration along the Newcastle – Carlisle Tyne Valley Line

Scope of the study

- Timetabling: services frequencies, calling patterns, capacity and reliability
- Station facilities, access and integration
- Marketing and Information:
- Rolling stock options
- Finance-related issues

Market Research was undertaken to understand the characteristics of current users and to test possible options for developing the line.

The trains serve several different travel markets:

- Commuting, principally into Newcastle, Carlisle and Hexham
- Shopping, including visits to the out-of-town Metro Centre
- End-to-end and longer distance inter-urban travel
- Leisure and tourism
- Local travel to, from and between communities along the route

Services are most intensive at the eastern end of the line, four trains an hour to Metro Centre, two to Hexham and one to Carlisle, with less frequent calls at some of the smaller intermediate stations.

The study found that passengers using smaller stations want more calls at their stations, whereas those on longer distance trips want trains to run faster by omitting stops. The net result is that there may be some scope for a small increase in station stops providing it is carefully focussed on station stops that will be most beneficial.

Recommendations

Timetable improvements

- All trains to call at **Prudhoe**
- More calls at **Haydon Bridge**
- More morning services at **Metro Centre**
- More calls at **Bardon Mill**, **Brampton** and **Wetheral** (subject to meeting certain criteria)
- Extra late-night Newcastle-Hexham train on Saturdays and investigate the scope for further extra late-night services Friday-Sunday
- Possible additional early morning service from Hexham to Newcastle (subject to more detailed cost investigations)
- Better connections at Carlisle

There is little spare capacity because of long signalling sections, which limit headways between successive trains. A window of opportunity for increasing capacity will be when major investment in signalling on the route takes place, but this will not be before 2011.

Service patterns

- Retain cross-Newcastle links to Middlesbrough and Morpeth
- Replace Stranraer links with more trains to Glasgow, Whitehaven and/or Workington
- Safeguard the site for a possible new station at **Gilsland**

Action at stations in Tyne & Wear

- Earlier opening for car parks at **Metro Centre**
- Further investigation, to understand and resolve the wider issues about transport policy in the **Blaydon** area before a decision is taken on a significant improvement in train services
- To consider the possible closure of **Dunston** station

Train service reliability

The best way forward is day-to-day attention to detail and sound management:

- Continue the focus on performance developed by Northern Rail, such as changes in train maintenance procedures
- Good timetable planning principles train dispatch procedures and platforming information at Newcastle will also aid train performance
- A more dedicated rolling stock fleet will help improve performance

Station and interchange improvements

Most of the stations are attractive, in good physical condition, recently repainted, with clear long-line announcements of each train. Most have exceptionally well presented gardens. Several are let down by footbridges in need of repainting and telephones that do not work.

The most common means of reaching and leaving the station is on foot. Car, either driven or picked up/set down, is the next most important means of travel. Cycling only accounts for 2% of access trips. Only at Newcastle and Carlisle are connecting trains, buses and Metro significant.

We would not expect bus-rail interchange to increase significantly at most intermediate stations, as many bus services compete with rail, rather than feed into it. Despite longer bus journey times, there is little or no time benefit in changing from a bus to a parallel train and there is the risk of a slower overall journey. Where high quality interchange is provided, it should be well publicised and its use encouraged by means such as through ticketing and planned connections.

Specific recommendations for station improvements

- Prioritise investment to benefit the majority of Tyne Valley rail users: improved walking routes and better signposting to and from stations
- More 'step-free' access
- Construction of a multi-modal transport interchange at Prudhoe
- Information displays to include fares, ticket types, bus links and area maps
- Extra car parking at some stations

The market

The catchment population for the Tyne Valley railway is 0.5 million, which doubles when Newcastle and Sunderland are included, and is increasing at above the national average rate. This gives a healthy environment for growth in rail demand. The market served by the line can be segmented into three, Inter-Urban, Long Distance and Local, each of which has different needs.

Rail's main competitor is the car. Three quarters of Tyne Valley rail passengers are car owners and two thirds of passengers could have made their journey by car. Rail journey times are comparable, but the convenience and comfort levels of the car are better than rail. Rail's relative position improves where the motorist faces congestion and / or parking problems.

Fares and ticketing

- The policy of heavily discounting return fares has a weakness in that it results in highly priced singles and may lead to perceptions that the service is expensive.
- A weakness in the package of return fares on offer is that the stay-away option is only available to those making longer distance trips.
- Our recommendations for improving the attractiveness of rail fares and ticketing include fares to Newcastle with travel on Metro and buses included, off-peak discounts for small groups, easier purchase of season tickets and opening Hexham ticket office earlier

Marketing and train operation

- Concentrate on the key market of regular all year travel for work, shopping and leisure
- More effective use of Internet web sites to improve joint marketing with the tourist industry, the promotion of fares, special offers and the possibility of on-line season ticket sales
- Close collaboration with Nexus to examine the opportunity to extend the strong Nexus brand to the Tyne Valley
- Continue and build on improved operational reliability

Rolling stock and train crowding

The award of the Northern Rail franchise brought no offer of new or additional trains. For the present, therefore, and in the absence of significant additional funding, there

is no alternative but to make the best of the available rolling stock and to optimise its management and deployment:

- Class 156 'Sprinter' trains to run all longer distance services
- Continue to improve train reliability through improved maintenance planning
- Encourage staff to manage capacity on crowded trains by, for example, asking passengers to remove bags from seats

In the longer term, we recommend replacement 'Pacer' trains with cascades of Sprinters as soon as these become available. We recommend that TVCRP work closely with Northern Rail to try to secure the best deal for obtaining and using cascaded rolling stock. If TVCRP and Nexus are proactive in this area it is more likely to happen.

Finance

- Maximise internal income generation through high quality operation and marketing
- Exploit every avenue for bringing in external financial support
- Explore options to strengthen the financial base of the Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership