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Clitheroe to Hellifield Strategic Outline Business Case

DalesRail Paper

On behalf of **Ribble Valley Borough Council**



Ribble Valley
Borough Council

www.ribblevalley.gov.uk

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 DalesRail is a unique tourist focused but timetabled railway service. It offers an integrated package of the rail journey from Blackpool North to Carlisle with a guided walk programme and coach links that extend into the Yorkshire Dales. DalesRail had an important role to play in saving the Settle & Carlisle (S&C) Line from closure and was instrumental in retaining the smaller intermediate stations.
- 1.1.2 The study brief cited a requirement to consider extended services beyond Hellifield, including the potential expansion of the Summer Sunday-only DalesRail service. The main focus of the SOBC has been on developing the proposition for a scheduled service, with a view to those potentially being supplemented by additional DalesRail services. This short paper sets out how the DalesRail proposition can be further developed.

1.2 History

- 1.2.1 The DalesRail service started in 1975, following a one-off charter train in 1974. This was only five years after the closure of the intermediate stations on the S&C in 1970 which had left Settle and Appleby as the only stations open. The full 1975 DalesRail service started as charter trains sponsored by the then new Yorkshire Dales National Park. It was delivered in what today is a remarkably short time largely due to the efforts of a few passionate individuals. The initial services were from Leeds, but a service was tried from Preston over the Ribble Valley Line (Blackburn – Clitheroe – Hellifield). Clitheroe station was brought into the service in 1978 with Lancashire County Council and Ribble Valley District Council funding a minimum cost scheme approved by British Rail.
- 1.2.2 The service from Leeds was largely superseded in 1986 by the operation of regular local services calling at all of the reopened stations, which left the Ribble Valley Line as the only section of line where DalesRail continued as the only service, chartered by Lancashire County Council. During this period, the whole of the route from Settle Junction to Carlisle was being proposed for closure, a process which started in December 1983 when the first closure notice was published.
- 1.2.3 In April 1989, the letter from the Department for Transport refusing British Rail the right to close the line included specific reference to the Blackburn – Clitheroe – Hellifield section, over which there were no timetabled passenger trains, only the DalesRail charters and occasional express trains diverted from the West Coast Main Line.
- 1.2.4 Consequently, from 1990 the DalesRail trains were incorporated into the public timetable, as the required published train service available to fare paying passengers, where they have been ever since. Subsequently, in 1994 Lancashire County Council sponsored the re-opening of the Blackburn – Clitheroe section for passenger services and the re-opening of the three intermediate stations, leaving only the Clitheroe to Hellifield section with the Sunday operation of the DalesRail trains. This is a situation that has continued up to the present day and which will require to remain as the minimum service to avoid closure proceedings. Sunday operation from Blackpool North has been favoured because of the availability of rolling stock and train crews. DalesRail services are operated by diesel units that are stabled at Blackpool.
- 1.2.5 More units are available there as some Blackpool-based services do not operate or operate at reduced frequencies on Sundays. Weekday rolling stock requirements are driven by city peak levels and until the recent purchase of new fleets and the introduction of electric traction, there has been a perpetual shortage of diesel rolling stock across Northern Trains to carry the peak volumes. Consequently, there is rolling stock available for use on Sundays at marginal cost.

Sunday operation is not part of the train crew's working week, it is voluntary overtime, so DalesRail costs are marginal and extra staff are not required on the train crew establishment.

2 Current Operation

2.1.1 The project team have been provided with some information on the use of the current DalesRail service, a Sunday Blackpool North – Preston – Clitheroe – Hellifield – Settle - Carlisle train that has operated since 1990. Services were suspended in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Up to and including 2012 two trains a day were run. Table 2.1 shows key summary statistics for the DalesRail service

Table 2.1: DalesRail – Key Summary Statistics

Year	Total number of passengers	Number of return trains operated*	Average no per train	Walkers	Non-walkers	Cyclists
2019	1,921	17	113	957	944	20
2018	disrupted					
2017	1,558	13	60	756	776	26
2016	1,662	18	40	914	708	28
2015	No data					
2014	2,362	17	139	59%	41%	44
2013	2,767	22	126			
2012	3,742	41	91			
2011	4,942	41	120			
2010	5,774	41	206	3,214	2,560	
2009	4,151	31	244	2,374	1,777	
2008	5,202	37	236	2,922	2,280	
2007	4,174	30	261	2,133	2,041	
2006	5,061	42	211	2,846	1,215	
2005	5,688	41	237	3,101	2,587	
2004	5,517	43	230	3,109	2,407	
2003	6,060	44	242	3,183	2,927	
2002	4,256	41	177	2,108	2,148	
2001	3,250	44	129	1,304	1,921	
2000	4,623	40	201	2,875	1,720	
1999	4,264	40	185	2,674	1,590	
1998	4,219	39	176	2,621	1,598	

*Average number per train is for an out and back pair.

2.1.2 The key points from the above table are as follows:

- 2019 was a better year than the recent trend with poor train performance causing disruption in 2015, 2016 and 2018.
- Volumes are (perhaps not unexpectedly) influenced by weather conditions (noted from survey sheets).
- There are a number of users who make frequent trips.

2.2 Initial DalesRail Consultation

2.2.1 An initial consultation covering DalesRail was conducted by e-mail with Richard Watts from Community Rail Lancashire around 5th to 7th February 2021. Details of the responses to questions asked are included in Appendix A .

2.3 Why does DalesRail need to be considered in this SOBC?

2.3.1 As previously noted, DalesRail is a unique service on the UK railway network, a public train which is targeted at a specific group of leisure travellers. This is more normally found as a charter operation and its status is a direct result of the long running closure attempt in the second half of the 1980s.

2.3.2 If a regular service is reintroduced between Clitheroe and Hellifield, this will remove the specific requirement to run the DalesRail service, which would change its function to being entirely about the passengers it carries and the markets it serves as opposed to being a 'Parliamentary' service which cannot be removed without the competition of a formal closure process.

2.3.3 Consequently, the introduction of a new Clitheroe to Hellifield passenger service would probably require a reappraisal of the future role of the DalesRail service.

Observations about DalesRail

2.3.4 There are a number of specific points about DalesRail:

- It only operates on Summer Sundays.
- It does not provide direct access from Greater Manchester to the Dales.
- Bicycle capacity is limited.
- It provides for three clear markets: independent walkers; guided walks/tours; and 'trip on the line'.
- It has a dedicated group of regular users .
- Significant numbers of passengers join in the Ribble Valley as well as Preston/Blackburn.
- Dales stations between Horton-in-Ribblesdale, Dent and Kirkby Stephen are popular for walkers.
- Comprehensive packages of country and town guided walks are provided by volunteers from the Lancashire Rail Ramblers.
- Additional coach / bus trips are made available, organised by the Lancashire Rail Ramblers
- A refreshment trolley service is provided on some services.
- DalesRail provides an additional Hellifield – Carlisle Sunday service to supplement the Leeds – Settle – Carlisle service.

2.4 Potential impact on DalesRail of a restored Clitheroe – Hellifield service

2.4.1 This section is based on the concept of providing a timetabled passenger service to Hellifield only, with any extension north onto the Settle & Carlisle Line strengthening the impact.

2.4.2 The operation of a service linking East Lancashire to the Settle & Carlisle Line will open up the Dales to passengers from places such as Greater Manchester, Bolton, Blackburn. At present, the only possible rail link between Greater Manchester and the western Dales is via Preston,

Lancaster and Bentham for the Ingleborough area. However, this is a long, circuitous and expensive route, which also requires interchange.

- 2.4.3 A regular service will provide the options for independent walking trips on any day of the week, but particularly Saturday and potentially Fridays as new working patterns potentially evolve. This may slightly dilute the numbers using DalesRail trains.
- 2.4.4 A regular service may also reduce day trips in favour of one or two day stay-away visits as the travel option makes that possible, which is good for the local economy but less good for DalesRail trains.
- 2.4.5 Conversely a new service may make the Dales more accessible to a much wider group of people who might then find the DalesRail experience to their liking, given that it offers significantly more by way of an experience than a scheduled passenger service only. Growth in the market may also result in greater use of DalesRail trains – just as new competition has led to increased use of incumbent operators' trains.
- 2.4.6 DalesRail walking/coach packages are reliant on volunteers and are unlikely to be able to be greatly expanded to cover service trains on other days of the week, except possibly Saturdays.

3 Stakeholder Consultation with Community Rail Lancashire

- 3.1.1 As a result of the on-going dialogue with Richard Watts from Community Rail Lancashire on DalesRail, the final consultation broadly confirmed this paper. However, a key feature was the potential opportunity to incrementally expand DalesRail days of operation to covers Saturdays and potentially Fridays. It is recognised that this will require some more innovative thinking on resourcing, but this may be possible post-COVID if Friday peak volumes do not recover and are lower than has been the case pre-COVID.
- 3.1.2 It was noted that, even when direct services were available, Manchester was not as strong a market as Lancashire and the Ribble Valley. In addition, a 4-car Class 156 train was the preferred unit for DalesRail, with good seat/window alignment and reasonable space for cycles and luggage/backpacks. A class 156 had previously been 'wrapped' in a DalesRail vinyl.
- 3.1.3 On a wider issue, as DalesRail relies on volunteers, any changes would need to be incremental to ensure that sufficient volunteers are available to provide a reliable and high-quality service.

3.2 Key Issues

- 3.2.1 DalesRail offers a very well organised and targeted service, which will not be matched by a conventional franchised train service.
- 3.2.2 Northern run a lot of train services, spread over a very large area and are naturally under strong pressure from the city regions, so cannot offer the management and marketing time and resource that DalesRail can offer to their service, which is bespoke and tailored.
- 3.2.3 The future railway industry structure is moving more towards a concession model with the revenue risk falling to the funder (which could be DfT or TfN, or both), which will potentially move revenue and marketing further away from these local markets.
- 3.2.4 Any extension of Northern services beyond Clitheroe to Hellifield, and possibly beyond will require to fit into the regular pattern of the current Rochdale – Manchester Victoria – Blackburn/Clitheroe services, which hopefully will provide useful travel opportunities for Dales residents and visitors. However, these services will be substantially defined by the needs of the Greater Manchester area.
- 3.2.5 The provision of direct Manchester Victoria (particularly) or Preston starting services into the Dales would potentially open up new markets for the Dales and the rail service generally.

3.3 Conclusions

- 3.3.1 The complete replacement of the DalesRail service by extensions of the Manchester Victoria – Blackburn/Clitheroe services would be a loss to the market.
- 3.3.2 It would be seen as a down-grading of the service and would thus temper the positive message of the extra connectivity, especially for Dales residents, with the loss of a long-standing operation tailored to the market it serves.
- 3.3.3 Any new or additional service is also unlikely to extend for the whole length of the Settle & Carlisle Line.

3.3.4 The extended Manchester Victoria – Blackburn/Clitheroe services would also not offer the same extra add-ons as DalesRail currently offers, but it would bring new users and visitors to the Dales, from a wider range of origins, for more days in the week and in new market segments.

3.3.5 **In conclusion, there is scope for an expanded DalesRail service alongside any provision of new regular services and these could be introduced incrementally.**

3.4 Recommendations

- It is recommended that a complimentary solution is devised which preserves the benefits of DalesRail but capitalises on the new access offered by a scheduled service, both in terms of the reach of the new train services and the all-week and all-year coverage.
- It is suggested that this is achieved by retaining and increasing Dales Rail services to include Saturdays, Bank Holidays and selected Friday train services and these services run through to Carlisle. These services would retain an appropriate range of 'add-on' activities (guided walks, connecting coach tours etc).
- That a range, as appropriate for the stations served, of "add-ons" (guided and unguided walks, bus/coach links and packaged breaks) are made available to link with the new regular Clitheroe – Hellifield (and potentially beyond) train services. These would ideally be shared with the DalesRail services.
- If these recommendations are accepted, there are a range of more detailed operational points that need to be developed as identified by Richard Watts (noted in Appendix A).

Appendix A Summary of Q&A with Community Rail Lancashire

How important is Blackpool? – noting it has a bespoke Sunday service.

Blackpool is a convenient starting point as it is where the rolling stock is berthed as well as the crew signing on point. Usage from Blackpool has always been low but then the highest fares, longest journey time and longest day out restrict its appeal.

Does Manchester (and Bolton) provide passengers for DalesRail?

Yes, but only a limited number, most of whom railhead at one of the stations that DalesRail calls at, as rail connections at either Preston or Blackburn have typically been poor or non-existent. It is suggested that intending passengers are nervous that they will actually make the DalesRail service. Note East Lancashire (i.e., east of Blackburn) has no connection into the outward DalesRail service, something that has long been requested. The local Transdev bus company did have an arrival into Clitheroe Interchange on its Main Line service from Burnley offering a connection and it is promoted by DalesRail (fare is extra).

Is there information available indicating the destination stations to which DalesRail passengers travel?

Yes - some details provided. However, as DalesRail provides guided walks and coach links the importance of a station can be 'artificially' inflated by using it as the starting point for walks or coach links.

Is the through journey critical? Would a change at Hellifield / Ribbleshead / Garsdale cause problems?

On the whole a through journey is preferred rather than relying on a change. The key reason is that passengers have little confidence that connections would be maintained in the event of late running.

This doesn't apply to the coach links as these are operated by the Lancashire Rail Ramblers so there is no possibility of them leaving early or not waiting for the train. In the past where time tabled bus connections have been used this does not apply and there have been occasions where the bus hasn't waited for a late running train - even just a few minutes.

With guided walks a walk leader will always have an alternative available, so all is not lost but for those doing their own thing then their day has been totally upset a situation less likely to happen if you use your own transport.

So, to answer your question a through train is preferred but in the event of a change then connections need to be guaranteed (except in exceptional circumstances). The winter service from Blackpool/Preston to Hellifield has suffered from late running with the Settle & Carlisle connection being missed at Hellifield. The consequence is a ruined day given the very low frequency of both services.

To develop this point further if Hellifield is the connecting point, then thought must be given to ensuring good connections in both directions. Hellifield is not a destination for most people wanting to visit the Yorkshire Dales, Eden Valley, Skipton, or the Bentham Line (for Clapham or Bentham)

If trains went on to Ribbleshead or Garsdale then they offer day out opportunities in their own right. This doesn't diminish the importance of good connections but does go some way to mitigate if things do go wrong.

How important is Carlisle (and the stations beyond Kirkby Stephen/Appleyby) for "East Lancashire" passengers (i.e., those coming from south of Hellifield)

This is an interesting question. For those wanting to 'ride the line' then Carlisle is the usual destination with a variety of activities available. DalesRail offers town trails as well as the opportunity for walks in the Gretna Green/Dumfries area (train fare extra!). It is surprising how many passengers in the course of the year want to do just that and have Sunday lunch in the town. In addition, Langwathby has been a useful station for coach links to Lanercost Priory and Hadrian's Wall.

The website has a self-guide town trails for Carlisle as well as one for Appleyby see links below:

<https://www.communityraillancashire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/carlisle.pdf>
<https://www.communityraillancashire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/appleby.pdf>

Does standard ticketing apply for journeys Hellifield to Carlisle and any passenger there will just see the train as one of several on the route.

Yes, from Hellifield northwards standard fares apply – although some Blackpool guards will offer the DalesRail fares from Clitheroe at Hellifield if it is cheaper! Hellifield is often the railhead for passengers from West Yorkshire wanting to join DalesRail who either use the 0900 Leeds to Carlisle service that operates in front of DalesRail or P&R. There is a good station café at Hellifield which is always open at this time, although the café is understood to have recently changed hands and may well have been severely affected by the pandemic.

There was a time when Regional Railways North West deliberately priced Carlisle higher in order to make journeys to intermediate stations cheaper! That changed with the fare simplification currently in place. (I am sure you will be familiar with the approach as it equally applied to fares to Blackpool but not from it during peak summer season.

Current service is Sundays only – with, it is understood, a desire for a longer season. There is also a desire for other days – could this be met by connections rather than a through train? A bespoke DalesRail train may be difficult to resource and operate on weekdays, although that, post Covid might change. It may potentially easier, with fewer freight trains, on Saturdays.

DalesRail has a long history and has operated on Saturdays. There is an element of the market that would prefer Saturdays to Sundays especially as it is a long day out and Monday is the start of the working week!

One option proposed by a study some while ago was to operate a service on Fridays to enable the development of weekend breaks in the Dales.

It would be difficult to offer the current DalesRail package if the service was substantially expanded yet it is the package element and the fact that experienced people are on hand who know how to deal with situations when things go wrong that make it a successful combination. So if DalesRail was expanded the nature of the packages offered would need to change with maybe greater collaboration with the Settle & Carlisle Development Company (now the Settle & Carlisle Community Rail Partnership (CRP)) and the Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP) in the development of new packages targeting different market segments.

As a simple development it would be good to see DalesRail operate from Easter until the clocks ‘fall back’ - as it once did.

Offering a regular service will result in “regular” fares being offered to all passengers – this may impact on the DalesRail fares currently offered. This may result in a different fare on service trains compared with any DalesRail train that continues to operate. What are your thoughts on this?

Complicated! I suspect many DalesRailers paying the full fare i.e. without a Railcard would think the fares were quite high enough. Pricing for services operating north of Clitheroe would need to be sensitive to the fare structure for DalesRail as well as the winter Sunday service. It will also need to be sensitive to the demographics as many parts of Lancashire/north Manchester are not especially affluent.

Assuming DalesRail operates in 2021 a revised fare structure is being introduced reflecting the plan to introduce new bus links as well as the frequent comment that fares from Clitheroe to Hellifield/Settle were too high! I attach the draft fare structure which needs just a bit more work doing to it.

The Dales Rail card managed by the S&C Dev Co (CRP) is available to residents in the BB7 post code area which includes stations at Whalley and Clitheroe see:

<https://settle-carlisle.co.uk/tickets-times-travel/dales-railcard/>
<https://www.streetlist.co.uk/bb/bb7>

One possibility might be to extend the availability of the Dales Rail card to include BB1 (Blackburn) and BB2 (Blackburn west) – see attached link. Other BB postcodes could be included.

If leisure use is likely to be a key target market then it is probably going to be price sensitive, see earlier comment as well, especially for families hence some of the fare options available on DalesRail such as the DalesRail Duo;

If the Dales is to be promoted to the Greater Manchester market then consideration needs to be given to rail fares into the Peak District – lower journey time, relatively frequent rail service to key hubs, well known and established walks, active CRP, active promotion by the Peak District National Park etc. However, there is potential from Bolton northwards especially if a through service was offered.

If Lancashire to S&C stations were available on service trains would the range of guided walks and bus links expand to cover these new opportunities – what is preventing that happening now from the existing Leeds services?

I doubt the total number of guided walks would change that much but they would be more spaced out – with a working number of about 100 a season. There would also be the guided walk programme offered by the S/C Partnership which are organised by FoSCLA (Ruth Evans does or did develop the programme). So, in combination an impressive number of walks would be available. Not too sure what the YDNP offers now, but at one time walkers needed to pay to join a guided walk offered by the YDNP.

Bus links is complex and hinge on what authorities such as North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC), YDNP, Cumbria County Council are willing to support. NYCC bus subsidies are directed in specific ways and the English National Concessionary Travel (ENCT) is not available for purely leisure services within North Yorkshire.

I think it is fair to say that bus connections from S&C stations are biased towards the Leeds – Carlisle service with little consideration given to the Sunday DalesRail service hence the reason we go it alone! That has not always been the case. If regular services operated from GM/Lancashire onto the S&C then I hope this would change – it would need to be part of any package. Craven District Council

recently published a consultation document on developing bus and rail services in the District which has been partly drafted by Colin Speakman. I attach a copy in case you haven't already seen it. It is very bus focused but has a few thoughts on rail services, integrated ticketing etc.

Some of the current bus links have been supported by Northern through the S&C Dev Co/ FoSCLA, but there are none at present. There may be limited scope to expand these using the Station Adoption/Seedcorn fund. Applications would need to be through the S&C Dev Co or FoSCLA, but with no guarantee.

Lastly austerity has significantly reduced all local authorities' ability to support non-commercial bus services with significant reductions to supported services along the S&C corridor – statutory school traffic has probably been a lifeline for many services. So, if bus links are seen as part of an evolving package consideration needs to be given to their funding and not just the 'here today gone tomorrow' approach as users will have no confidence in them.

It has been suggested that some walkers would wish to be out early, especially for long walks, such as the Three Peaks Walk. DalesRail does not provide for them. It might be an outcome from an early commuter service from "Settle area" to Manchester (Train currently needs to go to Ribbleshead and Blea Moor to come back.) But the facility is probably only likely to be available from Blackburn. Is that worth following up?

Good suggestion if there was a way to do it then it might be worth looking at. However, if walkers wanted to do extra-long walks such as the Three Peaks then I suggest they would either drive early in the day or better still stay in a B&B the night before. Developing a weekend option from Greater Manchester/Lancashire might be the better way to develop this and could be done by well-timed connections at Hellifield with S&C services. Again, the package approach could be adopted i.e., weekend break in the Dales complete with rail ticket? Something for the YDNP/Dev Co/CRP?

If DalesRail services were subsumed and supplemented by a regular service would DalesRail continue with organised walks and bus connections, possibly over more days, and promotion/publicity?

Yes, as mentioned earlier this would probably change but the leaders would probably develop a different programme as is currently done for the East Lancashire and Clitheroe Lines.

I would hate to think we would lose DalesRail altogether so it would be good to see a train in the timetable that was DalesRail and could be promoted as that little bit different! As you will be aware Northern is unable to devote much time to promoting or developing leisure based services given the pressures placed on it by the City Regions with their commuter centric approach. Hence there has been a significant role for CRPs to step in to fill this gap which can be seen both with the promotion and development of DalesRail and also the roles of the S&C Development Company and Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line (FoSCL) in developing the S&C line. This can also be seen in the rolling stock allocated to the Clitheroe line which is being developed into a 3 car 150 railway. Great for commuters/students/scholars but not really for long distance leisure travel. The sort of refurbishment that Great Western and Arriva Trains Wales did to their class 150s might help with reduction of 3+2 seating and introduction of tables for groups/families to be able to sit around. However, the number of seats available in the peaks still seems to dominate thinking so it would be unthinkable to reduce 3+2 seating to 2+2.

Conversely could you envisage a position where there were a wider range of “bespoke” DalesRail services (more targeted at tripper/tourism) in parallel with a service which provided for essential local needs – possibly focussed to commuting opportunities from the Dales to Manchester and one or two middle of the day connections. Effectively a split in the service to meet two different needs – with regular ticketing available on all trains so passengers could still use any train if it suited their needs.

Again, such an option could work and has been suggested before but resourcing issues i.e., no trains as they are needed for commuter peaks into the major regional centres to meet PIXIE requirements even though Friday is a low commuting day and has been for years in the Northwest. The counter is that the Friday evening peak is busy but probably enhanced by leisure users – which is understood to have continued during the pandemic with Friday evening and Sunday being the busiest days. This would need to be explored in more detail as post-Covid travel patterns settle down.

In summary some key issues:

- **Journey times** from Greater Manchester and Lancashire need to be looked at as many users may find them too long, unattractive, and certainly not competitive with the car. The slow line speed on the Ribble Valley line does not help.
- **Fares:** this area needs to be looked at in the round if regular services beyond the current offer operate to Hellifield or beyond. Scope to look at Dales Rail card.
- **Rolling stock:** Class 150's may be suitable for commuter journeys but are these in their current configuration the right trains to operate regular services onto the S&C?
- **Packages:** as part of the offer then train + guided walk; train + connecting bus + guided walk; train + guided town trail; train as scenic journey (on train guides); train + afternoon tea/lunch time meal, and other options need to be somewhere in the mix. To develop the leisure offer then a partnership approach is likely to be necessary.
- **DalesRail:** It is hoped that under any of the options considered there was a future for the **DalesRail approach** but further embedded into the sort of adds-on that the Dev Co do such as on train catering; on train volunteer guides etc. DalesRail has been a fundamental part of rescuing the line, both S&C and Blackburn and Hellifield, when put up for closure and in its subsequent development post reprieve in 1989. I use the term **approach** as the features that make DalesRail fairly unusual (unique?) in British railway terms can be adopted by what comes out of the RYR project and certainly Community Rail Lancashire/Clitheroe Line CRP will play its part in continuing to support whatever service options are progressed.
- **Connections:** If Hellifield is to be a key location then connections between services need to be looked at very carefully and, so far as the railway can, be guaranteed. This may require changes to the S&C and Leeds – Morecambe timetables north of Skipton.
- **Extending the reach of the service:** bus links to destinations away for the line need to be looked at with well-timed and well promoted connections provided. Connections need to be guaranteed within the parameters of current legislation.