

UPPER CALDER VALLEY SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT GROUP RESPONSE TO: THE WEST YORKSHIRE COMBINED AUTHORITY RAIL PLAN CONSULTATION SUMMER 2023

INTRODUCTORY

The Upper Calder Valley Sustainable Transport Group is a voluntary community based group that exists to promote improved and sustainable transport in, to and from the upper Calder valley in West Yorkshire.

We agree with the Plan's statement that "Addressing the climate emergency is an overriding priority". Thus, our starting point is that there needs to be very significant modal shift during the next ten years from private cars to public transport, and that to achieve this, there needs to be major investment in Britain's railways to enable more and longer trains to run on existing routes, new stations to be built, more journey options (routes) to be available on the existing trackbed, and, where necessary and possible, new or reopened chords and lines. This modal shift is needed for three reasons: (a) to contribute to tackling the climate emergency; (b) to ease road congestion, making the road system more efficient for essential users including emergency services buses, and those who really need to make journeys by private transport; (c) to improve air quality, recognising that electric cars still release hazardous particles from breaks and tyres. Whilst electric vehicles contribute to reducing global heating, they still congest roads, require parking spaces, increase the risk of road accidents, require rare metals for their batteries and increased electricity generation to power them. Thus, the more journeys that are made on high volume vehicles i.e. buses, trams and trains, the better.

We are in broad agreement with the draft rail strategy, and welcome it. We agree with your ambition as set out in the Foreword. However, we feel that the strategy could go further in some respects, and we have addressed these in our response which concentrates on current and possible future rail services and infrastructure affecting the Calder Valley Line, and the stations in the upper Calder Valley. We appreciate that the Calder Valley line has a better train service than several other lines in West Yorkshire, but there is scope for improvement, and it is this that our response addresses, as well as commenting on train design. Our comments appear in chronological order.

Major Projects

Within this section, we consider it is important that the WYCA Rail Plan stresses **the need for a new underground section of Manchester Piccadilly railway station, joined by a new underground route to Manchester Victoria**, thus *inter alia* enabling through services from the Calder Valley line to Piccadilly station and to Manchester Airport. Manchester is closer by rail to the upper Calder valley than Leeds. Direct connectivity into Piccadilly would give us easy connections to a number of destinations not served from Leeds, including Buxton, North Wales, South Wales, Shropshire, Herefordshire, and stations on the West Coast Main Line south of Manchester.

We are disappointed that once again there is no proposal to **join up the Aire/Wharfedale and Calder Valley rail networks in Bradford**. We consider this should be a part of the WY Rail Plan. Amongst the several advantages, this would enable through services to and from the Calder Valley to Ilkley, Keighley, and Skipton, with cross platform connections to the Settle and Carlisle and Bentham Lines; it would also, of course, greatly improve connectivity from Airedale and Wharfedale line stations to Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Tameside and Manchester Piccadilly.

Local and intra-regional connectivity.

Table 3 fails to identify the **need for a direct service between the upper Calder Valley and Huddersfield**. There is considerable commuting between them, much related to educational institutions. There are different ways this could be achieved. Perhaps the most radical would be to introduce bi-directional circular services to and from Manchester, and running via Rochdale, Todmorden, Sowerby Bridge, Brighouse, Huddersfield, Marsden, Stalybridge, Guide Bridge, Manchester Piccadilly, Oxford Road, and Victoria. This would also make many other currently difficult journeys easier. An alternative would be a Todmorden-Huddersfield or Todmorden – Stalybridge shuttle. A third would be a service starting in Lancashire (Blackpool, Preston, Blackburn, Clitheroe or Hellifield (N Yorkshire)), and running via Hebden Bridge and Brighouse, ideally reversing at Todmorden.

Local connectivity gaps.

Regarding all routes, the strategy needs to identify as frequency gaps, late starts on Sundays, and have as “next steps” **the need for Sunday services to start early and finish late.**

Regarding the Calder Valley Line, Figure 8 identifies that Sowerby Bridge and Walsden have less than optimal number of services each hour. We consider “next steps” in Table 4 should specify the need for all Blackpool –York services in both directions to call at **Sowerby Bridge**; for **evening timetable anomalies** affecting Sowerby Bridge and Mytholmroyd to be resolved; and for **Walsden’s** service level to be raised from one to two trains an hour. We also recommend that York- Blackpool North service calls at **Mytholmroyd** in both directions in the morning and afternoon peaks, so that there are 2tph to the important commuter destinations of Halifax and Bradford (*You will be aware that Mytholmroyd has a large and underused car park*)

Whilst Hebden Bridge has 4tph, these are **unevenly spread**, meaning that there are three trains ph to Halifax and Bradford within a 20-25 minute window, and then nothing for 35-40 minutes. (The gap is filled for Leeds passengers by the Brighouse route service)

Table 4 fails to identify the lack of **through services between Sheffield and Bradford**, which could be achieved by restoring the Craggstone Curve, or by running via Wakefield Kirkgate where it would reverse. Such a service would give a cross- platform change at Brighouse (or at the planned Elland station) between the upper Valley, Barnsley and Sheffield, with connections there for the East Midlands.

Capacity Needs

Rolling stock

We are pleased that the Plan (Table 6) recognises the need for additional carriages on the Calder Valley Line as some trains are already overcrowded, and much commuting has returned.

Track capacity

Given the strategic need to increase the volume of rail freight, and the need for the enhanced services on the Calder Valley Line already referred to, we feel that **a passing loop** is necessary to enable freight or stopping passenger services to be held to enable faster services to pass. There is room for such a loop between Mytholmroyd and Hebden Bridge. Similarly, reinstating a third platform at Halifax would increase capacity.

Passenger Experience and Access to the Network

Station Amenities

Provision for cyclists. To encourage passengers to commute to travel to stations by bicycle, all the stations in Calder Valley (and elsewhere) require adequate and secure parking facilities for bicycles, including electric bikes. There needs to be charging facilities for electric bikes. Secure included full 24/7 CCTV coverage as well as the ability to secure bicycles to stands. Lockers are needed for helmets and other cycling kit. Facilities currently vary at Calder Valley stations, but at none are all these standards met.

Hebden Bridge station is a good example of a station that does have the minimum level of amenities that a station with its level of usage needs. Those amenities include the **ticket office**, which has over 15,000 transactions a quarter, plus is a vital source of information and advice. It is essential that it remains open. We are not only alarmed at the impact closure will have on ticket purchase and travel information (and consequently some possible loss of passengers), but are concerned that reduced staff hours will mean that the **waiting rooms and the toilets** will have reduced hours, and that there will be no staff on the station on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, the busiest times for incoming and outgoing visitors, some of whom unfortunately come to Hebden Bridge to drink too much – a lack of staff will result in many people, especially women, children, older people, and minorities **feeling unsafe** and may cause them not to use trains at these times. These issues are covered in more detail in our submission to the consultation on the closure of ticket offices, which WYCA has previously been sent (and which covers Todmorden as well).

As well as their benefit to passengers, the toilets are also well used by the drivers of our local buses (currently run by TLC) who have no alternative provision. The local services bus stop at the station is a good example of **public transport integration**, but we feel this should be enhanced by real time bus information being displayed on the outside of the station building. A taxi rank should be provided.

Whilst Hebden Bridge station has been made fully **accessible** to passengers, the same cannot be said of the Network Rail owned approach road, which has a very narrow pavement and cannot safely be used by wheelchair users or some other people with disabilities. This needs addressing.

Hebden Bridge station car park was recently benefitted from much needed expansion, but no **electric vehicle charging points** were included. This needs rectifying as a matter of urgency.

Todmorden station needs improvements. It is due to get a **passenger lift** under Access for All, but no start date has yet been announced. There are **no toilets** on the station, and this should be rectified. There are buildings on the westbound platform currently in commercial use that could house modern standard toilet facilities. There are no **covered waiting facilities** on the west bound platform when the waiting room is closed; as with HBD, we fear that should the ticket office closure plans go ahead, the waiting room hours will be considerably reduced. The **car park** is not big enough for demand and should be extended if possible. **Electric vehicle charging** points need to be provided as a matter of urgency. The bus station is a short distance away, and full **bus information** including services and real time information should be provided by the entrance to the railway station. A taxi rank should be considered, although perhaps unnecessary given that a minicab firm operates from the lower station building.

Mytholmroyd station needs better waiting facilities for passengers, and these could be provided in the renovated station building. Electric vehicle charging needs to be provided in the car park. Access between

the car park and the eastbound platform is time consuming, and very difficult for the less ambulant. A footbridge should be provided, pending Mytholmroyd's turn for a lift arriving.

Sowerby Bridge needs **toilets, better waiting facilities (especially on the westbound platform), better information about local bus services, better accessibility to the eastbound platform, and a ticket office.** The car park requires electric vehicle charging points, and a taxi rank should be provided. *Sowerby Bridge station serves a wide catchment area, including a number of affluent villages.* There needs to be better **interchange with local buses**, and full bus information provided at the station. With better amenities and **more frequent services**, it could have a significantly increased footfall.

Walsden requires a minimum of two trains an hour in each direction, and more protected waiting areas for passengers.

On-train experience.

Nowhere in this section is there any mention of **toilets**. This is a major omission, given that Northern is using class three carriage class 195 trains on routes that are up to over 3 hours in duration. Hebden Bridge to Blackpool North is 1 hour 25 mins, and to Chester is 1 hour 38 minutes. This problem is made more acute by the increase in leisure travel, which increases the number of passengers in the demographics statistically more likely to need the loo – children, older people, drinkers. **Northern's next new train acquisitions** must have a minimum of two toilets per unit, USB sockets as well as plug sockets, and should also have **end corridor/gangway connections** for when two units are coupled together. Ideally, they will also have some flexibility with the internal layout in some carriages, to allow for **increased space for bicycles, buggies, luggage, wheelchairs and disability scooters**, and also to enable part of a train set to be used for **parcels** in quieter times (we consider it is important to increase rail's share of the parcels market for environmental and congestion reasons, and support the notion of local parcels hubs. Indeed, this could be an enhanced role for ticket offices). **WYCA needs to stress these needs to Northern and the DfT.**

The existing class 195 and 331 units should have an extra toilet inserted when they are due a major refurbishment, together with increased space for bicycles, buggies and wheelchairs. These points should be included in the bullet points on page 61.

Decarbonisation: Electrification

As your strategy makes clear, decarbonisation is essential for the planet's health, but progress to date is far too slow and lacks urgency. We are pleased that the strategy identifies the Calder Valley Lines as Tier 1 for electrification, and we just hope that Government sees the importance and urgency of this work.

UPPER CALDER VALLEY SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT GROUP, 30.8.23

Our ref: stg ns bk mj lm sq ag

CONTACT: Nina Smith, Chair,