

**6th July 2005**

## **First Community Rail Routes Launched**

Plans to help secure the future of Britain's local rail routes have reached a major milestone with the designation of the country's first official Community Rail routes.

Forming part of the Strategic Rail Authority's Community Rail Development (CRD) strategy, the designation of the three routes - **The Esk Valley Line (Middlesbrough to Whitby)**, **St Ives Bay Line (St Ives to St Erth)** and **Abbey Line (Watford to St Albans)** - ensures that the lines are managed to meet local requirements at an affordable price. It also provides increased powers to local partnerships, bringing together stakeholders in support of their lines.

In addition to the designations, four new Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) have also recently been created, increasing the number of CRPs nationally to 60. These partnerships can cover designated Community Rail Routes or local services on conventional lines.

Launched by the SRA last year, the Community Rail Development Strategy aims to put the country's branch lines on a long term footing through a combination of increased passenger numbers, cost control and improved marketing via greater community involvement.

The programme also gives local people a greater say in the running of their railway via the establishment of Community Rail Partnerships - a partnership consisting of local authorities, the train operating companies and rail infrastructure owner and operator Network Rail.

With over 50 local lines identified for designation as Community Rail routes, the scheme has already started via six pilot schemes, with three of those now officially designated (see above), following a consultation period.

In practical terms, this means:

**On St Ives** - many of the initiatives are already in place for this Summer, including a more frequent, regular interval service, increased station capacity and a simplified fares structure, which were facilitated by the CRD strategy and the proposed designation of the line.

**On St Albans** - a new Community Rail Partnership has now been formed, and designation will play a key step in plans to provide a crossing loop and increase service frequency.

**On Esk Valley** - designation is expected to facilitate the provision of better links with the North York Moors Railway and work is underway

on assessment of the market potential for further development of the line.

Commented Chris Austin, the SRA's Executive Director of Community Rail Development: "This is a tremendous start to the programme, with each of these three routes already seeing increased support from the communities they serve and in some cases, the introduction of new services focused directly on catering for local needs."

A further four rail routes have also seen the establishment of new Community Rail Partnerships, each working towards the enhancement of these lines - North Staffordshire, Skegness to Grantham, the Isle of Wight and the Abbey Line - while work is in hand to establish a partnership on the Barton Line (Cleethorpes to Barton on Humber) in North East Lincolnshire and one for West Wales.

"Where the initial concept of Community Rail has already been embraced via existing partnerships, the results have been extremely encouraging, such as on the Bittern line in Norfolk, which has seen passenger numbers increase by almost 200% during the last eight years. The further introduction of these new rail partnerships will help strengthen an already effective community driven network." added Chris.

Now the focus is on the remaining pilot schemes, with the designation consultation process recently completed on Grantham - Skegness and started on the Penistone line (Huddersfield to Barnsley) and Tamar Valley/Looe Valley Lines in Cornwall.

The programme will then turn to the remaining routes identified as suitable for Community Rail designation, with the overall development scheme scheduled for completion in two years.

**For specific information about Community Rail activity in your area, visit the Association of Community Rail Partnership's website at [www.acorp.uk.com](http://www.acorp.uk.com)**

## **Notes for Editors**

### **Community Rail Development Strategy**

1. Following a thorough consultation process last year, which included local authorities, Community Rail Partnerships, Railway Development Companies, and rail user groups throughout the UK, the SRA's Community Rail Development Strategy was published in November 2004 with the intention of securing the long-term viability of local rail routes. It has three key objectives:
  - To increase passenger use and revenue
  - To manage down costs

- To involve the local community more in the development of their railway
2. Over 50 lines throughout the UK (including the pilots) have been identified as possible Community Rail routes. Success will depend on partnership working. The strategy encourages local involvement in developing local railways through:
    - Community Rail Partnerships and Railway Development Companies
    - Innovative ways to attract more passengers using the resources already available
    - 'Adoption' of stations by local communities
    - Introduction of standards appropriate to the use of individual routes
    - Improved integration, including between local bus and rail services
  3. The initial six pilot lines identified for designation were:
    - Watford Junction to St Albans Abbey (Abbey line)
    - Esk Valley (Middlesbrough-Whitby)
    - Looe Valley (Looe-Liskeard) and Tamar Valley (Plymouth-Gunnislake)
    - Grantham to Skegness
    - Penistone line (Huddersfield-Barnsley)
    - St Ives Bay line (St Ives- St Erth)
  4. Responsibility for Community Rail Development transfers to the Government (DfT Rail) from 21 August 2005. Community Rail will form part of the Customer & Stakeholder Relations organisation and two of the existing Community Rail team from the SRA will transfer to DfT Rail to take the programme forward.