

10th May 2005

Branching Out! This weekend's Community Rail Day celebrates new life for local lines

Local rail routes take centre stage on Saturday (14 May), when the industry stages its first ever Community Rail Day.

Train operators on more than 40 routes across the country will be working together with the communities they serve to show just how vital these local services are, both socially and economically.

May 14's special 'Open Day', which includes routes in Yorkshire, Lancashire, North Wales, Cornwall and Anglia (see further details below), will help highlight the shared vision for local lines, spelled out in the Strategic Rail Authority's (SRA) Community Rail Development Strategy - a blueprint for the future for these branch line services.

The strategy aims to provide new life for local lines and:

- Ensure better value for money through improved cost management
- Increase passenger numbers and revenue
- Introduce greater community involvement with local marketing

Explained the SRA's Executive Director for Community Rail Development, Chris Austin: "It's an exciting time for what is effectively everyone's railway. These local services have a key role to play in the everyday lives of communities throughout the country and we are asking them to work with us to help develop these routes for the future, helping give them the railway they really want".

In all, 56 lines have been identified as Community Rail routes, which, if designated as such, would give people a greater say in the running of their railway and help provide better value for money.

Six pilot schemes are already being introduced over the next few months and include:

- 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)

Where the Community Rail concept has been embraced, the results have been encouraging, with two of the most successful being the Chester to

Shrewsbury line, which has seen passenger numbers increase by 300% during the last seven years, whilst on the Bittern Line which runs from Sheringham to Norwich, numbers have risen by 180% since the introduction of a Community Rail Partnership in 1995.

Commented Peter Roberts, Chairman of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships: "This is a marvellous initiative which shows that local communities and the railway industry can work together to support their local railways. We have been delighted at the level of support from train operators, Network Rail and the Strategic Rail Authority. May 14th will go down as a very special day for our local railways".

During the weekend of Saturday 14 May, many of these routes, including the six pilot schemes, will be staging a series events and special promotions, inviting people to see their local lines in action. Station galas will be taking place at Wrexham, Huddersfield, Barnsley, Cleethorpes, Blackburn, Whitby and Lowestoft, with activities including children's entertainment and displays, whilst at St Ives a new sculpture is unveiled, on the Looe line passengers can shake a leg on the music train and beer lovers can join the ale trail on the Penistone Line. **(A full list of activities is available below).**

Passengers will also benefit in the pocket, with many train operators on these routes offering special promotional fares with some discounts of up to 50% off normal prices on Community Rail Day. These include Wessex Trains, Northern Rail, One Railway and Island Line, whilst Southern are offering 100 free tickets between Oxted and Uckfield via their website.

Commented Edward Funnell from the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC): "Train operators are offering a range of special fares and events for Community Rail Day because they want people to try out their local train services and to see and understand for themselves how the railways provide the economic and social lifeblood to the communities they serve".

For further information about Community Rail activities in your area, visit the Association of Community Rail Partnership's website at www.acorp.uk.com

For further details please contact the SRA Press Office on: 020 7654 6339/6234.

Notes to Editors

Below is a list of activities taking place on and around Community Rail Day on Saturday 14 May 2005.

Local and Regional Events

South West (Wessex Trains)

50% discount on Wessex Trains' Community Rail lines
St Ives Bay Line - unveiling of artwork at St Ives with Tate Gallery and launch of St Ives Line Guide
Music Train on St Ives line, free pasties!
Maritime Line - Friends of Penmere Platform 'at home'
Looe Valley Line - guided walks and Music Train
Cream teas on Liskeard station; cake-cutting event
Tamar Valley line - launch of new bus link from Calstock station to Cotehele House
Tarka Line - launch of new Rail Ale Trail guide
Truro-Falmouth - Guided rail ale walk
Severn Beach line - Treasure Train - event to attract children to take their parents on the line

North West (Northern Rail unless otherwise shown)

50% discount on Cheap Day Return tickets on Community Rail lines
East Lancs Line - Gala Day at Blackburn station, stalls, events
West Lancs CRP - special events at Parbold - 'meet the manager' and magician!
Davenport: live music on the station
Levenshulme station mosaic panel
Music train, Manchester to Hathersage
Launch of 'Friends of Whaley Bridge Station' with art work and music
Handforth station - posters and leaflets; Halcrow sponsorship
Promotional leaflet for Windermere branch (Trans Pennine Express)
Unveiling of art plaque at Frodsham station

Yorkshire and the Humber

Yorkshire Coast line - promotional leaflet
Barber Shop Singers at Bridlington
Events on Barton Line linked to Kite Festival
Mini Gala at Cleethorpes Station
Discounts for rail travellers on Cleethorpes Light Railway and Pleasure Island
Esk Valley - station event at Whitby
Linked events on North Yorkshire Moors Railway
Penistone Line - treasure trail, galas at Huddersfield and Barnsley
Wensleydale Railway: Promotional posters

North-East (Northern)

Heritage Line (Bishops Auckland) - promotional leaflets and posters for CRP launch at Shildon

Eastern England ('One' Railway)

Two for the price of one offer on lines covered by Community Rail Partnerships
Bittern Line T-Shirt
CRP stall at Norwich Station
Children's painting competition at Lowestoft station
Badges to be given to passengers on East Suffolk Line
Discounts for rail travellers on Bure Valley and North Norfolk Railways

East Midlands (Central Trains)

Skegness line - event linked to competition to name the line; line posters
Derwent Valley - specially branded train, publicity distribution by Friends of Derwent Valley Line and station-based exhibition at Duffield
Promotional leaflet for North Staffordshire Line (Crewe - Stoke - Derby)

West Midlands

Publication of line brochure for Birmingham - Stratford (Shakespeare Line) - Central Trains
Parry People Mover: 'Community Light Rail' event at Chasewater Railway, near Walsall

Wales (Arriva Trains Wales)

Heart of Wales Line - Bands on trains
Gala at Wrexham
Fund raising for Railway Children Charity

South East

100 free tickets between Oxted and Uckfield via website (Southern)
Launch of Uckfield Line Guide (Southern)

Event at Edenbridge Town Station (Southern)
Children's T-shirts for Uckfield and Ashford - Hastings lines
Promotional leaflet for Abbey Line explaining CRP's aims and inviting membership (Silverlink)
Free family ticket for 'station adopters' at Saunderton (Chiltern Railways)

Isle of Wight (Island Line)

Island Line: Discounted fares
Discounted entrance to some attractions near the railway
'Mini walks' from the railway - part of the Isle of Wight Walking Festival
New access ramp to up platform at Sandown

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. 56 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 lines identified for designation are:
 - 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)

**For further details contact the Department for Transport Rail Press desk:
020 7944 3108**