



LIGHTWEIGHT COMMUNITY TRANSPORT NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2009

Liz Lynne MEP works with LCT to bring light rail to Bewdley

The route between Bewdley and Kidderminster, part of the Severn Valley line, is already a popular heritage rail route. But could it also see passenger services for the many Bewdley residents who would benefit from access to the town and main line rail in Kidderminster?

Only a short distance away from the Stourbridge service on the same line, Bewdley has already seen some trials of the Parry People Mover in 2005. There are some difficulties to overcome – not least the limited parking at Bewdley, and the need to avoid clashing with heritage rail events.

We are hoping that the keen interest of Liz Lynne, one of the West Midlands European Parliamentarians, will give renewed impetus to the idea. She met with Kate Whittle (right) of LCT and John Parry towards the end of last year and since then her office has been closely in touch to try to bring together the necessary resources to make this happen.



Network Rail are friendly without actually being helpful

Our meetings with Network Rail have so far been amicable, and they have been quick to follow up our queries about opportunities particularly in the Wessex region. We have been looking at some locations suggested by the new Go! Co-operative (a new business that is planning to operate a number of public transport services as a co-operative – Alex is one of its members) such as

- Weymouth, where some local people hope to revive the quayside railway
- Yeovil, where a 2 mile section of unused track connects the town's two stations
- Frome, where a freight line traverses the town and could link to the old line to Radstock
- a military line to Ludgershall from Andover

In all of these cases there is line that is not used by any passenger service. However, whatever we suggest there are invariably 'operational difficulties' that make it (they claim) impossible.

The main reason for this is a culture of 'safety first' that makes any new proposal see like more of a threat than an opportunities. We will need to continue our constructive engagement, build on the precedents established at Stourbridge, and make use of the many supportive voices around – for example in the All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group, or the local authorities such as Somerset County Council.

For the time being, this confirms our original expectation that early progress would be made mostly on the heritage railways. But persuading Network Rail that light rail can be safely segregated from conventional traffic remains an important longer term objective.

Wensleydale progress

As you will recall, the Wensleydale Railway is one of the most enthusiastic independent railways for light rail use of their line. Their challenge, however, is to extend their line into Northallerton station. Survey work on site is well under way. This has taken a lot of time because it involved getting access to the East Coast Main Line, not an easy permission to obtain.

Design work is following closely behind the survey. This work is being done by the professionals at Corus, free of charge, as a memorial to the late Clive Roberts who was one of their staff and one of the WR's Directors.

Ian Sesnan and his team are making good progress on the business plan, but it cannot be finalised until the design of the railway is complete. LCT director Steve Deane is delivering a range of options for possible train services.

Bodmin trial – still on, but not yet

A hoped for trial at Bodmin will not take place this spring, as the rail inspectorate have recommended some substantial works that they will need to carry out during their non-running season. However, their interest remains strong, and the work we have done to prepare terms and options for trials will prove useful either there or elsewhere.

Share issue tops £30,000

Our thanks goes out once again to the growing community of ethical investors who have now purchased £30,000 of share capital. At this very early stage in our development, it gets us off to a flying start. As Independent Financial Advisors such as Gaeia and Socialinvestments.com become more familiar with us, we are seeing a steady flow of new members. We expect to achieve further publicity with a lengthy article in Rail Magazine in late February / early March.

The next Directors meeting is on the 12th February in Birmingham, and among the issues to be discussed are further approaches to independent railways, and the long term work of persuading Network Rail to create segregated routes so that light rail can make use of underused parts of the national network. Please contact Alex if you would like further updates following this meeting.

...and finally...

You will probably have noticed that this January newsletter is in fact going out in February. My apologies, but there is so much activity that I thought it would be worth taking the time to write a longer newsletter.

There are many more opportunities that we are studying that could bear fruit in the future, from Saxmundham to Gobowen, or from Eden Valley to Ironbridge Gorge. We still hold out the hope that Hampshire County Council will see the possibility of retaining the branch line to Gosport; however, the signs are that they are determined to replace it with a bus route. Rest assured that we will keep you informed of any progress. A key target for this year is to get the demonstration railcar that some of you will have seen at Stourbridge into action running demonstration services in at least one of the locations I have mentioned.

Many of you have brought forward your own ideas and drawn on local knowledge – please do keep it up, it is invaluable.