

Friday 17 June 05 saw the launch of North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership. A meeting was held at Uttoxeter Race Course. Amongst those present were Janet Dean (local MP), Neil Buxton (Development Manager for Association of Community Rail Partnerships), Jerry Swift (Community Account Director for Network Rail), Mike Haigh (Business Development Director for Central Trains), Michael Wilmot (North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership Steering Group).

The aims of the Community Rail Partnership were stated as follows:-

To promote and develop the Crewe to Derby rail route for the benefit of local residents, businesses and visitors.

Ensure, by working with local partners that the route contributes to the social and economic regeneration of the area, and to strengthen social inclusion along the line.

Collaborate with others to promote and support local and regional tourism.

Developing community involvement and working with a range of partners to improve stations and enhance services.

Working to achieve integrated transport links with bus services and for cycling and walking, as well as with the national rail network at Derby, Stoke & Crewe.

Neil Buxton gave a presentation in which it was stated that ACoRP's vision is for a community railway similar to that found in Germany & Sweden. ACoRP's presentation included photos of continental style light railways. The meeting was told that CRP's are highly relevant to low speed lines such as ours. When questioned as to whether a light railway (as opposed to the present heavy rail system) was seen as the way forward, it was stressed that this was very much a long term vision. With regard to finances, ACoRP's presentation drew a distinction between two elements of the scheme, firstly *Community Rail Partnerships* – community based initiatives to bring more passengers to the line and secondly *Community Rail Designation* – which covers activities associated with reducing costs. It would appear from the presentation given at Uttoxeter that the money saving activities (Community Rail Designation) can take place independently of the Community Rail Partnership activities. Jerry Swift (Community Account Director for Central Trains) indicated that there needed to be a 31% overall reduction in costs associated with the railway. In ACoRP's view one possible cost saving measure would be de-manning of level crossings with subsequent demolition of signal boxes. Replacing the old semaphore signaling on the line was seen as a long term activity.

Janet Dean said that she would be pushing for more extended hours on the railway, i.e. later trains in the evening, and would ultimately like to see the service return to its pre privatization state. Janet Dean was asked if there was any scope for cross county collaboration, such as local trains calling at Peartree Station near Derby. It was accepted that there is a need to get Mark Todd (MP for South Derbyshire) on board.

Amongst those present in the audience were representatives from Transport 2000 who expressed concern about the lack of impetus for public transport schemes in Staffordshire compared to the activities taking place in neighboring counties. Representatives from Royal Mail, expressed disappointment at one closure already planned – namely Etruria Station near Stoke on Trent.

Michael Wilmot (Chairman of North Staffs Community Rail Partnership Steering Group), advised that they would be looking to form a group of stakeholders comprising local businesses and community groups to take the CRP scheme forward. It was envisaged that a CRP liaison officer would be appointed around September 2005. It is not clear at this stage where this officer will be based.

Janet Dean thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 12 noon.

The meeting room was “donated” by Uttoxeter Race Course, who also sponsored refreshments.

Contact details:

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Mike Wilmot would be a good starting point for anyone interested in the CRP.