

The value of a rail link is enormous

Andy Shackleton is campaigning for the reopening of the Colne-Skipton line. Here he marvels at the change in attitudes since many rail lines closed in the 1960s and 1970s.

It seems like no time at all since Harold Macmillan told the nation that they'd never had it so good. Teenagers, pop music, indoor bathrooms. A brave vision of a growing economy, full employment, concrete, cars – and empty roads to drive them on.

Supermarkets, drive-through fast food, a brand new economy of industrial estates trailing in the wake of the motorway – and more.

Out with the old, and in with the new. East Lancashire embraced modernity with a will, trashing much no longer regarded as immediately useful.

But history has a habit of rearing up in our faces. What's this about swathes of near valueless terraced homes left behind in the scramble, while regions close by see a near insatiable housing market across the spectrum?

Communities and the demands they make on local infrastructure change. Ask any estate agent in the land about their patch and you'll get to hear about shops, schools, employment – and links to the rest of the country.

Look at the Skipton-Aire valley corridor and that of Todmorden-Hebden Bridge in the Calder Valley. Not unlike Pendle in terms of industrial background

and their Pennine roots. But miles apart when it comes to those status-boosting links that whirl commuter, shopper, or tourist to city destination, and beyond, in swanky new trains.

The reader will not be surprised to learn of property markets reflecting that status.

Forty years ago, few would have envisioned an increase in the demand that sees more people travelling by rail than at any time since nationalisation.

Trains are part of the future, a vital part of an integrated transport system that people should be proud to use, elected leaders eager to promote.

It is so easy to say "I told you so", that short-term policies of previous leaders were folly, but while those without cars are more isolated than ever, regions served by an effective rail service enjoy near cult status.

Cut off as a through route more than 30 years ago, Pendle's remnants of a railway trundle on, Heath Robinson-like, carrying those with no alternative, for few would use it by choice.

Notwithstanding, proposals to rebuild the route to Skipton, and Yorkshire's network beyond, have met with stiff opposition from those who would obliterate its formation.

Recently published results of the feasibility study into the possibility of the line being reopened throughout reveal no insurmountable problems.

Craven District Council's leaders back the scheme 100%. They know a thing or two about modern railways and the lift they

give to a region. Pendle's population sees only a ramshackle has-been for a rail service and can be forgiven for not seeing its viable future as a through route.

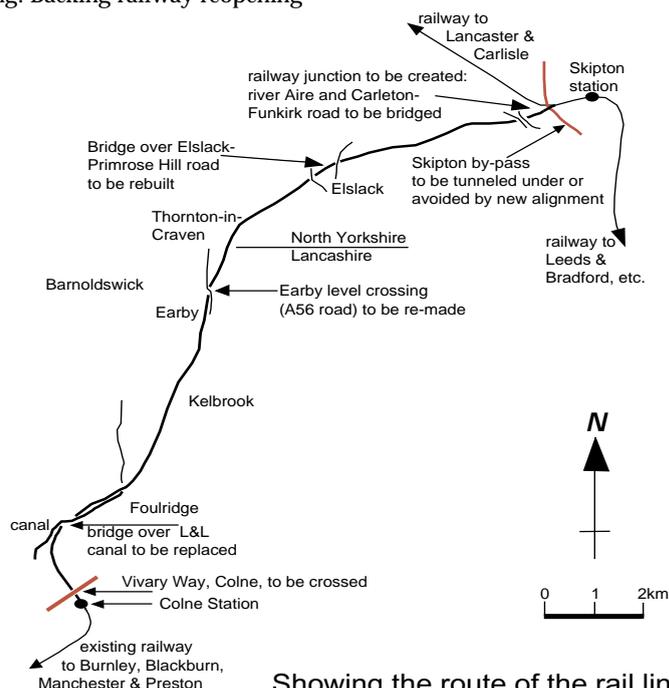
Pendle's leaders, on the other hand, should know better. At all levels it is their job to look after the needs of the community that elected them, to embrace the future. Failure to do this is to compound the 30-year-old mistake that saw a vital facility discarded.

What became of all those valueless homes? Some became bijou residences in a traditional setting! Backing railway reopening

will solve a whole raft of problems. Andy Shackleton can be contacted at Higher Park Farm, Kelbrook Road, Barnoldswick, Lancs BB18 5TD, or email: ashacks@btinternet.com

Membership of the Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership costs only £5. The current main aim is to get the route protected. More information at www.selrap.org.uk

SELRAP
Skipton—East Lancashire
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Partnership



Showing the route of the rail link between Skipton & Colne and the key features along the line

By Gerard Duddridge

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1 July 2003 marked 100 years since the opening of the Exeter Railway from Exeter St Thomas to Christow via Alphington, Ide and Longdown.

This railway linked to the Teign Valley line to give an alternative route to Newton Abbot. Regrettably, the whole of the Exeter and Teign Valley line was closed in 1958 and today only a short stretch of track remains through Exeter's Marsh Barton industrial estate at Alphington.

There is little doubt that the Teign Valley line was uneconomic, but this was partly a result of a failure to modernise and upgrade the route.

But closure certainly caused inconvenience and hardship. A survey by David St John Thomas showed that of 32 commuters using the railway, five lost their jobs immediately after the closure, two arranged lifts and nine bought cars.

A year later almost half were no longer using the bus. Of all the other regular rail users only one-third were using the bus replacement service. Today the bus service to Christow and the Teign Valley is very poor. The slow 360 service runs only four

Time line for the Teign

times per day and there is just one daily commuter bus to Exeter from Kingsteignton via the main Teign Valley road.

If the Teign Valley railway was reopened then Heathfield could be just 22 minutes from Exeter St Davids (stopping only at Alphington and St Thomas). In the 1950s the train took about one hour from Heathfield, so no wonder the railway was not used enough. Today, Alphington and Heathfield would be the most important intermediate stations. As well as nearby housing, both would serve industrial estates and they are close to the A30 and A38 trunk roads respectively.

If reopening ever becomes a reality it will most likely be for through trains with just a few stops to serve the local area. The tight curvature and single track tunnels limit the route's usefulness as a complete alternative to the main line via Dawlish, but it would be invaluable at times when the sea blocked the normal route.

On a day-to-day basis the Exeter to Newton Abbot line is already congested so

more Exeter to Paignton trains could be run.

Restoration would be straightforward over substantial lengths of the old route. Less easy might be re-acquiring the land from private ownership.

A modified alignment would be needed between Alphington and Ide to overcome the blockage created by the A30 road. Between Chudleigh and Chudleigh Knighton the A38 trunk road has taken over the trackbed, but there would still be room alongside for a railway.

However, the main factor against the railway reopening is the lack of funding for this type of project.

Furthermore, if money does become available there are even higher priority projects to be pursued in Devon, including reopening of the Exeter to Plymouth via Okehampton line, Barnstaple to Bideford and a link back into Tiverton. The Exeter and Teign Valley railway will have to remain dormant for a little longer yet. However, its time must surely come.