

Community Rail Weekend on Northern - May 17th/18th 2008

Overview

This was certainly the most successful 'Community Rail Weekend' we have had on Northern, with a wide range of events which were well supported. It was good to hear of so many directors and senior managers taking time to go round and visit the various activities.

As in previous years, our Marketing team produced an attractive poster and leaflet giving overall awareness of the weekend's events. Communications colleagues put out a press release. In addition, specific events featured on our website. Lancashire County Council produced their own poster promoting activities in the county. A very welcome feature of this year's event was the involvement of many local schools.

Ribble Valley

Ribble Valley Rail and the Clitheroe Line CRP put on a number of events, with **Clitheroe** at the centre. It was also the weekend of Clitheroe Festival which had been arranged to co-incide with Community Rail Weekend. There was an exhibition in the Platform Gallery at the station including some stunning artwork by local schools. Vintage buses gave trips from the station to local attractions and also provided a linking service to **Hellifield**, where there was a station gala staffed by RVR, Friends of Settle-Carlisle Line and the Lancaster/Morecambe – Leeds CRP. Kingfisher, which runs the station buffet as well as being a railtour operator and producer of railway DVDs, was actively involved. The Naylor's Brewery stall was popular with many visitors. Drew Haley and Paul Salveson represented Northern. Ribble Valley Rail's volunteers were severely stretched, coping with at least four separate events on the same day – they did a brilliant job, well supported by Simon Clarke, Brian Haworth and Richard Watts of Lancashire County Council. Steve Butcher also attended the event.

Blackburn and East Lancashire

The well-established **Blackburn** Station Gala was well supported with a range of stalls and lots of interest from passengers and other visitors. The music train, with Mr Blojangles and St Augustine's School Swing Band, used the 10.01 departure to Colne and returned to form the 11.42 to Blackpool South, with invited guests for the launch of the South Fylde CRP (see below). The very attractive new posters from Lancashire County Council depicting stations on the East Lancashire Line (Brierfield, Bamber Bridge and also Entwistle) were on view.

South Fylde (Blackpool South)

Saturday was the official launch of the South Fylde Line CRP, with a ministerial announcement the previous day saying that it was to be a designated community rail route. Invited guests traveled on the 11.42 from Blackburn to **Lytham** where there was a reception and speeches, with a tour of the area by vintage bus. Simon Clarke, the CRP officer (on loan from Northern) said "I would like to particularly thank Matt Chappell and the team in Northern Control who were able to provide the 156 for the music train, and Andy Murray for his help in smoothing things at Lytham on the morning..." Tricia spoke at the launch event together with local dignitaries.

Richard Watts said "We launched the SFLCRP in true excellent style. The dignitaries were met at Lytham station by the Fylde Mayor and we went for the formal bit to the Station Tavern where there were speeches from Richard Fulford Brown, Chair of the SFLCRP; County Councillor Matthew Tomlinson; Councillor Val Haines, deputy Mayor Blackpool BC and Tricia Riley, AD North".

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Conclusion

By any standard this was a fantastic effort and a real partnership between ourselves and community organisations, many led by volunteers, particularly the station groups and bodies like Ribble Valley Rail.

It was marvelous that so many directors and managers were able to get out and about and this was greatly appreciated by the community groups.

What next? The West Lancs CRP held off doing anything this weekend because we couldn't offer a Sunday service on the Ormskirk Line owing to operational problems at Preston. A weekend gala will take place on July 5th and 6th, the later date allowing for a concentration of forces which would otherwise have been very widely spread.

Thanks to everyone who did a lot behind the scenes, not least Marketing colleagues who produced an excellent leaflet and poster and Communications who produced the press release.

For next year, whilst we should support more of the same we should also be encouraging some of the more active station partnerships to put on a show. For example Eccles, Walkden, and Todmorden who are all doing fantastic work were not able to lay anything special on this time. I think the examples of Glossop, Broadbottom and Whaley Bridge shows that with relatively little financial outlay a lot can be achieved. But it needs planning and it takes time.

The CRP officers put in a huge amount of time to make their events a success and I hope this report does justice to their efforts. And guys – please make sure you send us any examples of media coverage from the weekend.

Paul Salveson, May 19th 2008