



Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership

MID CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2016



“Working creatively with partners along the Mid Cheshire Line to achieve the priorities of the Partnership and maximise income and investment into the Line and its communities.”

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR:

2016 has been an interesting year for the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership. As reflected in the cover photograph from January 2016 we always start on a high note with the Cheshire Best Kept Stations Awards night.

Cheshire Best Kept Stations brings together volunteers, councillors and local mayors together with representatives from the rail world to celebrate all the excellent work that station friends do at stations across Cheshire. We were particularly pleased to see Delamere and Knutsford win best kept station awards. The partnership with Petty Pool College at Delamere and with the staff at Knutsford station makes a big difference. This is what community rail is all about.

April saw more celebrations as the new franchises started across the North with the new TransPennine Express franchise and the new Northern franchise. Not surprisingly the new Northern franchise has seen staff leave and retire and we have welcomed new faces. Eight months in to the franchise and it feels like Arriva Rail North are still feeling their way in some aspects. This has impacted on the CRP in that we have lost volunteers from along the Line and are having to find our way through new policies and procedures. Nevertheless, we are pleased with the new regional structure, are meeting regularly with Liam Sumpter our new Central Region director and are looking forward to the new Northern staff and systems bedding in.

We are also delighted to receive more community rail funding for this franchise, funding that is allocated over three years giving the CRP longer term security. This will enable our Community Rail Partnership Officer, Sally Buttifant, to focus fully on community rail projects rather than also spending time trying to secure future funding.

2016 has seen the launch of the national community rail group – Women in Community Rail. We are proud to say that Sally is one of the founder members of this group. We have also had several successful volunteer days at stations along the Line and we ended the year signing up to the local Dementia Action Alliance. Community rail is always varied and interesting.

And lastly, we couldn't achieve anything like as much without the tireless efforts of all the many supporters and volunteers who work to improve and promote the Line with the Community Rail Partnership Officer's guidance and encouragement.

We look forward to 2017 seeing more station volunteer days, more station friends and a big push on marketing Mid Cheshire attractions along our scenic Mid Cheshire Line!

John Oates, CRP Chair, January 2017



VOLUNTEERING

The Partnership's website is maintained by John Hulme, who was awarded the BEM in 2016 for his services to railways in Cheshire. Every station is supported by some volunteers. There is no standard arrangement – at Plumley the work is led through the parish council. At Cuddington it is a small informal group, co-ordinated by a volunteer, at Delamere Petty Pool College look after the station. Other volunteers are active, particularly through MCRUA, the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association, in promoting the Line and maintaining close links with the operational team in Northern. They have been active in trying to resolve the problems at Altrincham where development of the interchange is still not satisfactorily completed.

At every station there are Partnership noticeboards kept up-to-date by a local volunteer. They show details of events along the Line, ideas for days out by train and the fares from that station. From time to time on a sample of trains there are volunteer counters who record the numbers of people using the Line in order to verify national data from ticket sales which is not adequate to accurately show the actual number and pattern of the journeys that are made.

STATION DAYS

As well as the regular station visits and work that station friends undertake, we were lucky this year to have a couple of big station volunteer days. The year started with a productive partnership day on land by the freight line just outside Northwich Station. Initiated by Northwich Town Council, partners - including the CRP, Cheshire West & Chester Council and Network Rail - inspected rail land and an unloved playing field and undertook a huge rubbish clearance exercise. The embankment was left looking transformed and the playing field is now being regularly maintained by the Town Council - and most importantly residents are starting to use the unique triangular piece of land that has a rail line on every side!



Inspection of the land and embankment prior to the partner clean up day

It was much warmer for the next volunteer day at Knutsford in May when three Network Rail staff joined our CRP officer for several hours of hard labour! Five heavy wooden planters needed moving on the station and this involved emptying out the soil, moving the wooden structures, replacing the soil and then re-planting. The results though made all the hard work worth it!



In June it was Northwich's turn to benefit from willing volunteers. Almost overcome by the heat, volunteers from Vale Royal Environmental Group together with Dave Tyrer from Northern weeded the rose bed and painted the shelter. It was great to see the roses liberated from a carpet of weeds!



A YEAR FOR THOUGHT AND PLANNING

With the change in franchise and the new focus on Station Groups rather than Station Adopters, 2016 has been a year of considerable thought and planning.

The Mid Cheshire Line is very proud of our current award winning Station Groups and wants to ensure their best practice is shared at all stations.

Volunteers are the CRP's most valuable resource because they want to give their time to a cause that they care about. They need all the support and encouragement we can give them.

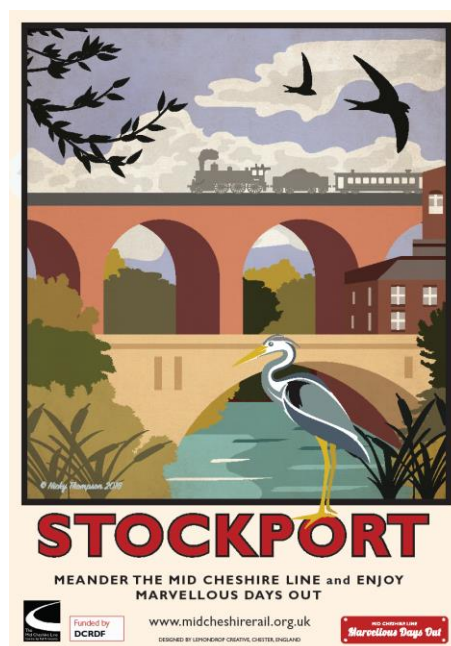
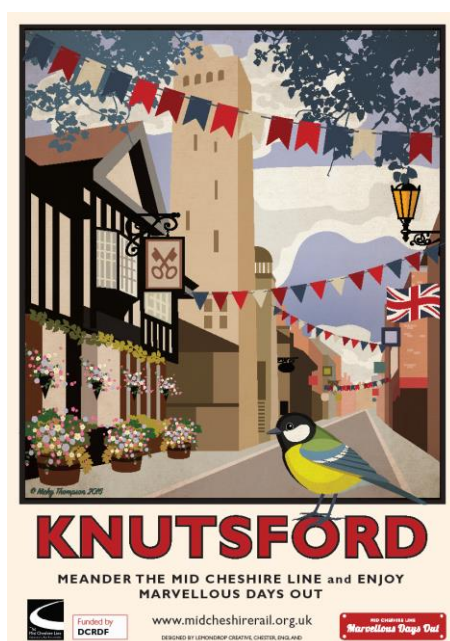
At the heart of all the CRP's work are the customers who travel on the Line and the need for their customer experience to exceed their expectations

Stations are both the start and end of this customer journey and volunteers have so much to offer in ensuring our stations are clean, tidy, safe and well maintained. Volunteers are also a key part of our other successes i.e. music trains, passenger counts, marketing, performance, events etc. As we move forward with our Station Groups the CRP will be:

- developing plans with each Station Group to ensure they receive the support they deserve both in time and funds
- improving our communications with our Groups
- improving our administrative efforts to support our Groups
- ensuring all our Groups and their volunteers are valued

MARKETING

This year we have started to develop a marketing theme of 'Marvellous Days Out'. New posters have been prepared for some of the main attractions along the Line and more are on the way. The aim is to develop a message which can be spread more widely than Mid Cheshire, using the resources of the whole Northern network. 2017 will see the development of our full marketing plan for the new franchise.



STATION EVENTS

Stations are also key gateways in and out of communities and are great places to hold events so it was fitting that in June we celebrated the Queen's 90th Birthday at Stockport, Knutsford and Manchester Piccadilly stations. And in August a similar event was held at Chester Station. Station events are all about partnership and in Mid Cheshire we love to work with as many partners as possible!

The Queen's Birthday gave us opportunities to work with Arriva Trains Wales, Arriva Train Care, Chester & District Samaritans, Chester Model Railway Club, CrossCountry, Friends of the Mid Cheshire, Friends of Mills Hill, Ffestiniog Railway, Magic FM, Manchester Transport Museum, Mersey Morris Men, Network Rail, North Cheshire Rail User Group, Northern, Rail Safety Week, Scouts and Virgin Trains.



MUSIC TRAINS

The Music Train season for 2016 finished on 19 October with 31 members of Hale U3A travelling to Alexanders with Mart's ManJazz3 for a superb performance by the Deportees – a good time was had by all.

This has been our most successful Music Train season so far. There were 647 passengers on 16 Music trains. Six trains from Chester to Plumley, two trains from Chester to Mobberley, seven from Hale to Chester and one train from Hale to Plumley. These events had the potential to raise approximately £4,500 in ticket sales for Northern. The average attendance for each music train was 40.

The best night was 13 July when we had two Music Trains (one in each direction) with a total of 111 passengers on them and more people came to Plumley from the east by train that evening too.

Nine Music Trains were publicly advertised and seven were for groups - Bromborough U3A, St Peter's Men's Fella-Ship, Hale Civic Trust, Altrincham Conservatives, Hale U3A (twice) and Hale WI. We cater for groups because they are a good way of spreading the word about the Line (eg all 600+ members of Hale U3A were notified about the events). They attract people

onto the trains who would not otherwise use them (or might not even realise that they existed). We also have a couple of groups of regulars on the public Music Trains.

Take the train for a low cost, unique night out, using local rail services, promoting local musicians and supporting local businesses – community rail at its best.



UK COMMUNITY RAIL

Community rail is all about linking the community to its railway through stations, encouraging people to use the train and spend their money locally. And it isn't just Mid Cheshire that undertakes community rail, the initiative is UK wide so part of what Mid Cheshire CRP does is to be an ambassador for community rail, showcase good practice and network with other CRPs and station groups to learn how to be even more innovative and creative.

In 2016 the CRP has been out to visit partners and local groups talking about community rail and encouraging them to get involved. We were invited by Great Western Railway (GWR) to the South West to learn about good practice in community rail at their Community Rail Conference and we spent time with a GWR colleague who came to see how we do things in Cheshire. We have spoken to public transport colleagues about how community rail ways of working might be applied to bus services and we have been to Yorkshire to share our experiences with the Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group at their AGM.

We also undertook an interesting project with CrossCountry Trains and Arriva Train Care, working with colleagues on a leadership course, talking to them about community rail and mentoring them as they took part in the Queen's birthday celebrations at Manchester Piccadilly.



In 2016 our Community Rail Partnership Officer became a member of the Board of ACoRP, the Association of Community Rail Partnerships. Her particular area of interest on the Board is station friends and station adoption and over the year she has attended board meetings, helped to recruit new staff and is helping ACoRP move forward taking community rail to the next level.

2017

In the coming months we look forward to lots of station friends activity, more volunteer days at stations and marketing the Line – 'Marvellous Days Out' either along the Line or from the Line. Look out for the iconic travel posters coming to a station near you!

Check out our website too, it is now mobile friendly and contains lots of useful information to help people plan a day out by train www.midcheshirerail.org.uk.

We are always looking for volunteers to join in with community rail activities – please get in touch if you are interested.

And as ever a HUGE THANK YOU TO volunteers, residents, partners, CRP stakeholders, councillors, councils, passengers, Network Rail and Northern who support us and help us make a difference.

Sally Buttifant

Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership Officer, **Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership**

ACoRP Community Rail Awards 2015 - Overall Winner Award: 'Outstanding

Delivery of the Community Rail Strategy'

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Visit: <http://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk>

Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership Partners:

- Cheshire Association of Local Councils (CHALC),
- Cheshire East,
- Cheshire West & Chester (accountable body),
- The Forestry Commission,
- Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM),
- Knutsford Town Council,
- Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association,
- Northern Rail,
- Northwich Town Council,
- Stockport Council & Trafford Council.