

Renowned for its scenery and heritage structures including Ribbleshead Viaduct, the possibility of running 'Scenic Trains' on the S&C with bespoke interiors has been suggested to optimise the passenger experience. PAUL HUNTER.

# New connections for the S&C?

**C**onnectivity. Whether commuting for work or education, travelling for business or leisure purposes, or just for the ever-changing view through the carriage window, the railway is all about connectivity.

Which immediately brings us to the iconic Settle-Carlisle Line. World-renowned for its amazing scenery and engineering endeavour, it is also arguably the nation's most undervalued inter-city railway line.

It is properly identified as the Leeds-Settle-Carlisle line, connecting Leeds and Carlisle. But while the number of daily weekday trains between the northern cities rises from seven to eight with the May 2018 timetable change (plus the short evening working to/from Ribbleshead, and six round trips on Sundays), that number is still well short of fully exploiting the line's potential.

Freight traffic has declined recently, especially with the drop in imported coal heading for Yorkshire power stations. And despite the considerable engineering and signalling work carried out this century, this

**The Settle-Carlisle Line's two main support groups are pursuing a new vision for the iconic line's services in the 2020s. STEVE BROADBENT reports**

invaluable national asset remains seriously underused, with the current Northern franchise contract offering no further enhancement before the mid-2020s.

The Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company (DevCo) and the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line (FoSCL) are leading the work on behalf of S&C organisations to prepare a vision for future services on the line, with discussions taking place with key people and organisations in the rail industry. However, it is unlikely that any major enhancement can be introduced before the end of 2021, simply because elsewhere in the north of England major timetable changes are planned for May 2018 and in 2020. The industry has only so much capacity, and funds, to evaluate and plan for change.

The S&C was built as the Midland Railway's

main line from London St Pancras to the East Midlands, Leeds, Carlisle and on to Glasgow. Trains such as the 'Thames Clyde Express' ran the full length of the route until the through service was finally withdrawn in 1976.

Today, apart from one working from Sheffield and returning to Nottingham on Sundays, franchised passenger trains run only between Leeds and Carlisle. Most stop at all intermediate stations north of Skipton - 17 stops in all, 112.9 miles, around 260 minutes. Capacity is available for more passenger services, and there is always debate among supporters and enthusiasts regarding through services - whether from London or the Midlands, whether they should again operate beyond Carlisle, and whether some journeys should be faster.

In its *Connecting People: a Strategic Vision for*

*Rail*, published in November 2017 (*RAIL* 839), the Department for Transport makes a series of points which coincidentally are relevant to the S&C's future potential, even though it outwardly concentrates on upgrading existing lines or reopening long-closed ones.

Upgrades and electrification are extremely expensive, take many years to implement, and are at severe risk of ever-changing government transport and economic policies. Reopening closed lines involves an almost perverse planning process and hugely complicated design evaluations that result in progress which makes a snail look supersonic, even once a scheme has the compulsory local authority support - witness East West Rail, and

the reopenings at Tavistock, Portishead and Ashington.

Today's policy of spending untold (and probably unaffordable) billions on what the media has dubbed 'reversing Beeching' can therefore be a very long-term and fragile ambition, likely to be reversed and re-reversed by successive Transport Secretaries.

And yet the nation's need for economic growth, improved social inclusion, new houses and an end to the North-South divide remain ever-pressing problems. Enter the S&C - a fully functional, high-quality, inter-city railway, requiring zero capital expenditure for it to play its full part in addressing the issues of the areas it serves or could serve

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(including Carlisle, Leeds, East Lancashire and Manchester, as well as the communities of the Yorkshire Dales).

So, what do DevCo and the Friends look for to make better use of the assets, meet the DfT's aims, and support the line's diverse communities?

The key aspect of the S&C's support groups' four aims is connectivity. The line's communities need better connections to (and onwards from) Leeds, Carlisle and Manchester - for business, education, social, domestic, commuting and tourism needs, in order to promote economic growth as well as social mobility and inclusion. In this post-industrial internet age, the continuing economic

health and viability of market towns and rural areas is a crucial national issue, many aspects of which can be best (and sometimes only) addressed by the railway. The Borders Railway, reopened in 2015 between Edinburgh and Tweedbank, is an excellent example of the economic benefits a railway service brings to rural areas.

Good connectivity between the ➔



Class 158s could be complemented by short-formed HSTs on the S&C from as early as 2020, or perhaps locomotive-hauled Mk 4 coaches displaced by IEPs. STUART PETCH.

→ existing railway network and HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail (aka HS3) at both Leeds and Manchester is a key aim of transport authorities in the north of England, an ambition which should also include the S&C. HS2/NPR and the Northern Powerhouse concept in general will not fulfil their potential without proper links to/from every rail corridor at their stations. The S&C corridor would also be better served if some trains ran to Manchester Airport, which would open up the Yorkshire Dales to increased inbound tourism and business travel.

Aim One would be more frequent Leeds-Carlisle services, with Aim Two a step-change in service quality and capacity.

The line is served predominantly by two-car, three-car or four-car Class 158 diesel multiple units. Over 25 years old, these unattractive



trains do not match the expectations of business people or tourists in many regards, even when refurbished.

There is also no certainty on how many carriages will be on a particular service, which means that the highly lucrative group travel party market cannot be properly exploited by DevCo's marketing team. In 2014 these group bookings, handled by DevCo for Northern Rail, brought the train operator income of over £220,000. DevCo estimates that there is an untapped demand for group travel of some 35,000 passengers a year, or over £500,000 of income.

Even the improved Leeds-Carlisle service operating from May 2018 is still insufficient to cater for the line's various markets, and a

clock-face, two-hourly service is the basic aim. Carlisle remains poorly served, especially in the mornings, and commuting into both cities from the intermediate stations is an important issue, so timings, reliability and quality are factors. There is growing travel along the S&C to/from Scotland, so good connections at Carlisle is also an ambition.

The Northern franchise is introducing the Northern Connect brand on 12 routes by the end of 2019. According to the operator's website, this will be a "fast, comfortable, inter-urban network (which) connects all cities and towns with a population over 85,000 (unless served by other franchise)", a demarcation which conveniently puts Carlisle just below the cut-off point. The city has a population of under 80,000, but the Carlisle District has over 100,000 inhabitants.

Newcastle-Carlisle will have a half-hourly



## Leeds-Settle- Carlisle

### Key

..... Tunnel

— Network Rail

● Station

For clarity some lines/stations are omitted

Diagrammatic map not to scale

### Four aims for Settle-Carlisle

■ **1:** Frequency of Leeds-Settle-Carlisle services increased to be broadly two-hourly, with clock-face departures from either end of the line.

■ **2:** The trains on this service to be of better quality and increased capacity, and to be consistent on a day-to-day basis, giving adequate seats to allow the line to be marketed with confidence - particularly to high-value tour operators.

■ **3:** A revived, high-quality Leeds-Settle-Carlisle-Glasgow Central service, providing the shortest and fastest route from Leeds and the Aire Valley to Motherwell and Glasgow, with trains suited to both tourists and business travellers.

■ **4:** A regular passenger service between Clitheroe and Hellifield connecting Lancashire and Manchester with the S&C. This can be achieved by a variety of services options, including: a Manchester-Carlisle service via the S&C; an extension of the Manchester-Clitheroe service to Hellifield; or a service operating from Blackburn/Blackpool/Preston to Hellifield or beyond.



Northern Connect service with refurbished trains, while Liverpool and Manchester will get brand new electric trains (operated by TransPennine Express) to Carlisle and Scotland, so why no improvement of this nature for the S&C? Even if a more suitable type of train cannot be deployed, at least having the Northern Connect branding would help marketing. When Northern Connect was announced the hope was to expand its coverage later in the franchise, so why should the S&C not be Line 13?

Some aspects of Aims One and Two could be achieved through Aims Three or Four.

Aim Three is a direct Leeds-Glasgow service via Settle and Carlisle. For many decades there was a direct service from London St Pancras (later Nottingham) to Leeds and thence to Glasgow via the S&C, so it is a traditional route for rail traffic, and in the past few years a continuing increase in the number of passengers travelling to/from Scotland has been noticed. The S&C is also the shortest route between Leeds and Glasgow, it offers the

cheapest walk-on fares, and journey times are very close to (and sometimes better than) the route via Newcastle.

However, finding this information on National Rail Enquiries takes some skill and dedication - the benefits of travelling by the S&C are not obvious to a newcomer to rail travel (see panel, page 48). (A tip: to see trains and fares via the S&C, specify 'via Settle' under Edit journey >>Advanced search.)

Four high-quality, limited-stop, daily Leeds-Carlisle-Glasgow trains in each direction, in addition to the continuing Leeds-Carlisle service, would give an hourly service along the line for part of the day.

In Scotland, the route via Carstairs and Motherwell is favoured, as it is faster than that via Dumfries. In November 2017, Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced that studies are under way as a prelude to reducing rail journey times between Carstairs and Glasgow, and the Scottish Government favours more Anglo-Scottish rail services. However, this is not a devolved matter and

**The Settle-Carlisle Line is the world's 'most undervalued' inter-city route with more services needed to fulfil its potential, argues Steve Broadbent. SETTLE-CARLISLE RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT COMPANY.**

the decision rests with the Department for Transport in London.

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) considers such a Glasgow service to be a "connectivity gap" in rail services from Leeds. In February 2017, its Transport Committee was told: "This service could potentially represent good use for high-performance bi-mode trains... to provide a step change in connectivity... services could run through from the East Midlands."

A short initial business case study carried out for the WYCA by the WSP consultancy in 2013-14 indicates that an extension of Leeds-Carlisle services to Glasgow, giving basically a two-hourly service, could well generate significant revenue - potentially sufficient to cover operating costs, depending on the route and rolling stock adopted. Trains could travel via either Dumfries or Carstairs, and the rolling stock considered were Classes 158, '180' and '185'. While positive benefit:cost ratios are shown, the report does not consider wider social and economic benefits, which should further improve the case.

But it is perhaps more pragmatic that a Leeds-Carlisle-Glasgow service should be in addition to (rather than an extension of), the existing Leeds-Carlisle trains. And without any further evaluation having been done, a high-quality, limited stop service (with the

**“ As well as the local economic growth and community benefits it brings, the line is an important rail artery which should be much more accessible as a through Anglo-Scottish route for long-distance passengers. ”**

**John Moorhouse**  
Chairman, Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company



### Leeds-Glasgow travel comparison (December 2017 timetable, weekdays)

**Leeds-Settle-Carlisle-Glasgow - 215 miles**  
Present, with change at Carlisle: 5 trains northbound, journey time 250-267 mins, one at 300 mins; 7 trains southbound, journey time 238-268 mins.  
Future, with a direct service: a journey time of 210-220 mins should be possible.

**Leeds-York-Newcastle-Edinburgh-Glasgow - 284 miles.**  
Trains operate broadly every two hours: 6 trains northbound, journey time 244-255 mins; 7 trains southbound, journey time 248-260 mins.

### Typical walk-on return fare, northwards one day, southwards the next:

Via Settle and Carlisle: £59.00 anytime, no peak supplement.  
Via Newcastle and Edinburgh: £125.50 peak, £107.10 off peak.



Studies have shown a strong business case for extending existing services to more southerly destinations, including Manchester. SETTLE-CARLISLE RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT COMPANY.

➔ existing Leeds-Carlisle services retained to serve intermediate stops) is the better solution.

According to Office of Rail and Road statistics published in December 2017, Glasgow Central (32 million passengers handled in 2016-17) is the UK's second busiest station outside London, and Leeds (31 million passengers) ranks third. Surely such large numbers merits a far higher quality and frequency of direct rail services, on a par with Manchester and Liverpool?

Connectivity between West Yorkshire and the Scottish Central Belt would be improved, and tourists from Scotland could more easily access the S&C corridor's market towns and the countryside. While the S&C groups are neutral as to who should operate any new service along the line, the concept here does fit well with ScotRail's commitment to improve services to the seven cities in Scotland. Could Carlisle and Leeds be (an unofficial) eight and nine?

"It now seems incredible that the Settle-Carlisle Line came so close to closure in the 1980s," DevCo Chairman John Moorhouse tells *RAIL*.

"As well as the local economic growth and community benefits it brings, the line is an important rail artery which should be much more accessible as a through Anglo-Scottish route for long-distance passengers. At long last it appears that we are in sight of such an opportunity, but there is much more work to be done to make it a reality."

Finally, Aim Four is a regular passenger service between Clitheroe and Hellifield, connecting northwest England with the S&C. Here there are several options to be

considered, which will be refined as discussions continue.

The 13½-mile double-track railway between Clitheroe and Hellifield line is fully operational but rarely used. The only passenger services are Summer Sunday Dales Rail services from Blackpool to Carlisle, and occasional private charter trains. There have been frequent calls in recent years for daily passenger services to be reinstated, as such trains would offer a link from the Blackburn-Clitheroe 'Ribble Valley' line towards Carlisle and Leeds.

A business case study published by FoSCL in 2014 favoured extending existing Manchester-Blackburn/Clitheroe services through to Carlisle, probably serving principal stations en route, and with four services each way each day. No capital expenditure or extra paths into Manchester would be needed, and the study shows a very positive business case and an excellent return on investment.

Such a service would link parts of northwest England such as Bolton (connections in the Wigan/Southport direction and to Manchester Airport) and Blackburn (connections towards Preston and Blackpool) with market towns and tourist areas along the S&C.

Further analysis might show that a starting point other than Manchester is preferable - for example, Blackburn or Preston. Indeed, extending the Manchester-Clitheroe service only to Hellifield is itself an attractive option - turnround at Settle Junction is possible, and it believed that reversing at Hellifield station could be done if modest signalling improvements were made.

Whatever the chosen option, services could be phased in as patronage develops - perhaps

initially operating at weekends and during school summer holidays to aid tourism to the Settle-Carlisle corridor and shoppers going to Manchester. Later, weekday services would help develop commuting and business travel into both Manchester and Carlisle. Also, through trains could be interleaved with the Leeds-Carlisle service to provide a regular timetable between Settle and Carlisle.

The route's full potential would be realised by eventually running trains to/from Manchester Airport - the third busiest airport in the UK by passenger numbers, with more than 25 million passengers in 2016. The ability to offer a direct rail service from the Airport to

Settle and beyond would undoubtedly attract inbound overseas tourists, a market which DevCo is well placed to exploit through the internet and social media.

Even then, such a phased start-up ignores the considerable leisure market on weekdays throughout the year, as well as the demand for business and student travel. Manchester and the Settle-Carlisle corridor towns would all benefit from the ability of high-salary professionals to commute from S&C stations.

The Ribble Valley Line (the line between Blackburn and Clitheroe, itself scenically attractive) is also well-supported by a Community Rail Partnership and a Rail User Group. Both have given their support to extra services which would provide further travel options for their members.

In terms of new rolling stock to serve increased tourism, throughout the UK significant numbers of diesel-powered trains are being cascaded as a result of electrification or the introduction of new-build units.

Where these displaced trains will end up is not known ahead of contract signatures, but there are some interesting possibilities which could help bring a step-change to the quality of Settle-Carlisle Line services.

At present, there are no plans to replace the line's Class 158s during the present Northern franchise. But even if these trains were refurbished, aspects such as the very cramped area around the doors make them unsuitable for people with bicycles, rucksacks or bags, with limited space for prams and wheelchairs. As with any railway, the S&C's trains need to reflect the market they serve.

The British railway network makes little

## “ The Settle-Carlisle Line is very much a jewel in the crown of the Northern network. ”

David Hoggarth,  
Director, Rail North

attempt to cater for the demands of the ever-increasing number of both domestic and overseas tourists. The tourist-orientated lines in Norway and Switzerland are excellent examples of what can be accomplished, and of the boost that trainloads of tourists bring to local economies.

Apart from serving local communities and as an inter-city route, the S&C is also renowned internationally for its scenery and heritage. Its ability to exploit this lucrative (if demanding) market would be enhanced if the trains were configured to maximise passengers' enjoyment of the journey. A bespoke interior, such as that proposed in the 'Scenic Trains' initiative made by train leasing company Angel Trains (*RAIL* 783), would be ideal as part of a Northern Connect upgrade.

For the mainly all-stations services between Leeds and Carlisle, and from Manchester/Lancashire to Hellifield/Carlisle, displaced three-car Class 170s or '185s' would offer a step-change. If the '185s' are maintained at the York depot, an occasional York-Leeds-Carlisle service would be an added bonus.

Four possibilities for a Leeds-Carlisle-Glasgow service come readily to mind. Short-formed High Speed Trains displaced

by electrification could become available very quickly, to be replaced by sets modified to comply with disability regulations (DDA) from January 2020. Mk 4 carriages being displaced by Intercity Express Programme trains from East Coast services later this year are already DDA-compliant, although a suitable locomotive to haul them, capable of over 100mph north of Carlisle, would be required. These two options would give an excellent passenger environment, and could attract a following from enthusiasts.

First Hull Trains' Class 180s come off-lease next year and would fit the role well, while new-build Hitachi Class 802 bi-mode trains, as ordered by both Hull Trains and TransPennine Express, would bring real quality to the route from (say) 2021. ■

### Conclusion

Additional rail services along the S&C, offering high-quality journeys and new destinations, will help maintain the vibrancy of (and economic activity in) the market towns and rural areas along the corridor, improving the prosperity and reducing the social deprivation of its residents. It will also provide the health and well-being benefits of the countryside to inbound tourists, whether from the rest of the UK or overseas.

Such additional services will also improve the connectivity between Leeds, Manchester, the S&C corridor, Carlisle and Glasgow - a key factor in generating economic growth.

It is early days for this joint DevCo/Friends' campaign for new and improved services, but it has already met with favourable comment.

The last word goes to Rail North Director David Hoggarth: "The Settle-Carlisle Line is very much a jewel in the crown of the Northern network, some of Rail North's members having been actively involved in saving the line from closure in the 1980s.

"In January 2018 Rail North published a Draft for Consultation of its updated Long-Term Rail Strategy, setting out aspirations for creating a world-class railway by 2050, including recognising the importance of tourism.

"While the detail is subject to further development and business cases, aspirations for higher service frequencies and links to new destinations (such as Glasgow) could provide new opportunities for the next phase in the development of the route."

### About the author

Steve Broadbent, Contributing Writer

Steve is a highly experienced transport writer with long roots in both railways and aviation. He founded SELRAP to campaign for the re-opening of the Skipton-Colne Line.



A1 60163 *Tornado* crosses Ribbleshead Viaduct, bound for Settle, on February 15 2017 as part of Northern Rail's Plandampf event with DB Cargo. The line is a popular route for tourists. PAUL HUNTER.

