



INTRODUCTION

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for passengers and freight. Railfuture is a voluntary group representing rail users, with 20,000 affiliated and individual members. It is not affiliated to or funded by train companies, political parties or trade unions. Railfuture North East Branch (RFNE) has an area of interest covering the counties of Northumberland and Durham, the former county of Cleveland and the Tyne and Wear metropolitan area, together with the cross-border extensions of railway lines into Carlisle and Whitby. This includes the East Coast Main line from Northallerton to the Scottish Border. The group is not in a position, and does not have the expertise, to provide costing information for the various proposals made.

When considering connectivity to HS2 and other parts of the National Infrastructure to the south of this region, it is worth mentioning that the connection is entirely dependent on the 30 mile stretch of railway, albeit 4 track, between Northallerton and York. The only current alternative is via Carlisle, which would carry such a distance penalty as to be impractical. This means that in the event of major disruption on this line, the North East would be in a similar situation to the area west of Exeter when the sea defences at Dawlish were breached in February 2014. Whilst not in our area, we question whether an examination of reinstating the 25 mile railway between Harrogate and Northallerton, via Ripon, would be worthwhile.

RFNE CAMPAIGNS

RFNE has a particular interest, along with others including the local Rail User Groups, in 7 campaigns:

1. **Providing Faster Journeys Teesside to Tyneside** by running passenger services from Middlesbrough, Thornaby and Stockton via the 10 mile Stillington freight only line and then via the East Coast Main Line to Newcastle. Our aim is to reduce overall journey time on direct train between Middlesbrough to Newcastle from 1 hour 15 minutes to 55 minutes and so open up many additional job opportunities to the residents of both areas
2. Building a **New Station at Ferryhill** at the point where the Stillington freight line joins the East Coast Main Line. The station could be served by either (i) The existing TransPennine Express services, (ii) a new local service from Darlington to Newcastle via the either direct via the ECML or via the Leamside Line, or (iii) The new Teesside – Tyneside service via the Stillington freight line. Our aim is to extend rail access to a substantial part of the former Durham Coalfield that suffers from poor links to both Tyneside and Teesside. There are sizeable settlements within 10 miles: Bishop Auckland, Shildon, Spennymoor, Sedgefield, and Newton Aycliffe, which could benefit from a “Park and ride” facility here, particularly for commuting into the regional capital of Newcastle. The existing train service from some of these settlements runs south to Darlington and is unattractive for commuting to stations to the north.
3. **Reopening the rail line from Ferryhill to Pelaw** (the Leamside Line) with the aim of providing services that will improve local connections and open new opportunities to people living in this part of County Durham, as well as providing relief for congestion on the existing line through Durham.

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To be the number one advocate for the railway and rail users.

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4. Construct a new **Station at Team Valley** where ECML passes through Team Valley near the site of the former Low Fell station. The station could be served by a new local service from York or Darlington to Newcastle via the ECML, the existing TransPennine Express services, the new Teesside – Tyneside service via the Stillington freight line, or by an extension of the proposed local service (see below) from Northumberland. This proposal is particularly relevant because the roads into Newcastle from the south are congested at peak times and there are air quality issues to the extent that the City Council is considering charging arrangements to help limit the traffic flow
5. **New Station at Gilsland** aimed at both improving links to local towns for the residents of the area and opening up the area to a new and greener form of tourism.
6. Providing a **New Rail Service from Newcastle to Ashington** by re-introducing passenger services on the current freight line between Newcastle and Ashington. Utilising the existing privately owned freight line between Ashington and Butterwell Junction, and adding a north to east curve at Butterwell, would also allow this route to create a new freight and diversionary route from the ECML between Benton and Butterwell junctions
7. Developing a **North of Morpeth Local Service** by extending local Newcastle – Morpeth services to Berwick offering an hourly service calling at all stations, possibly linking to similar service from Berwick to Edinburgh. This service need not terminate in Newcastle and could be extended to serve Team Valley and areas in County Durham that are on electrified lines.

Further details of our proposals and the associated campaigns can be found on the Railfuture Northeast pages of the Railfuture website at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/North+East+Branch>

In addition to these campaigns we also would like to see improvements to services on:

1. The **Durham Coast Line** with improved frequencies between Teesside, Wearside and Tyneside as well introduction of further inter-city services.
2. The **Bishop Auckland Line** with improved frequencies and the service extended into Weardale.
3. The **Esk Valley line** with both improved frequencies and improvement to the ability of the North York Moors Railway to access the section from Grosmont to Whitby.
4. The **Tyne Valley Line** with a more regular stopping pattern and reinstatement of the former station at Gilsland.

As can be seen from these brief descriptions each of these proposals have their own value to local residents. However, implementation of a number of these proposals together have would further strategic advantages. It is now widely accepted that the East Coast Main Line faces problems of both capacity and resilience between Northallerton and to the North of Newcastle. Whilst some of these problems come from speed restrictions caused by junctions the main problem arises from the fact that this particular section of the line is only dual tracked. We could achieve what would be effectively an additional two tracks over a very congested stretch of main line if:

- 1 Improvements were made to the capacity of the line from Northallerton to Stockton and the Stillington Line (ensuring that they can both be used by modern container traffic)
- 2 The Leamside Line was rebuilt
- 3 The link between Ashington and the ECML was re-established along with the new curve at Butterwell junction.

Overall capacity would be improved by judicious re-routing of some passenger and freight services, resilience would be improved by the creation of a series of diversionary routes, and opportunities would be opened up for new local passenger services.

INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION TO OUR CAMPAIGNS

1. East Coast Main Line

The line within our area of interest is a 2 track line with major stations at Darlington, where the service from Bishop Auckland to Saltburn crosses, and Newcastle, simpler ones at Northallerton, Durham, Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick and unstaffed halts at Chester-le-Street, Manors, Cramlington, Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington and Chathill. The line is electrified and most of it is passed for speeds of 100 – 125 mile/hour. South of Newcastle it carries 6 long distance high speed services (LDHS) each way per hour, with 4 of these continuing to Edinburgh or beyond. From December 2021, there are plans for an additional LDHS service every hour to Newcastle and an Open Access service running 5 times per day between London and Edinburgh calling, in this region, at Newcastle and Morpeth only. There are occasional local services using the line northbound between Darlington and Newcastle in the morning peak and 1 southbound in the late evening. There is an hourly local service between Newcastle and Morpeth, with 1 morning and 1 evening train extended to Chathill then running north to Belford to turn in the loop there.

Problems: It is increasingly difficult to schedule other passenger or freight services in this corridor, which is essentially “full”. There are aspirations for a more regular local service serving stations between Newcastle and Berwick, for which there is a study currently underway. Presently, Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick stations have a service to both Newcastle and Edinburgh, but the calling pattern of trains means that connectivity between them can be problematic.

A temporary problem is that the power supply north of Chathill is insufficient for the amount of traffic now using the line, this means that certain bi-mode trains are having to use diesel traction on this section, reducing performance and increasing carbon emissions. North of Newcastle, capacity is constrained by the signalling system having been renewed in the late 1980s with 3- aspect replacing 4- aspect signals. Once ETCS has proved itself between London and Peterborough, perhaps this should be the next stretch of line so treated.

Enhancements:

The main issue here is to improve capacity. Rather than attempting to add two additional lines on the existing ECML alignment we propose the development of a ‘parallel’ route making use of either existing or restored lines between Northallerton and Widdrington. In effect we propose building a “bypass” – with the additional advantage of opening up the possibility (re)opening a number of local stations. In addition, we propose a number of ‘small’ projects aimed at facilitating new services. These include improvements to the various loop lines or, in a few areas, slow lines that generally have entry and exit speeds of 30 mile/hour or less. If these connections were improved to permit (say) 45 mile/hour over them, the time required for a 775 metre long freight train to enter/exit the loop could be reduced by around a minute thus easing pathing for faster trains.

A further possibility to be considered is the diversion of 1 train/hour to serve the Durham Coast route on its way to Newcastle.

At Ferryhill, there are separate slow lines, east of the fast lines, for 2 miles. There is adequate space on railway owned land to create the station and parking area beside these lines. The connections at both end of the slow lines is currently 30 mile/hour, if these could be realigned for (say) 60 mile/hour then the pathing of trains would be easier.

Darlington station here lies to the west of the main running lines, meaning that southbound services calling here have to cross over the route of non-stopping northbound services twice. This has not, hitherto been a great issue, as almost all trains stop here, but it will become so as further services are introduced. Additionally, services from the Saltburn direction have conflicting moves with main line services. A masterplan has been conceived, creating additional platforms to the east of the main lines into which Saltburn line services would run and, in a 2nd phase, a platform for southbound main line services.

A station at Low Fell would require a former chord at Dunston to be reinstated, and electrified, to give access from the slow lines situated to the north west of the main lines to the Tyne Valley line which

passes underneath and emerges to the south east of them. This would also give grade separated access from Tyne Yard to the railway towards Sunderland and, if reinstated, the Leamside line.

2. Northallerton – Teesside - Ferryhill

Northallerton is the northern end of a continuous 4 track railway from York, 30 miles to the south, and is the junction for through services to the Teesside conurbation. There is one intermediate station at Yarm. At present there is an hourly passenger service running from Manchester Airport to Redcar Central which leaves the main line here as well as an open access service from Kings Cross to Sunderland which runs 5 times per day with agreement for a 6th daily service. Northbound trains cross the southbound main line on the level. From December 2021, there is to be an additional 2 hourly Kings Cross to Middlesbrough service using this route, which also carries significant freight traffic, though that is able to leave the main line at Longlands Junction, 1 mile 20 chains to the south, and cross under the main line. There a little used railway from Norton South Junction, north of Stockton to Ferryhill, on the ECML, 13 miles north of Darlington. If this line is brought to a standard that will permit 75 mile/hour running, it will, together with the railway running north east from Northallerton, provide an alternative route for freight traffic, relieving congestion on the line through Darlington. The additional distance is only 4 miles 17 chains. The line from Norton South Junction to Ferryhill combined with the existing railway north from there to Newcastle gives the shortest available journey between the sub regional centre of Middlesbrough and the regional capital of Newcastle. The route this way is 42 miles, against 47 miles via Sunderland and 51 miles via Darlington. As matters currently stand, it is the only route which can connect these 2 centres in under 1 hour. It would also provide additional connectivity between Teesside and Durham.

Problems: The line is unable to carry the tallest commonly used containers on standard wagons, with the result that container services from Teesport to the south have to travel to Darlington and reverse there. The signalling on the section between Northallerton and Eaglescliffe was simplified in response to degradation of the electrical system many years ago, prior to the routing of a regular passenger service that way. Signal sections are longer than the standard found on main lines and this will limit the ultimate capacity of the line. North of Stockton, the 10½ mile section from Norton West to Ferryhill is a single block section, hence only 1 train at a time in each direction can use that line.

The permitted speed is lower than desirable, being generally 70 mile/hour between Northallerton and Eaglescliffe, 60 mile/hour on the sections shared with other routes and 50 passenger/40 freight between Norton and Ferryhill.

Enhancements

It is therefore proposed that work is urgently undertaken to improve this line to W12 loading gauge so that all freight traffic can be routed this way. The works undertaken for this should also provide clearance for any future electrification and for increasing line speed (Currently 70 mile/hour) to at least 75 mile/hour and preferably 90 between Northallerton and Eaglescliffe and 75 mile/hour on to Ferryhill.

The line from Longlands Junction to the Eaglescliffe line has a level crossing with Boroughbride Road, about 50 metres west of Northallerton station. North of this, the line runs adjacent to the station long stay car park. It is suggested that the feasibility of providing platforms on this line should be done as it may well remove junction conflicts from trains calling at the existing platforms, although this is less of a problem for southbound services.

The signalling system should be reviewed to ascertain the feasibility of shortened sections to enhance capacity.

3. Durham Coast Line

This line runs north from Teesside serving the towns of Stockton and Hartlepool together with the city of Sunderland en-route to Newcastle. It serves intermediate stations at Billingham, Seaton Carew and Seaham with a Park and Ride interchange station at Heworth on the south eastern approach to Newcastle. Only Hartlepool and Sunderland are staffed stations. A new station is expected to open at Horden/Peterlee in summer 2020. The line between Sunderland and near Heworth is shared with the Tyne & Wear Metro, which serves several intermediate stations and this section is electrified at 1,500V DC, but there is a planned increase to 6 trains per hour each way.

The normal passenger service is 1 train per hour in each direction, taking between 75 and 80 minutes for the 47 miles between Middlesbrough and Newcastle and calling at all stations except those that are purely "Metro". Most of these services extend beyond Newcastle to Hexham and beyond Middlesbrough to Nunthorpe. There is also an "Open Access" service, operated by Grand Central, from Sunderland to London Kings Cross. This operates 5 times daily, with access agreed for a sixth path. It serves Hartlepool and uses the direct line to Northallerton, via Eaglescliffe, where it also calls. Local authorities along the line are supportive of an hourly long distance franchised service being routed via this line instead of via Durham to provide a greater range of direct services from communities such as Sunderland and Hartlepool. Additionally, there are freight trains serving Port of Tyne and a cement depot at Seaham. At the southern end of the line, there is freight traffic to and from Hartlepool Pipe Mill and Hartlepool Nuclear Power Station. There are also some freight services which use the line as a through route from Tyneside to destinations south of Northallerton.

Problems: The section of track shared with Metro brings problems with pathing the heavy rail services as there are 5 metro services per hour, each way. The current metro trains were built before joint running with heavy rail trains was envisaged and they do not have the same level of crash protection, hence they require special operating arrangements which have an effect on the number of paths available. New metro trains are expected to be introduced in 2023 which will remove this constraint. There are a number of operational hindrances on the line, Hartlepool station is on a tight curve and only has one operational platform, signalling between Hartlepool and Sunderland was recently improved, although there are still some long sections which limit capacity, and line speed is very modest being mainly 60 mile/hour, with 70 permitted between Billingham and Hartlepool and between Sunderland and Heworth, though with intermediate lesser restrictions for curvature. This has a negative effect on journey times and there should be an aspiration to get the overall time for trains between Middlesbrough and Newcastle as close to 1 hour as possible.

Enhancements: Restoration of the second platform at Hartlepool: this would require a new footbridge with provision for disabled access, together with consideration of stepping distance to end doored coaches. This would have a hugely beneficial effect on line capacity.

There is still some mechanical signalling in the Billingham area which limits capacity, replacement of this would also enable easier use of the curve which provides access from the Hartlepool direction onto the Stillington route to Ferryhill. At present Norton East signal box needs to be opened specially if this is to be used. It would shorten the distance for trains from Hartlepool Pipe Mill to destinations further north, these are currently routed via Darlington and take up capacity on the ECML.

Work is urgently required to review line speeds. All passenger trains using the route are capable of at least 75 mile/hour and this should be able to be utilised. For much of the line it is not thought that any work would be required to achieve this, particularly if just for diesel multiple unit trains.

There is an aspiration by stakeholders in the region that the passenger service should be increased to at least 2 trains/hour each way. At this level, the potential for electrification should be examined. Any proposal would need to ensure that Metro can continue to operate between Sunderland and Pelaw. However, the new Metro trains currently on order will have a battery facility which might enable them to still operate if the voltage were to be changed on the shared section of track just over 8 miles long. In addition, there are outline proposals to extend the Metro from its current terminus at South Hylton to run forward to join the Leamside line and then run via Washington to Pelaw where it would re-join the current Metro Line. It is not clear to us if this proposal would also use battery power for all or part

of its route. The issue of use of battery power for both Pelaw to Sunderland and South Hylton to Pelaw could be problematic.

4. Bishop Auckland – Darlington

This line runs North West from Darlington for approximately 11¾ miles. At Bishop Auckland there is an end-on junction with the Weardale Railway, albeit with the two separate stations separated by a 200 – 300 metre walk. It is mainly single track, with just under 4 miles of double track between Heighington and Shildon. There are connections from the line near Heighington into the Hitachi Rail factory and, at Shildon, into the National Railway Museum annex, Locomotion.

The line, which is the subject of a Community Rail Partnership, carries an hourly passenger service, calling at all 4 intermediate stations, and trains continue through Darlington on to Middlesbrough and Saltburn.

Problems: The service is sub-optimal, in that line speed is only 45 mile/hour, meaning that trains take almost exactly 1 hour for the return journey and, hence, occupy both through platforms at Darlington at the same time.

Enhancements: A few years ago the line was wholly relaid with the stated aim of increasing speed to 60 mile/hour. Some track maintenance would probably be required to achieve this now, but such a change, even if only for multiple units, would enable the service in each direction to pass east of Darlington, which would aid train planning at that point. It is understood that, at peak periods, a significant proportion of passengers using this service cross Darlington to stations further east. In addition recent changes in the ownership of the Weardale Railway, and their initial proposals to improve services, make it more important than ever that a single station is shared by both operations.

5. Darlington – Middlesbrough- Saltburn

This line leaves the ECML just south of Darlington and runs east for about 28 miles to Saltburn. The line is double track throughout except for a “Single lead” junction at Darlington, and for the last ½ mile into Saltburn. It is joined at Eaglescliffe by the direct line from Northallerton to Teesside and at Thornaby, by the Durham Coast line. There is a line, used by the Open Access Grand Central service from London to Sunderland, freight and a Sunday stopping service from Darlington to Hartlepool, directly from Eaglescliffe to Stockton which creates a triangular junction. At Middlesbrough, the branch line to Whitby leaves. There are considerable freight facilities near Thornaby and additional goods running lines between there and Whitehouse, east of Middlesbrough. Further goods lines are provided from South Bank, past the entry to Teesport and on to the branch that leads into the Wilton Chemical complex. Just before Saltburn, a branch leaves carrying traffic to Skinningrove rolling mills and Boulby potash mine.

There is significant freight traffic, potash from Boulby to Teesport and a terminal west of Middlesbrough, steel blooms from Scunthorpe to rolling mills at Lackenby and Skinningrove, domestic waste from Merseyside to a power station at Wilton, bulk minerals from wharves at the old Redcar steelworks site to various destinations and container traffic to and from Teesport, the deepest water port on England’s east coast. Apart from a section of absolute block between Redcar Central and Longbeck, the line is TCB throughout.

The passenger service on the line is 2 trains/hour each way between Darlington and Saltburn, with 1 of them being a through service to/from Bishop Auckland. In addition there is an hourly through service from Manchester Airport to Redcar Central, which joins the line at Eaglescliffe. There are 13 intermediate stations, of which Eaglescliffe, Thornaby, Middlesbrough and Redcar Central are staffed for all or part of the day. One station, Teesside Airport currently has only a “Parliamentary” service of 1 eastbound service on a Sunday and another, Redcar British Steel, has been mothballed pending redevelopment of the former steelworks area. The Darlington – Saltburn service serves all other stations although South Bank is only served by alternate trains, journey time is around 50 – 55 minutes. The service from Manchester Airport calls on this line only at Thornaby, Middlesbrough and Redcar Central.

There is a proposal for a through service from London to Middlesbrough in alternate hours from December 2021.

Problems: The line suffers from an overall speed limit of 60 mile/hour (55 westbound between Saltburn and Redcar Central), which is unchanged from steam days over half a century ago, despite great improvements to the track and signalling. This needs to be increased to 75 mile/hour for multiple unit trains and should be achievable without significant cost. There are 2 level crossings in Redcar which cause significant traffic problems and interventions to reduce the periods of closure need to be investigated.

Middlesbrough is a significant source of passenger traffic and the layout there is unfit for the level of service required. Any terminating train arriving from the west that is longer than 4 coaches needs to make a double shunt to reach a siding long enough for it to stable.

Enhancements: Tees Valley Combined Authority has expressed an aspiration for the Darlington – Saltburn service to be increased to 3 trains/hour. At this frequency electrification is surely justified. Such an enhancement would also help in the decarbonisation of freight. A masterplan for Middlesbrough station was developed in 2017 and this needs to be taken forward quickly to provide adequate facilities for terminating trains with a 3rd platform to the north of the existing ones.

6. Tyne Valley Line

The Tyne valley line is an important connecting route approximately 60 miles long between the east and west coast main lines. It has triangular junctions at both ends and, at the western end, also a direct connection onto the line from Carlisle to West Cumbria. There is little or no originating freight traffic on the line, but it does form an important link for some longer freight flows. Within the medium term, there is the likelihood of a new regular flow of deep mined coal from West Cumbria to Teesport, near Redcar. Most of the line is signalled on the Absolute Block system with mechanical signalling, but there are some limited stretches of TCB. The line is the subject of a Community Rail Partnership and the passenger service on the line is currently 2 trains/hour each way from Newcastle to Carlisle with a 3rd serving stations east of Hexham. One of the through trains is limited stop and takes around 80 minutes for the journey. There is a considerable commuter flow of passengers into Newcastle, particularly from Hexham and intermediate stations and all trains serve the important traffic generator of the Metro Centre.

Problems: The line has a limit of 65 mile/hour east of Blenkinsop, near Haltwhistle, and 60 mile/hour west of that, but there are many stretches with lower speed limits. There should be an aspiration to get the overall journey time as close to 1 hour as possible. If traffic increases, the absolute block system may become a hindrance to capacity and renewal should be considered should this become likely, rather than waiting for it to become a problem.

Enhancements: The line would benefit from works to uplift the line speed to 75 mile/hour as much as possible, as part of this consideration should be given to the signalling system to make it fit to accept a moderate increase in traffic.

Reinstatement of the former station at **Gilsland** is also desirable. This would assist in regeneration of the local community, providing better access to both Carlisle and Newcastle, and would greatly increase public transport access to Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site.

7. Middlesbrough – Whitby

The Whitby branch line runs south then east from Middlesbrough. It is single track throughout, with passing loops at Nunthorpe and Glaisdale. Passing is also possible at Battersby, where trains must reverse, with 2 trains in the same platform. There is also a run round loop there, controlled from ground frames at either end. The line is operated on the "No signalman token block" system under the supervision of Nunthorpe signal box, with drivers operating the token machines at Battersby, Glaisdale and Whitby. Maximum line speed is 50 mile/hour between Middlesbrough and Battersby and 45 mile/hour between Battersby and Whitby, although there are many restrictions below those speeds. As far as Nunthorpe, it carries a roughly hourly service of trains that run through to Newcastle or beyond. Between Nunthorpe and Whitby, there are now 6 services/day. At Grosmont, the line has a connection with The North York Moors Railway, a heritage line which operates into Whitby on an Open Access basis. The connection is operated using a ground frame and there is an intermediate token machine so

that a Glaisdale to Whitby token may be obtained. This service also uses a 2nd platform at Whitby, again accessed by a ground frame, like that at Grosmont, it is released by the token.

Problems: Operation of the ground frames at Grosmont and Whitby adds greatly to the time required by NYMR trains and is a major impediment to the aspiration of increasing the Middlesbrough service to 8 trains/day. At present, a single journey from Grosmont to Whitby by a NYMR train requires the Glaisdale to Whitby token for upwards of 30 minutes and a return trip upwards of 70 minutes making pathing of services to/from Middlesbrough problematic.

Enhancements: There needs to be a solution found that will enable trains to access the line at Grosmont from the NYMR and run into the 2nd platform at Whitby without needing to stop to operate the points. There may also need to be a running loop provided in the Sleights area to increase capacity. It is understood that 3rd party funding is available to help.

8. Leamside route – Ferryhill to Heworth:

Until 1872 when the present main line through Durham was opened, the 21 mile Leamside line formed part of the primary route from London to Newcastle. After 1872 it was used mostly for freight and for a local passenger service. Latterly line was used only for freight (mostly coal) and to provide a diversion facility in the event of engineering work or untoward occurrences on the two track East Coast Main Line (ECML) between Ferryhill and Newcastle.

The route was mothballed by British Rail (BR) in 1991 following completion of ECML electrification on the grounds that the Leamside line would henceforward be superfluous to need.

The Leamside rails were finally removed about 12 years ago, but the full track bed remains “in tact”. There is currently an agreement between Durham County Council and the other two authorities through whose areas the route goes that prohibits any developments that might impede eventual railway re-opening.

In the period after closure in 1991, local support for the line’s reinstatement began to develop. Some MP’s, Durham County Council, the NE Chamber of Commerce and NEXUS (owners of Tyne and Wear METRO) were among those advocating for Leamside and, in its Network Management Statement for 1999 Railtrack, the private company created in 1994 to assume responsibility for the track and signals of the newly privatised railway, a plan was included for Leamside reinstatement. Railtrack’s rationale was:-

- That the volume of rail traffic was rising (and likely to continue to do so)
- Capacity issues on the ECML between Northallerton and Newcastle were emerging
- The need to separate slow moving freight trains from fast passenger trains was becoming more apparent
- The desirability of reinstating Leamside as a suitable diversion for ECML between Ferryhill and Newcastle was emphasised
- The opportunity to develop a new pattern of local train services based on Leamside so as to enhance area connectivity was highlighted as a significant attraction for progressing re-opening.

In relation to the proposal for local services it is of note that Railtrack made an agreement with Durham County Council whereby the Council would assume responsibility for developing a large Parkway Station facility on Leamside at Belmont, near Durham, and possibly a new station at Ferryhill as well.

Early in 2002 Railtrack was declared insolvent and the Government had to step in with a new (state owned) company, Network Rail, to take over. In the event Network Rail was obliged to curtail many of Railtrack’s expansion and renewal ambitions including the Leamside scheme. Money earmarked for it was lost.

Interest in and hopes for Leamside reinstatement, have, however, remained on the North East agenda since 2002. An important Feasibility Study undertaken by Faber Maunsell on behalf of NEXUS was published in January 2008. This advised that reopening was feasible, that the best economic option was to reopen the full 21 miles, that its diversionary potential and its ability to carry freight (two factors underpinning the Railtrack decision to reinstate) provided operational advantages for the wider

rail system in the North East. The Study also found that reopening would assist economic regeneration in the NE region.

Since then NEXUS has begun to push hard for using the Durham Belmont to Pelaw section of Leamside for expansion of METRO services. NEXUS also wants to include rail provision for Washington, a major settlement of near 60,000 people, but currently lacking any connection to the national rail system. In addition to NEXUS and Durham County Council, support for Leamside reinstatement currently comes from the North East LEP, NE Chamber of Commerce, the NE (North of Tyne) Combined Authority and Transport for the North (TfN).

In terms of the engineering required for reinstatement, the route is, and has been protected. It is understood to still be a "railway" for planning purposes and to still belong to Network Rail. The absence of track should ease the task of making good any defects in the foundations of the line. The route has a generally good alignment and most of it could be made suitable for speeds of 75 mph or more. It's most notable engineering feature is the single track Victoria Viaduct which soars high above the River Wear close to Washington.

It is proposed that a passenger station would be provided at Belmont, near Durham and adjacent to a large park and ride facility currently used for bus transport into Durham, but which is capable of dual purposing and enlarging. Platforms here should be of sufficient length to accommodate ten car passenger trains since when any diversions of long distance trains from ECML were operating passengers making for Durham would have to alight at Belmont.

The importance of Leamside being able to serve Washington would clearly require station provision there as well. The nature of this, however, will depend on what inter-play there might be between METRO and heavy rail services when the final design of service patterns is drawn up. In the longer term stations at Chilton Moor (Black Boy Bridge) and at Penshaw (possibly a P & R facility where the line crosses A182) might be needed in respect of the 'local' passenger services.

The route had 4 level crossings, which would need investment to replace with over- or under-bridges. The route should be, at the very least, developed with passive provision for future electrification, but it would probably make sense to electrify it from the outset when the work could be done without disrupting a working railway. Any extension of the METRO, running on a different voltage, would be able to make use of the battery facility specified for the new stock now on order.

The route runs close to the Nissan factory and there should be the opportunity for modal shift of some freight traffic, both supplies and finished vehicles from road to rail thus assisting in decarbonisation. If it is possible to construct a south to east curve where the route joins the Newcastle to Sunderland part of the Durham Coast line, then traffic to and from the Port of Tyne could be routed this way, saving congestion on both the Durham Coast route and the ECML.

It is the view of Railfuture North East that the full 21 miles of Leamside should be reopened as recommended in the 2008 Feasibility Study. No matter how little or how much METRO services might utilise the line, the economic case for Leamside is enhanced if it provides a through facility from Ferryhill to Pelaw and Heworth (on the Durham Coast Line) so as to cater for both passenger train diversions and for routing of through freight. Incidentally, we say that the freight loading gauge should be W12.

We would further emphasise the diversionary facility as being an important safeguard in respect of the resilience factors on the ECML section between Ferryhill and Newcastle which boasts at least four major viaducts and several significant embankments. In the event of a major structural failure in any of these there is effectively no suitable diversionary route currently available capable of handling the ECML's normal volume of traffic on the Ferryhill to Newcastle axis. The Durham Coast Line patently cannot cope with major diversionary demands from ECML whether as a result of engineering work or on account of unexpected blockages. In reality the Coast Line can only deal with a small proportion of diverted traffic so that inevitably bus substitution has to operate whenever ECML closures occur. Railfuture North East contends that the case for early Leamside reinstatement is overwhelmingly strong and would therefore urge NIC to include this in its strategic plans for enhancement of rail in the North, and the North East in particular.

In closing we put on record our awareness that mention has been made within the recent past of using the southern end of Leamside as part of an eastern ECML by-pass of Durham City area. Aim would be to provide a faster transit through the area which is regarded as necessary so as to capitalise on journey time savings which will be achieved when HS2 reaches Church Fenton (from London). Even if the Durham City eastern by-pass comes to fruition which would entail high speed trains travelling from Ferryhill on the Leamside alignment rejoining ECML north of Durham near to Chester-le-Street, this would not preclude local heavy rail passenger trains, or METRO's or freight trains utilising the same Leamside track as far as Belmont and thereafter traversing the 'traditional' Leamside route through to Pelaw and the Coast Line.

9. Ashington, Blyth and Tyne (a.k.a The Northumberland Line)

Proposals are currently being developed to reintroduce a passenger service on the existing 20 mile freight line serving the South East Northumberland settlements in the Blyth and Ashington areas. It is the subject of current studies which are evaluating a service from Newcastle to Ashington with intermediate stations at Northumberland Park, Seaton Delaval, Newsham, Bebside, Bedlington, Ashington and, possibly, Woodhorn. The line has the potential to dramatically assist the economic regeneration of the area by creating improved access to jobs at Cobalt and in Newcastle. Plans to reintroduce passenger services seem to be well advanced even if the final funding stream is not, as at May 2020, yet certain.

In possible subsequent developments, the formation exists for the line to be extended into the coastal settlement of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, which would require a little over 1 Km of new construction. There is also the possibility of establishing a passenger connection between Bedlington and Morpeth, making use of the existing freight line. Finally we argue that the line north of Ashington, mainly privately owned and used for movement of coal, should be reconnected to the Ashington Blyth and Tyne so as to complete the "bypass" to the ECML and also open up the possibility of new local services from between Berwick, Alnmouth and Ashington, where Wansbeck General Hospital is situated.