

National Infrastructure Commission

Call for Evidence

To what extent are weaknesses in transport connectivity holding back northern city regions (specifically in terms of jobs, enterprise creation and growth, and housing)?

Submission by the Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group



Chinley, Derbyshire

January 2016

On behalf of the **Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group** we are writing to you in response to point 1 of the *Call for Evidence* published by the National Infrastructure Commission on its website.

The Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group is a community organisation dedicated to improving rail provision for Chinley and the surrounding High Peak area of Derbyshire. Chinley is a station on the mainline Hope Valley Railway between Manchester Piccadilly and Sheffield, and is managed by Northern Rail. The terminuses of the Hope Valley line at Manchester Piccadilly and Sheffield are major national rail hubs, and as regards station usage were ranked 16th and 42nd respectively in the ORR (Office of Rail and Road) 2014/15 data. Of the 17 intermediary stations on this line, Chinley is ranked 7th busiest with well over 100,000 entries and exits annually. Chinley's catchment area for users of the Hope Valley Line extends west to Buxworth and Whaley Bridge, east to Chapel Milton and Chapel-en-le-Frith and south to the Buxton area.

Chinley station also has a well-defined accessibility problem, in that despite its inclusion in the Pan-European T.S.I. standards, both of its platforms are only accessible via a single footbridge with steep steps.

Introduction

The question asked in this consultation is:-

'To what extent are weaknesses in transport connectivity holding back northern city regions (specifically in terms of jobs, enterprise creation and growth, and housing)?'

In January 2013 in the foreword to *A Better Railway for a Better Britain*, David Higgins, then Chairman of Network Rail wrote:

As the entrepreneurs who originally built the railway knew, railways don't just move people and freight, they also generate and spread prosperity – they can create jobs, open up new markets and, ultimately, support the growth of a new balanced economy.

A Better Railway for a Better Britain (2013, p2)

Drawing both on our own local research and experience and research at national level, it is our argument that problems of poor station accessibility are a significant weakness in terms of the efficiency and connectivity of the Hope Valley line between Manchester and Sheffield, and in the wider context of the Northern region, they constitute an example of a transport-related barrier to growth and job creation for communities both within, and along the mainline between, two major Northern

cities. Simply put, if people cannot access the railway, regional growth will be stunted. Chinley is of course not unique in having accessibility problems, but we feel strongly that in the context of this *Call for Evidence*, Chinley provides a case study in 'suppressed volume' of usage. Accessibility improvements to railway stations like Chinley should thus be considered an essential component of any strategy seeking to encourage growth and job creation in cities in the Northern region.

Accessibility as a Challenge and an Opportunity

Across the country, poor accessibility of a significant number of stations is a national issue which has attracted considerable attention and significant central government funding over the last 10 years since the launch of the *Access for All* programme in 2006. The Department for Transport's own commissioned research, compiled by Steer Davies Gleave in July 2015, made the following statement about the wide-ranging social and economic importance of proper accessibility of stations.

Access for All has important social benefits in terms of giving everyone the opportunity to travel by rail. Its benefits also extend well beyond people with a disability, most obviously to passengers with luggage, but also to what we have termed "unencumbered" passengers: in effect, all passengers benefit to some extent.

Impacts of Station Accessibility Improvements,
Recommendations & Conclusions (2015, §7.3)

Network Rail has itself commissioned research – within the Northern region the 'Gateway to Sheffield' project and Manchester Piccadilly station reconstruction provided 50% of the case studies - which shows very clearly that investment in station improvement pays off economically. In a report entitled '*The Value of Station Investment*', compiled for Network Rail by Steer Davies Gleave in 2011, page 10 of the Executive Summary reads:

"Acting as a gateway, stations are a key point of arrival and departure for many business travellers and other visitors, and the quality of the station environment forms part of people's overall perception of a town or city. A high quality, well designed station can improve the image of the location it serves, making it more attractive as a place to live, work and invest."

The Value of Station Investment (2011, p10)

Recent local research

A number of recent studies have highlighted rail-related issues of regional development. The Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group surveyed passengers in

2011, and in the same year Derbyshire County Council carried out a similar survey as part of Stockport Borough Council's public consultation on the development of the A6 corridor. Public consultation also took place in 2014 prior to the re-tendering of the Northern Rail franchise.

The 2011 Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group study surveyed rail users at Chinley station and received responses from 289 travellers. Questions related to frequency of travel to/from Chinley, reasons for using the railway, access to the railway (including disabled access), station facilities, train fares, rolling stock, quality of service provision, delays & inconveniences, improvements that travellers would like to see.

The improvement most often mentioned in responses was improved/more frequent service provision towards both Manchester and Sheffield, followed closely by cheaper fares. Indeed 76% of our respondents stated that they had been obliged to use stations other than Chinley as a result of significant inconveniences at this station, with step-free platform access specifically mentioned by 26 people.

Derbyshire C.C. & Stockport Borough Council Research

Also in 2011, Derbyshire C.C. conducted a passenger survey in the High Peak Area as part of the widespread consultation on the development of A6 corridor commissioned by Stockport Borough Council.

As in the example of the Chinley survey, cheaper fares and improved quality of train service were strongly represented in responses to this survey (29% & 25% of respondents per station respectively), and the issue of station access was also highlighted as regards potential short-term, medium-term and longer-term interventions in the final 2014 summary of the report.

High Peak & Hope Valley Community Rail Partnership Research

The High Peak and Hope Valley Community Partnership (HPHVCRP) is a partnership of Derbyshire C.C., Northern Rail, Transport for Greater Manchester, The Peak District National Park Authority and Cheshire East Council, along with a number community groups which share the common aims of "promoting and enhancing rail transport services in the Hope Valley and High Peak areas of Derbyshire."

On the basis of its consultations and research the HPHVCRP developed a Hope Valley line plan for 2014-16 in which the improved accessibility of stations figured very highly. Point 5.5.3 of the measures to be targeted by December 2016 included the enhancement of pedestrian, cycle and bus access to railway stations along with enhancement to facilities on the station themselves. Access at Chinley station was specifically mentioned in paragraph 8 as the footbridge was deemed to be "in very poor condition".

Barriers to Growth

How do these accessibility problems translate into actual barriers to job creation and growth? It is very difficult to provide exact data as to what extent growth may take off when and if obvious barriers to growth are removed. The 2011 Steer Davies Gleave report however asserted with confidence that:

For Sheffield, the direct employment impact was estimated to be 185 additional jobs, while the increase in employment in areas around station developments following station investment for each of Sheffield and Manchester was estimated to be up to 3,000 jobs. While it is difficult to attribute employment impacts specifically to station investment, there was a clear view among stakeholders that, over the longer-term, improvements delivered by station investment and associated regeneration were key to supporting the overall growth of city centre economies and employment.

The Value of Station Investment (2011, p22)

In 2015 the **Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group** embarked on a further consultation, specifically linked to travellers' views on problems of access to the railway. Using a variety of methods including for the first time, social media, we asked the public to give us their views on access to the railway at Chinley. We also invited comments as to how important the railway was for people's work and leisure. In what follows, from the many comments we have received, we have cited the viewpoints of six individuals taken from a cross section of different age groups. We have removed names from these testimonies for reasons of confidentiality, but we have checked carefully in all cases that the comments are genuine and made in good faith.

Person A

I'm a barrister. I use the railway to commute to my chambers in Manchester, and also to travel to a number of Northern towns and cities for court hearings, conferences with clients etc. I prefer not to drive, so both the railway and other forms of public transport are very important.

Person B

I don't use the station if I have the children as it's too difficult with a pushchair

Person C

I work for an engineering consultancy in Manchester and the railway is absolutely vital for me to get to work!

Person D

I can no longer use the train because of the footbridge and poor access. I have a toddler and am now pregnant. I used to struggle up and over with a toddler but now that I'm pregnant I have had to abandon the idea of going to Manchester on my own

Person E

I often use Chinley station to travel into the Peak District National Park to go walking at the weekends.

Person F

We really do need disabled access at Chinley station for those who struggle with stairs, prams, wheelchairs, luggage etc. The bridge is extremely dated for a thriving village that is growing in population. So many of us use the line for the convenience of travel to Sheffield and Manchester

Chinley is not a station with a very low level of usage. The station is used by many people in its wide catchment area for commuting, (see *Persons A & C*), it facilitates easy travel to Manchester airport, it is popular for leisure and business travel to both Manchester and Sheffield (*Persons E & F*), and it is an important point of visitor access to the Peak District National Park. Additionally, statistics obtained from the Office of Rail and Road data portal show that between 2008/9 and 2014/15 the number of entries and exits at Chinley Station increased from 86,002 to 108,582, a percentage increase of 26%. This is a significant increase in usage, and one can therefore only guess at the additional numbers of people who would have travelled if full access existed. *Person F* identifies Chinley as a local transport hub with great potential for growth, and new housing developments mean that the population of the catchment area of Chinley station is already set to increase in size quite considerably.

Jobs, Housing, Enterprise

The creation of jobs is a multi-faceted economic issue, and one important component of a developing economy must be a railway that serves the requirements of communities, not limits their practical functioning. Located within the immediate catchment area of Chinley station, the former Forge Bleach Works development will soon see the construction of up to 182 houses. The Ferodo/Federal Mogul development will add a further 164 dwellings, and 'Octavia Gardens' is destined to total 106 houses. There are two large industrial premises in close proximity to the station – the Vinyl Compounds factory and the Ferodo/Federal Mogul complex. Chinley and Buxworth also have two primary schools, a Derbyshire CC centre of excellence for the education and training of children and adults with learning difficulties, and significant nursery provision for young children.

Everyday obstacles to economic and social activity created by poor access

In order for the local area to remain attractive to commuters, businesses and visitors, the railway must represent a pull factor, not a problem which stunts growth.

Access problems at Chinley constitute a major inconvenience and have further detrimental consequences for road congestion in the A6 corridor. This is clearly seen in respect of access to health care.

As **Person D** stated:

'I can no longer use the train because of the footbridge and poor access. I have a toddler and am now pregnant. I used to struggle up and over with a toddler but now that I'm pregnant I have had to abandon the idea of going to Manchester on my own'

Rail access to the major regional hospital at Stepping Hill is perfectly possible. Travelling from Chinley to Hazel Grove, there is a convenient early morning train, and a late afternoon train for the return journey. However, because the railway is inaccessible to some potential users, people are forced to use their car, which unnecessarily adds traffic to the already badly congested A6 route. If a person has no access to a private car, a lengthy and difficult two-bus journey or a bus + rail journey via the Buxton line must be made.

Railway companies do offer help to people who experience difficulties accessing the railway (see Persons B & D), and locally although Northern Rail's *Passenger Assist* scheme complies fully with its statutory duties as regards station access, it is only persons who are registered disabled who are permitted to benefit from this scheme whereby free travel by taxi to a nearby station with level access can be organised. By definition therefore, this scheme does nothing to make the platforms at Chinley accessible to other people for whom the footbridge is seen as an impossible obstacle.

Problems of access to health care are a serious issue, and thus if the attractiveness of new housing developments in the Chinley area and the vitality and viability of local industry is to be maximised, it is not unreasonable to suggest that those bodies which make funding decisions about improvements to stations need to look very carefully at budgets for stations like Chinley.

Is Chinley a unique example locally of poor accessibility?

A number of High Peak Railway stations on lines into Manchester Piccadilly also have accessibility problems, and these also are highlighted targets for future enhancement in Stockport Borough Council's *A6 Corridor Route* report. Chapel-en-le-Frith station is not only inconveniently located well away from the centre of town, if travelling towards Manchester rail users must cross the tracks by means of a foot crossing. At New Mills Central, travelling to Sheffield involves negotiating 17 steps down to the platform. Nationally, if one looks at all four recognized criteria for full accessibility (step-free access, audio announcements, station staffing and visual display boards),

the size of the challenge can be seen in that in 2014, just 21% of UK stations were fully accessible (8% in 2002!), but in the experience of this group it is rare to find mainline stations with over 100,000 entries/exits where the only two platforms *both* have serious accessibility issues, and where therefore the size of the 'suppressed volume' of potential uses can only be guessed at.

Photographic Evidence

Fig 1 Both the Manchester and Sheffield bound platforms at Chinley are only accessible via a footbridge



Figs 2 & 3 Steep steps to both platforms present difficulties for travellers at Chinley



Fig 4 Snow in November 2015 made the steep steps at Chinley Station extremely hazardous – trains were therefore almost impossible to access safely



Conclusions & Recommendations

1. Within the Northern region, the growing village of Chinley, with its extensively used railway station and wide catchment area, provides an example of how the modern railway urgently needs to address accessibility challenges – in this case a lack of step-free access to both of its platforms.
2. Recent research commissioned by the Department for Transport and Network Rail has shown how fully accessible stations are of huge benefit to all stakeholders.
3. The eradication of problems of poor access to railway stations on the main line between Manchester and Sheffield will help combat a well-defined weakness in transport connectivity, a weakness that may well be holding back considerably the potential of this Northern region.
4. The funding implications of addressing this urgent challenge need close analysis if the ambitions set out by the Secretary of State for Transport in February 2015 in *Transforming the North's Railways* are to be met:-

“This government has huge ambitions for the North of England and the railway is key to those plans.”

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For and on behalf of Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group

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