

DfT Community Rail Consultation. Moving Britain Ahead

Response from Sustainable Transport Shropshire

Theme: Connecting people to places and opportunities

Question 1a: What role can community rail play in improving end-to-end journeys?

Question 1b: How can community rail help to:

- Make Journeys more sustainable?
- Encourage more healthy travel?
- Reduce the environmental impact of travel?

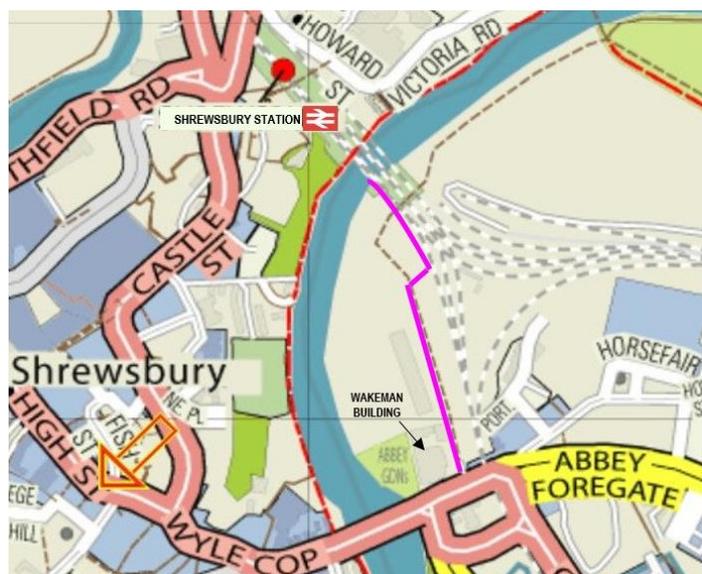
Community rail is about strengthening the links between the railway and the communities it serves. Whilst often this is taken as the community supporting the railway, it should equally apply to the railway supporting the community.

In Shrewsbury, the railway has an obligation to contribute to combatting town centre traffic congestion and deteriorating air quality near Shrewsbury Station caused in part by increased passenger arrivals and departures

Shrewsbury town centre retains its medieval street pattern. It is almost entirely surrounded by the River Severn with restricted access for traffic via two river bridges and two single carriageway roads along the neck of 'the loop'. It is prone to traffic congestion. At times the air quality monitor near to the station shows nitrogen dioxide levels exceeding the national target

For the past 20 years efforts have been made to reduce traffic through the town centre, most recently in the Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package and a £100million bid for the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road. Measures have included improving the inner ring road, park and ride services and improved provision for walking and cycling.

Unfortunately, the railway station is neutralising these measures by generating ever increasing amounts of traffic. During the last 11 years, the lifetime of the current franchise, passenger arrivals and departures have grown by more than 50%: from 1.3 million in 2004/05 to 2 million in 2015/16. In 2016/17 footfall increased by 5.5% on the previous year, the third largest annual increase in the past decade (ORR data). If this trend continues, numbers are expected to reach 3 million by the end of the forthcoming franchise – well over double the numbers at the start of the existing franchise, contributing to further congestion on the station forecourt and to increased town centre traffic.



The congestion and air quality concerns can be addressed by the re-opening of the second station access from platform 3 to Abbey Foregate (mauve line on map). This would provide an entry from both sides of town with an associated significant reduction in through town traffic. However the scheme has been persistently opposed by Arriva Trains Wales, the current train operator, who would prefer to keep the single station entrance for ease of operation.

Shropshire Council declares its support for this scheme but in the 10 years of this stated intention, sadly little has been achieved. The Council remains reticent about the actions it has taken in recent time, but does claim that the current franchise holder, Arriva Trains Wales has been unhelpful in progressing this scheme.

A recent campaign, supported by Shrewsbury Town Council, Shrewsbury Colleges Group, Shrewsbury Abbey, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, English Bridge Workshop Arts Centre, Shrewsbury Big Town Plan and over 250 other organisations and individuals is pressing Shropshire Council to take a pro-active lead in co-ordinating the project and negotiating the public access up to the boundary of the Network Rail land. Network Rail has previously said it is supportive of the scheme promising in 2013 a £25,000 contribution to costs.

Although this is clearly a local issue, we urge the DfT and the rail industry in its review of community rail strategy to give more emphasis to the rail industry's obligation to the communities it serves through contributing to improving station access and reducing traffic congestion where increased footfall at the station is a contributory cause.

Contact on behalf of Sustainable Transport Shropshire: Michael Willmot at abbeyrailpath@zoho.com