

# The Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership Second Annual Report

October 2007

# Foreword

From Mark Steward  
Route Director, Silverlink County

It has been another excellent year for the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership.

Silverlink has focused its efforts to facilitate a wide range of projects implemented by the CRP this year. With the launch of a second CRP on the Marston Vale line, we have been able to bring our two branch lines under the same management structure, and have brought the practitioners from the two CRPs together as often as possible, to share ideas and experiences in a series of well-attended workshops.

The Abbey Line continues to demonstrate just what can be achieved through partnership. More people know about their local railway, and as a consequence our passenger numbers have increased by almost 10% in the last year.

In addition to this, the work of the CRP is attracting considerable attention from the wider community rail network, with our nomination for the Marketing Strategy award in this year's Community Rail Awards, and six further nominations covering categories as diverse as youth projects, volunteer contributions and websites.

This will be Silverlink's last annual report, as our franchise ends in November. It has been a privilege for us to be involved in this partnership, and it is our intention to leave it in the best possible state for the start of the new London Midland franchise.

Congratulations to all those who have contributed to its success!



From County  
Councillor  
Aislinn Lee,  
Chair of the  
Community  
Rail  
Partnership



It's been a really good year for the Abbey Line and I'm pleased to Chair such a worthwhile and successful group, which aims to reduce congestion by increasing rail use, and is committed to involving local people in the development of the line.

I look forward to the continued success of the Community Rail Partnership next year.

# How does the CRP work?

The Partnership brings together a range of people involved in the local community – local government, tourism, businesses, schools and colleges, conservation, the environment, and of course the railway itself – to help secure the long term future of our local branch line.

It is managed on a day-to-day basis by a part-time Community Rail Partnership Officer, Alissa Ede, who is employed by Hertfordshire County Council. Our Steering Group, chaired by County Councillor Aislinn Lee, has representation from the local councils, Silverlink, and the Abfly Rail Users Group, as well as other local organisations and businesses. The group decides on the Action Plan for the year and gives overall direction to the partnership officer. Silverlink's Group Station Manager for Community Rail, James Elliott, is also a key person when it comes to implementing local projects.

Through a series of funded projects in our annual Action Plan, we aim to:

- raise the profile of the line in the community it serves
- encourage more people to use it through a range of promotional and marketing activities
- enhance the service offered to the community through small scale improvements at stations
- improve the links with local businesses and schools, that may benefit from the service.

An innovation this year has been a series of workshops in which key people from the Abbey Line and Marston Vale CRPs have come together to learn more about what can be achieved on their respective lines. The format of presentations followed by practical exercises is designed to share best practice and keep us at the forefront of community rail development.



*James Elliott and Alissa Ede*

## Measuring Outputs

One of the key topics for discussion amongst Community Rail Partnerships this year has been how we measure the impact of our activities. This is important as people begin to make judgements on the value of the Community Rail Development Strategy, but at a local level, it is critical that we can demonstrate our success to those organisations that continue to fund our Action Plan.

The Abbey Line CRP has led the way in establishing an annual programme of passenger counts and surveys, the results of which are now used along with the train operator's revenue data to build an accurate picture of how use of the line is growing. Over the last 12 months, there has been an 8% growth in passenger numbers, which is above the average for the London area. In just over 2 years, we have achieved growth in excess of 17%, which shows good value for the money invested in the CRP. In the coming year, our target is to become more sophisticated in the way that we measure the success of individual projects. We also need to demonstrate how the line can contribute to alleviating local issues of traffic congestion and air quality, as part of a wider message that the Abbey Line is a convenient, reliable, safe way to travel.

## Improvements to Stations

Our Action Plan continues to provide small scale yet important improvements to stations. A new shelter has been provided at How Wood this year, and the partnership has funded a significant increase in cycle parking capacity at Watford Junction station.

Silverlink has also been undertaking a station refurbishment programme as part of its commitments for the end of the franchise, and a new long-line public address system has been installed at all stations. A good deal of work is needed on a daily basis to keep stations safe and tidy, and to counter the effects of vandalism. Contractors MK

Express, usually in the person of Trevor Eady, supported by our station adopters, provide a vital service to the line.



## Promotion & Marketing

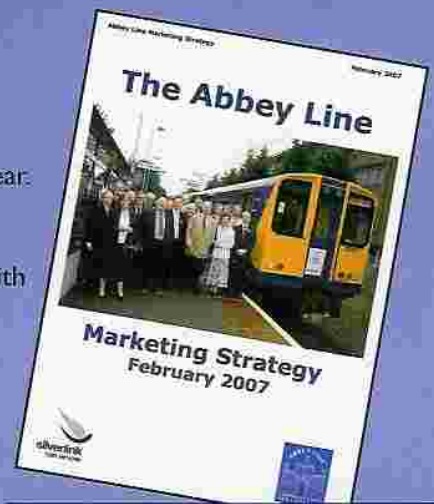
There have been major successes in the areas of promotion and marketing this year. CRP's across the country have been encouraged to develop marketing strategies, following a series of workshops run by the Department for Transport. Our Marketing Strategy has been shortlisted as one of the top three in the country, with the overall award being made at the Community Rail awards in late September.

Three particular projects have contributed to this success.

The CRP has now taken over production of the **mini-timetable**, which continues to be distributed within the community in large numbers.

A very popular **Rail Ale Trail** has been devised with the local branch of CAMRA, with leaflets, beer mats and t-shirts encouraging those who enjoy a good pint to visit local pubs by train.

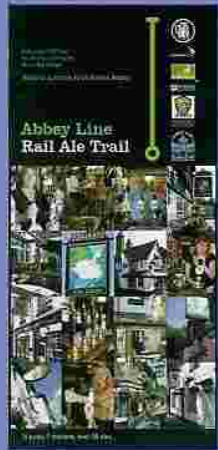
Following a good deal of market research, the **Abbey Line Carnet** has been introduced, providing discounts for pre-purchase of tickets for those travelling between St Albans and Watford. If successful, this facility can be extended to other parts of the route in the future.



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## Community Activities

This continues to be one of the most important areas of activity. We have continued our close links with local schools, facilitating school trips and visits in the expectation that the youngsters will become the regular travellers of the future. A highly original woodworking project with a number of local schools has resulted in sculptures with an Abbey Line theme appearing on school premises.

Our station adoption programme is expanding, with new groups coming forward to be the eyes and ears of the train operator in monitoring the condition of stations. Some groups are proposing local schemes to improve the landscaping, principally at St Albans Abbey and Park Street stations, which will bring about a significant improvement to the station environment. These involve Network Rail consent for access and there are



also possibilities for local businesses to sponsor them.

Some progress has also been made with a community let of the station building at Bricket Wood, with a scheme to turn it into artists' studios being investigated with a local arts charity.



## The Future

This is the final annual report presented by Silverlink on behalf of the partnership, as from 11th November this year, the Abbey Line becomes part of a new London Midland franchise operated by major transport operator Govia.

At the time of writing, we are still hopeful that an enhanced half-hourly service can be provided on the branch, with a passing loop at Bricket Wood being funded by Hertfordshire County Council through its Local Transport Plan.

Thanks largely to the efforts of our partners, the CRP reaches the end of the Silverlink era in a very positive position. We can all reflect on another successful year and look forward to the future with a great deal of optimism.

