

The Future



1. Development Strategy

1.1 Summary

Prior to this study, the ELR Trust Visioning Group had met to identify potential opportunities for the Railway and the Irwell Valley corridor. Eight priorities were agreed and defined, covering the development of attractions along the route and improvements to the facilities and operation of the railway.

The work done by the Group provided an excellent basis for the future strategy.

The approach taken has been to look at each of the eight projects and discuss the implications of each in some detail with the key stakeholders. A workshop was then held with members of the Visioning Group and other representatives from the ELLR and the Trust to discuss the wider implications of each and to explore any cross cutting themes.

The following is a summary of the findings for each of the eight priorities and the recommendations in each case. The discussion of each priority begins with a description of the project as articulated by the ELR Trust Visioning Group (in italics)

1.2 Bury Transport Museum

“The reopening of an enhanced ELR Transport Museum, within the Bury Town Centre Conservation Area, will further broaden the general appeal of the ELR and introduce stronger educational, training and restoration skills elements into the visitor experience. Visitors love to talk to people who have the dedication, time and experience to explain how things work and the museum will do this.

The main Museum exhibits will be displayed in the original 1848 Grade 2 listed Warehouse with its unique 12 door arrangement which played such a significant part in the growth of Bury and the Irwell Valley in the formative years of the Industrial Revolution. The Museum will give a fascinating insight into this industrial and social history by explaining how the raw goods came into the Castlecroft Museum site and were then transhipped onwards to local industry.

The £2.7m museum project is being supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the NW Regional Development Agency, Bury Council, the Pilsworth Environmental Trust and BIFFAward. Restoration work is due to commence in June 2008 for a museum reopening in June 2009.”

This project is very much underway and has been developed through partnership working between the ELR Trust, the ELLR Company and Bury Council. Together they have managed to secure funding and have already commenced work. It is anticipated that the museum will be open in the summer of 2009 and will generally be open 5 days a week.



Figure 26: Restoration work at Bury Transport Museum



It is anticipated that the Bury Transport Museum will vastly improve the visitor offer at the ELR providing a new and much needed narrative experience for visitors. It will also add a further dimension to the Footplate Experience, the ELR's premium 'backstage' tour. The Bury Transport Museum will provide a valuable additional educational resource for Bury. There will be a full-time paid education officer and education programmes aligned to the national curriculum are being developed around the themes of: World War 2 evacuees; transport in Bury; history of steam traction; history of internal combustion traction; history of the building during the Industrial Revolution and the geography of the Irwell Valley.

The museum will spruce up the Castlecroft area of the town and add another visitor attraction to the town centre of Bury to complement the new retail development. There will be increased opportunity to work with other town centre attractions such as the art gallery, the Fusilier Museum and the market and will provide a valuable meeting room facility in the town centre.

In conjunction with the development of the Buckley Wells site, it will also bring better facilities for volunteers and encourage more volunteers to consider committing to the ELR.

The development of the Museum should allow the Railway to sell itself better to families, groups and schools which will be key to growing the number of visits on non-event days. It will be important to work with other attractions, as well as retail, food and beverage businesses to develop packages for these three key markets.

This project is significantly more advanced than the other development projects and the ELR will be judged on its success. More than ever before, the staff and volunteers of the ELR will be closer to visitors and the importance of superior visitor care will become even more acute. To attract and retain the key growth markets of families, schools and groups will require focused effort in the areas of sales and marketing, booking and ticketing,



organisation and management, cleanliness, safety, customer service, retail and catering - in short, the visitor experience.

Partners in the ELR Trust believe that there is a will and capacity both internally and externally to make the project happen and are reasonably confident that it will be delivered to plan.

Partners recognise a small amount of non-financial risk as you would expect with a capital project of this scale but anticipate few negative organisational implications. The diesel works will have to be moved out of their current home at Castlecroft into Buckley Wells. This is likely to cause some friction in the interim but provided it is managed appropriately by the Directors of the ELLR it should not have a long term impact on the culture of the organisation. This move may require capital investment from the ELLR Company's reserves.

Partners felt that the project would benefit the East Lancashire Railway (as a visitor attraction) through an improved visitor experience and increased word of mouth recommendations. It is likely to bring new revenue streams for the ELLR and presents a good fit with the missions of both the Trust and the Operating Company. The company will incur the cost of an additional full time paid position - that of the Education Officer - but it is believed that as a department within the ELLR, the museum will generate an annual surplus.

Although it is unlikely to create many new direct jobs, it is likely to play an important part in realising the vision for Bury as articulated in the *Bury but Better Town Centre Vision and Development Strategy*. The *Bury but Better* document prepared by URBED in 2002 (and in the process of being updated) makes a specific recommendation that Bury should make the most of its heritage. It sees the expansion of the railway and the development of the Transport Museum as a key part of this. The document envisions Bury to be a more rounded and vibrant town centre with an improved housing, retail, cultural and heritage offer with opportunities for office development and other business units.

1.2.1 Issues

The project is well advanced and has a good fit with the Railway. It brings back in to use a site which is well located and potentially allows the organisation to strengthen its appeal to its core visitor markets. In particular, it will provide a stronger formal education facility.

It also potentially plays an important role in Bury, completing a 'golden triangle' of new cultural and heritage attractions which includes the Art Gallery, Fusilier Museum and the Transport Museum.

But as with any project, the extent to which it is able to realise the opportunity in reality will depend on the resources which are available to allow it to happen.



Attracting visitors to small heritage attractions is not easy, something which is apparent when visitor numbers to such projects are examined. The UK has many local and special interest museums, most of which struggle to attract more than 10,000 people each year.

In the case of the Bury Transport Museum, the business plan allows for one additional member of staff to work with educational groups. Other resources will need to be provided by volunteers.

There is no funding or staff time allocated for marketing or working with other museums to develop the project.

In our opinion, the challenges presented by this project are perhaps greater than has been assumed to date. Without doubt, the Museum will open and will be a good addition to the railway and to the town. It will, however, have limited impact if it relies on the very slender resources which have been assumed.

In particular, we consider that the following needs to be addressed:

- The current organisational structure is working very hard to deliver the core railway experience. At times volunteers cannot be found to open ticket desks at stations and to staff telephone booking lines and information lines. The Museum will add a further burden to existing resources.
- There is very limited marketing support, either as skilled staff resources or promotional budgets. Marketing is particularly critical for a new project.
- The infrastructure to support staff is also very slender. The new Education Officer will face an extremely demanding role and in particular the first few months will be very challenging. Without the necessary support mechanisms it will be difficult for the post holder to develop the necessary foundations.
- Limited new visitor facilities have been planned for the Museum. It will be particularly important that the additional visitor requirements, such as school lunch facilities, storage and sufficient toilets are given proper consideration and the implications on the existing operation addressed.

1.2.2 Recommendations for action

The issue about resources is, we believe, the single biggest issue which needs to be addressed by this strategy, for this project and for all the others we are considering as development opportunities.

The key question revolves around the **necessary level of investment in resources** which is required to realise the maximum benefit from the attraction. Without the resources needed, the Museum could potentially weaken the Railway experience and threaten future visitor numbers and income.



Finding the optimum level of resources is a complex issue, with no simple answers. We address the risks and opportunities in Section 3.

Detailed plans should be produced for the Museum which include a launch marketing plan and ongoing promotional plan; visitor management issues; creating links with other Museums in the area.

1.3 Buckley Wells Heritage Visitor Centre

“The extensive 20 acre Buckley Wells site was purchased from British Rail by Bury Council in 1993. At its heart is a 40,000sq ft Grade 2 listed building dating back to 1857 and is now believed to be the oldest continuously operational locomotive works in Britain. Since its purchase the site has become firmly established as the ELR’s main engineering and steam workshop base.

A guiding Masterplan has now been drawn up for the Buckley Wells site which will see the site fully reclaimed so that the visitor can be guided around the full extent of the site safely. Arrival will be by means of a “green train” shuttle service from Bolton St Station to run into a new Buckley Wells South platform yet to be constructed. The listed steam shed will be fully restored and fully functioning turntable will be constructed. The development will include a new diesel shed to be relocated from the Castlecroft Transport Museum site and a new carriage shed which is required to provide for much needed protection of vulnerable rolling stock. Implementation of the overall Masterplan will be phased over the period 2008- 2018.”

The Buckley Wells Heritage Visitor Centre is an ambitious and large scale project which represents a real opportunity to develop the East Lancashire Railway. Once realised, it will add significantly to the visitor experience, increasing the length of visit, extending the appeal to new audiences and adding important new visitor facilities.



Figure 27: Steam Locomotive on Buckley Wells Site



Equally importantly, the development will also bring significant improvements to the organisation. At present, the Company operates from inadequate, temporary office facilities which are almost certainly constraining the organisation in a number of ways. The plans will provide much needed new office facilities which will enable the Company to operate in a more professional manner and to expand its capacity in a way which will be essential to achieve the future strategy.

The project is however, highly complex and will only be achieved through a phased development plan. Some reorganisation of existing operations has already begun which will enable the site to be opened up for visitor use.

Partners in the ELR Trust believe that the Buckley Wells project will have a significant impact on the ELR as a visitor attraction, increasing visitor numbers and ticket revenue and on-site spend. It is a clear fit with the missions of both the trust and the company.

As with the Bury Transport Museum, the Buckley Wells Heritage Visitor Centre will enable the ELR to better attract families, groups and schools and it is likely to be very appealing to the enthusiast market. As with the Bury Transport Museum, there will need to be a real commitment to the visitor experience, encompassing every aspect of customer care from marketing through sales and booking to management, organisation and operations. We suspect that this will require substantial organisational change which we explore later in the report.

A business plan has not yet been prepared for this facility. It is our view that the business and operational planning should be harmonised with the masterplanning, architecture and design process at the earliest opportunity. Too many visitor attraction projects have failed to achieve their potential because they have given primacy to design and architectural considerations and left business planning to play catch-up. In many cases this has led to operational costs that are unsustainable.



To realise fully the aspirations for the site will probably cost in the region of £10m. To secure this level of funding and to deliver the project, there will need to be a joint effort between the ELLR Company, its volunteers, Bury Council and the ELR Trust with a number of phased options in place.

The public sector funding climate, however, has never been tougher for heritage, tourism and culture. We believe that it is as difficult now as it has been since the 1980s. Without doubt, it will only become more difficult as the impact of the economic downturn is increasingly felt. Competition for monies from the Heritage Lottery fund, the North West Development Agency, Local Authorities and private sector sponsorship is going to be very tough indeed.

The ELR have already commissioned architects and designers to develop a masterplan for the site. The scale and pace of the development will depend upon the availability of funding and the commitment of volunteers. Partners appreciate that it will be a real challenge to successfully deliver this project.

Both the ELR and the Council see the development of Buckley Wells as a natural progression for the site but also as a regeneration project for the town. It has the potential to create direct and indirect jobs, to increase learning opportunities, to create more business for local suppliers and to increase the number of visitors from outside of the region. As with the Transport Museum re-development at Castlecroft, it fits with the concept of the *Bury But Better* Town Centre Vision. Although it is just south of the town centre, it would add to the growing heritage and cultural offer and help to position Bury as a more vibrant town centre.

The Bury Councillors that we consulted with are concerned about the traffic and parking implications that the project may have on the local area. The Trust will have to work with Bury Council to alleviate such fears.

1.3.1 Issues

A project of this scale would be ambitious for most organisations. It is particularly challenging for an organisation which relies almost exclusively on volunteer resources. The Company and the Trust have an excellent track record however of achieving significant projects with limited resources and therefore certainly stand a better chance than most similar companies to deliver such a sizeable scheme.

But as with the Transport Museum, we believe that the resource implications need careful consideration.

Developing and delivering the project will make significant demands on individuals who are already essential to the operation of the railway. As their time is required to realise the project, there will be no 'back up' to continue to exploit and improve the existing product.



The difficult funding climate is going to heighten the need for carefully thought-through business and operational plans and place a greater demand on the planning and bidding processes.

It is also going to put into sharp focus the existing operation. Funders will look to the existing experience for evidence of how the new project will be delivered.

Clearly, this is not just a need for resources, but a need for people with the skills, knowledge and time to dedicate to the project. Much of the necessary knowledge exists within the organisation, but there is apparently very limited support. In particular, we feel that as senior volunteer time is necessarily diverted to this project, the improvements which are needed now in the core experience to realise the ambition of 200,000 visitors will not happen.

A second and equally important issue is the impact that the Buckley Wells Heritage Centre will have on the operation once it is open.

This may seem like a ‘problem for later’, and something to worry about once the funding is secured. However, the expectation is that the Centre will deliver an additional 100,000 visitors - effectively doubling the existing numbers. Clearly this will have profound implications on the organisation. It would be unreasonable to assume that the existing structure can simply absorb these additional requirements.

As part of the strategy therefore, we believe that important consideration needs to be given to the implications of Buckley Wells on the nature of the organisation. As part of the early project planning, thought needs to be given to the organisation which will be needed to run the Centre.

Planning will also be required to address how the organisation will migrate from its current position, to the structure needed for the future.

The particular challenge will be to achieve the necessary level of growth without lessening the commitment and goodwill of the existing volunteer base.

1.3.2 Recommendations for action

As with the first priority, the issue of resources needs to be considered. In particular we believe that the resources required to improve the **existing experience** needs to be addressed in light of the requirements of this project.

The level of support and skills which are going to be needed to successfully bid for and secure the necessary funds also needs to be considered.

The organisation (both the Company and the Trust) also needs to consider as part of the development of this project, the implications on the business going forward. Realistic plans will be needed to ensure that the project can be delivered and operated.

We consider the resource issues in Section 3.



Given the current funding climate, it will be important to ascertain the current availability of funds from the relevant bodies. It may be necessary to review the assumed timescales and plan for a later target opening date for the project.

1.4 Rawtenstall Station Improvements

“Rawtenstall Station is the northern terminus of the ELR and has a striking terminal station building and clock tower. The station, however, is just south of the centre of Rawtenstall itself and can be somewhat exposed to the Irwell Valley weather.

The Development Plan hopes to address the current problems with the construction of a station canopy similar to that recently completed at Ramsbottom Station to provide greater all weather protection. ELR wants to see an extension to the Station Café to provide more seating space. Station improvements should better orientate the visitor to Rawtenstall Town Centre and Rossendale with a larger ‘What to Do in Rossendale’ Information Point. These proposals should dovetail into complementary streetscape proposals contained within the Rawtenstall Town Centre Strategy.”

The general feeling from stakeholders is that Rawtenstall Station presents a relatively poor visitor experience to disembarking passengers. The station is about half a mile from the town centre and at the present time, passengers are not compelled to make the trip into the town centre. Research has shown that after about a quarter of a mile from the station, ELR passengers start to walk back.

ELLR acknowledges that it needs to make improvements to the station infrastructure itself and is keen to extend the station café to make it a more viable business proposition for the tenant and to improve the offer for visitors. Remodelling of the station is likely to cost in the region of £100,000.



Figure 28: Rawtenstall Station



The company also believes that the station is in desperate need of a canopy which is also likely to cost around £100,000. Rossendale Council (through the course of this study) has affirmed its commitment to work with the ELLR Company to secure funding and improve the station and its surrounding area.

Through our consultations, there appears to be renewed appetite and enthusiasm from within Rossendale Council to explore the opportunities presented by the Railway. The ELLR Company has recognised this new commitment and is keen to work with the council to improve the visitor experience at Rawtenstall Station and to make better linkages to the town centre.

More work clearly needs to be done to get ELR passengers to visit the town centre if the borough is to fully benefit from the regenerative effects that have been seen at Ramsbottom for example.

At the centre of Rawtenstall is an attractive cobbled area with Bank Street offering a number of high-end independent retailers. There are also some good restaurants and other interesting shops. The central zone is 'protected' by a conservation area. The Council have identified, however, that there are a number of areas which need to be improved.

The Valley Centre was built in the 1960s and is now part of £33m redevelopment scheme from Ashbourne Properties to demolish and rebuild it as a mixed use, retail, residential and leisure scheme. At present most of the centre is boarded up and as leases expire they are not being renewed.

The market is an attractive feature in the town and like most markets in the area is well used. Unfortunately it is at the opposite end of the town from the station. The traders have a parochial attitude and it is difficult to move the offer on to something which is more appealing to today's visitors.



The route from the station into the town is also unattractive. It runs along a busy dual carriageway and although the council is currently bidding to the NWDA for a grant to improve the public realm which could improve the route from the station to the town, potentially providing a partially covered walkway for some of the route, this is unlikely to happen for some years. There is interest from the operator of a heritage bus service to run vehicles between the station and the town centre which could provide an attractive link between the railway and the centre. The reality of moving visitors up to the town centre is not easy and the ELLR have acknowledged that their volunteers could do more to encourage people to use a free bus service.

Despite the potential for tourism, there are a number of issues which need to be addressed before the town can realise the opportunity. Most of the town centre is closed on Sundays and at present there is little incentive for the retailers to open. The restaurants are not necessarily suitable for a day time visitor audience.

Beyond the town centre, the borough offers a range of other attractions which provide a good basis for a visitor offer. The adrenaline theme is being developed, with existing activities including a mountain bike trail, skiing and white water rafting. There are also a number of more gentle outdoor activities on offer including the National Trust property at Stubbins. Local people are supportive of the idea of a halt at Stubbins which would provide access to the National Trust property and would allow walkers to make a circular route along the Irwell Sculpture Trail to Rawtenstall. (Salford Council has a £400k budget to improve the trail and to look at how it can be used to link the towns along the route.)

Other attractions of some worth include the Halo Panopticon and the Weavers Cottage. It is felt that these attractions are not widely marketed and many are difficult to find, even for people who are actively looking for them.

Some stakeholders believe that there used to be more to do in and around Rawtenstall which gave people a reason to use the railway, such as the Groundwork Centre which used to be close to the station. There was some suggestion that the “what to do” in the future, the activity and the animation, should be at the station.

Ramsbottom is seen as an example of how change can begin to happen. A relatively small amount of money was secured from English Heritage to help improve the town centre over 10 years. The money was used to work with shop keepers to improve the appearance of the properties. Investment was also made to allow the river to be brought back in to use and land was acquired through compulsory purchase orders, to create a new river-side picnic area. Events programmes were used to integrate the station area better into the town, with activities taking place both on the railway and platform and outside in the town.



1.4.1 Issues

Whilst the organisational focus of this priority is about improving the station, the important opportunity comes from **the wider collaboration with Rossendale Borough Council**.

During the course of this study there have been positive and encouraging signs from Rossendale Borough Council that they are considering more carefully the role that ELR can play in improving the Town Centre both environmentally and economically. These opportunities are to be explored in the context of the Town Centre Strategy which is currently being revisited.

Council officers have begun to work on conservation, public realm and regeneration issues in the area surrounding the station. This holistic approach is one that should be continued if the regenerative potential of the ELR is to be realised. The ELR Trust and the ELLR Company should be fully engaged and in a position to work with Rossendale Council on the Strategy.

Perhaps the most pressing need, however, is to consider the realistic timescales for major improvements and the implications that these will have on the railway.

The redevelopment of the town centre is likely to take several years and the current economic climate will almost certainly delay the critical commercial improvements to the central shopping centre area.

The first challenge is to ensure that the current momentum is not lost and that the commitment expressed by both the ELR and the Council is seen to deliver some immediate benefits.

We suggest, therefore, that a series of short term measures are implemented whilst the longer term planning and regeneration is realised.

The longer term potential will also need to be planned for meanwhile of course. The viability of a halt at Stubbins has been raised and there is strong support from some Council members.

The feasibility and benefits of adding the Halt to the service will of course need to be considered in light of the other developments which are proposed in the strategy. It should be added to the longer term planning for consideration.

1.4.2 Recommendations for action

Actions can be divided into short term and longer term needs.

In the short term:

Consideration should be given to encouraging visitors to move between the station and the town centre. This involves both practical considerations of how to move people around and also giving them a reason to want to do so.



- The most immediate priority should be to improve signage between the station and the town centre. Good, clear, attractive signage, marking the route from the station to the Town Centre is essential. We recommend that the route 'leads' visitors away from the main road, instead following a path in front of the DIY superstore and to the right of the main street. Improvements will be needed to improve the walkways and consideration will need to be given to lighting. This should be a fairly modest expense and should be considered a priority within the Local Authority tourism programme.
- Giving people a reason to visit the town is equally important. The most obvious opportunity is to arrange special events with the retailers (along the lines of the Heywood Christmas Shopping promotion). There is of course a requirement for any events to be successful, otherwise the traders will be discouraged from working with the railway again and this could damage the longer term success. We suggest that the relationship needs a 'kick start' using the lessons from Ramsbottom. A relatively small but ring-fenced fund is required to put on a targeted event.
- The interest of the heritage bus operator should be explored. As with traders however, it will be important to ensure that there are some resources in place to support the relationship initially.
- Marketing will be required to support these initiatives. There will need to be a promotional budget and dedicated and effective PR support.
- There will also need to be dedicated staff within the ELLR to deliver the initiatives. We address this in Section 3.
- Improvements to the station café could also be realised in the short term but should be linked to the above initiatives. Until the necessary resources are in place to achieve the package of short term improvements, there is limited benefit in improving the station and café. Detailed cost plans should however be drawn up when other initiatives get underway.

In the longer term:

- The Trust should continue to engage with the Council in the Town Centre development plans to ensure that maximum benefit is realised. The plans provide opportunities to make more radical improvements to pedestrian access, signage and public realm which will be essential.
- The relationship with the traders needs to be developed and nurtured - ultimately it will be the town centre which provides an ongoing reason for visitors to get off the train. Encouraging joint promotions such as Christmas Shopping weekends and special events which link to the town should become a regular feature. It will be very important to monitor the impact on the traders and to ensure that it remains a shared initiative.
- Stubbins Halt should be considered as a development opportunity. The feasibility will need to be assessed as part of the longer term business planning.



1.5 Burrs Country Park Halt

“Burrs Country Park lies 1 mile north of Bury Town Centre with the railway currently passing through the park but not stopping. The ELR has provided an atmospheric backdrop for the increasing numbers of visitors to the Park over the last 15 years. The Park recently achieved green flag status for its attractiveness and cleanliness. In addition to the ELR both the 32 mile Irwell Sculpture Trail run through the park and Burrs is now well established as a local “honey pot” with an events calendar of its own throughout the year. The Park is made up of a fascinating blend of early industrial archaeological remains, the Burrs Canoeing and Activity Centre, riverside walks, local fishing ponds and wildlife areas. Its most recent additions have been the relocation of the Bury Showground to Burrs and the establishing of a Caravan Club site adjacent to the park’s heritage pub ‘The Brown Cow’. A Burrs ELR railway halt will make a direct link between these two primary attractions within the Irwell Valley and allow for much greater flexibility to develop a future joint promotional calendar.

The project is being led by Bury Council with the ELR, the Burrs Activity Centre and the Camping and Caravan Club as development partners.”

At the moment the ELR trains provide an attractive backdrop to Burrs Country Park but Bury Council believes it is essential that the two are linked. The Council believes that this project will deliver more passengers for the ELR from Burrs Country Park particularly from visitors staying at the Caravan Club site but also from families and general visitors.

Figure 29: Burrs Country Park



At this stage the implications for the railway have not been fully explored. The ELLR Company currently have concerns that the additional stop will add to their costs but may not deliver any additional paying passengers. A survey completed at Burrs has shown that



70% of people who use Burrs Country Park would use a halt to access the ELR. Whilst caution is always needed when considering whether people will actually act on their intentions or not, the research does give a clear indication that idea is attractive to the majority of people.

The Caravan Club site is one of the most popular sites in the country and each weekend there can be up to 100 families staying on the caravan site that are unable to get on the train. It may be possible to market the ELR through the Caravan Club's national network of magazines, websites, newsletters, brochures etc.

A halt at Burrs Country Park will also allow visitors to get off the trains and enjoy a couple of hours in the park. At present there are no proper facilities for visitors and whilst there is a small café within the Activity Centre, there are no public toilets.

There may be further potential to link in with the education facilities at Burrs Activity Centre. The Activity Centre is a private company which offers residential and day courses in a range of wet and dry sports. The Centre Manager feels that at present there are limited opportunities for participants to use the railway, though at this stage it has not been considered in any detail. Initial discussions have suggested that initiatives such as short 'taster' sessions could potentially be developed in tandem with ELR.

An outline design for the halt has been prepared by Bury Council and a planning application will be submitted within the next couple of months. Some of the costs could be offset by an increase in rent paid by the Caravan site as the size of their site increases, although it is thought that Bury Council will seek most of the funding from external sources.

There seems to be good strategic fit with the current marketing of Manchester's Countryside by local authorities and Visit Manchester¹⁹.

Burrs Country Park will provide the opportunity for visitors to get out into the countryside whilst still being within a short walk of the railway.

There should be improved facilities within the park with better events and activities. There may be an opportunity for the council to sell off one of the buildings within the park to fund a new rangers' centre.

1.5.1 Issues

As with the previous priority, the real impact of the proposed development is about helping the railway to deliver its fundamental purpose - that of helping to develop the leisure and economic potential of the Irwell Valley.

¹⁹ Visit Manchester is the sub regional tourist board for Greater Manchester.



It has an immediate ability to broaden the impact that the railway has on the area. The potential development of the Croal-Irwell Regional Park is also very significant. The railway would assume a key linking role in the project and could be an essential catalyst for leveraging funds.

In this sense, therefore, the project needs to be assessed differently from the first two priorities.

There are of course operational implications for the Company. It will impact on timetabling and there will be some cost considerations. But the benefits should not just be seen in terms of the wider area.

We also believe that the project would play a particular role in helping to grow the number of core visits to the railway. Of all the priorities identified, it has the **most immediate potential to grow the number of visitors, particularly families** using the railway and to provide a much needed extension to the experience.

Both the Severn Valley Railway and the North Yorkshire Moors Railway have comparable halts at the Severn Valley Country Park and Newton Dale respectively and both believe that this is an important part of the visitor experience.

Without question, a business plan will be required to assess all of the implications of the scheme. However, the fact that the Country Park, Caravan Park and Activity Centre are all established and have demonstrable and quantifiable existing demand, strengthens the business case.

It should also be noted that, unlike several of the other priorities being considered, the project is probably achievable in the medium term and that the capital funds can be found even in the current climate.

The implications on ELLR resources are also less critical than for some other projects.

For all of these reasons therefore, it is apparent that this project should be given serious consideration and that it should be seen as a valuable and achievable step in the strategy.

As part of the project, plans need to be made to improve the facilities at the park. New toilets, a café and potentially more outdoor attractions would make the stop significantly more viable. A destination plan is needed for the park therefore in tandem with the plans for the Halt.

1.5.2 Recommendations for action

A **detailed business plan** is required to assess the implications of the project. It will be important to consider both the operational and financial impacts on the ELLR and the requirements on the other partners including Bury Council, the Activity Centre and the Caravan Park.



Research has already been carried out into the likely usage by visitors. As we have already noted, it is notoriously difficult to gain an accurate picture of potential take up of any new product or service from market research alone. The really important measure will be the commitment of the Council, the Caravan Park and the Activity centre to make the project a success and this will need to be established as part of the process.

Given the potential impacts and the high likelihood of being able to realise the scheme, this project should be given particularly high priority.

The marketing requirements will of course need to be considered. We address this as part of the wider development of the marketing function (see Section 1.8 below).

Develop a destination plan for the Country Park, potentially working with the existing operators to develop or run new facilities and attractions.

1.6 Heywood Masterplan

“After 12 years of intensive restoration work the 3 mile ELR line extension to Heywood was opened in 2003. The main priority at Heywood is to replace the temporary station building with an appropriate permanent station building and to work closely with Rochdale Council to establish a development package for the immediate station area that will start to develop a wider visitor dimension and in so doing both regenerate this part of Heywood and create a better linkage with the town centre itself.”

The Heywood Station Area has a rich history associated with the development of the town, and the adjacent Sefton Street Goods Warehouse dates back to the 1840’s when first a branch of the Rochdale Canal served the town and then the railway. Rochdale Council recently designated the wider Station Area a Conservation Area. Currently there area number of options as to how Priority 5 can be taken forward including upgrades to station facilities, masterplan development, new station building, footbridge, relocation of Manchester Transport Museum, upgrades to the Sefton Street warehouse, investment in and re-use of historic buildings, engaging private developers.

Heywood is currently one of the least exploited stops along the route. There is little reason at present for visitors to disembark and explore the area. The station is a long way from the town centre and there is nothing of interest in the immediate station environs. The development opportunities however are significant.



Figure 30: Heywood Station



The land around Heywood station has a number of growth opportunities which could be realised in the medium term and would bring notable economic benefits to the borough and to the wider valley corridor.

Five years ago, the ELR was under political pressure to extend the line to Heywood and had to go through a very complex and lengthy legal process. However, according to the ELLR Company, Heywood is something of a disappointment. When visitors arrive, there is nothing to do and the station is a long and unattractive walk from the town centre. ELLR believes there is a real need for the area around Heywood Station to be rejuvenated and transformed to make it more appealing to visitors. The Company cannot do this alone.

ELLR Company firmly believes that the local authority needs to take ownership of the rejuvenation of the area surrounding Heywood Station. The local authority needs to demonstrate the will and resolve to get the project moving by committing resources such as officer time in planning, estates, legal, engineering etc.

The ability to unleash the potential of this project is possibly linked to the Castleton extension project below, which may unlock funding and help to discover a new commitment and resolve to make things happen.

Our discussions with Rochdale Council have been very encouraging and demonstrate that there is enthusiasm amongst key officers and members to improve the visitor experience at Heywood and to deliver the extension to Castleton.

In particular the (relatively) new Head of Planning recognises the opportunity that development around the Heywood Station would bring and has acknowledged that the station and the area around needs to be developed to become a destination in its own right.

As an interim measure, it has been suggested that a carriage be provided and laid out as a café.

For their part, Rochdale MBC also wants to see a commitment to Heywood Station from the Trust and the operating company. Nothing happened in Heywood for example over the War Weekend except that it was used as a car park and visitors were shuttled into Bury.



This is of course another case of ‘chicken and egg’ and all partners need to come together not only to plan long term future developments and improvements but also interim measures and short term projects.

There seemed to be a renewed enthusiasm from Rochdale MBC and the seeds of a vision for Heywood Station have begun to emerge. There are lots of assets around the station site and partners are exploring the re-use of existing buildings.

There is the opportunity to develop a critical mass of visitor focused activity around the station. The ideas listed below are not new and have been around for some years. The general consensus of opinion is that there needs to be a commitment between partners to developing this vision, perhaps co-ordinated through the creation of a masterplan.

The stakeholders believe that there are three decisions due in the short term which present real opportunities: planning permission being required for the Iqbal ‘Curry Village’ scheme; the setting up of the Heywood Development Trust; and the securing of funds for this body to deliver appropriate schemes.

It was suggested that the creation of a new mixed use building next to the station, developed and managed by the Trust using funds from NDC could provide a valuable ‘quick win’. These ideas are explored below.

Greater Manchester Fire Service Museum

There is the opportunity to attract the Greater Manchester Fire Service Museum (currently located within Rochdale Fire Station) to a building close to the Heywood site. There seems to be a renewed enthusiasm for this from both the Fire Service and the Rochdale Council. The project already has some revenue funding assured and a charitable trust is being formed to manage and potentially operate the attraction.

Greater Manchester Transport Museum

There is also an opportunity to attract the Greater Manchester Museum of Transport which is currently located in Chetham Hill, North Manchester. The Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority (GMPTA) had originally indicated that they did not want the museum to move outside of the city boundaries. The ELLR has recently renewed discussions with the new Chair and Vice Chair of GMPTA.

It is estimated that a new museum will require c£4million funding and GMPTA may be prepared to commit up to £2million.

Rochdale Council has identified an industrial building near to the Heywood Station site that could be used for the Museum of Transport or split into a number of smaller units with a portion being given over to house the Fire Service Museum.



Curry Village

Plans have also been submitted by a local entrepreneur to develop a curry village in the Sefton Street area of Heywood. The plans have been rejected twice but have been resubmitted and are currently being considered.

Original Railway Warehouse

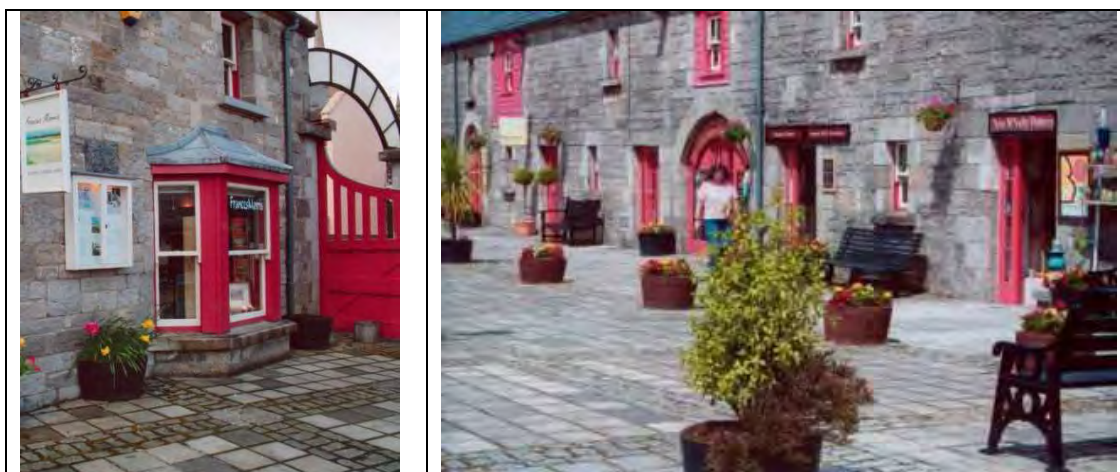
Close to the station site there is an original railway warehouse which is in very good condition and could play an important part in an improved visitor offer around Heywood Station. It may be important that this building becomes listed in the near future. Although the current owner is sympathetic to conservation, this may not be the case in future.

Phoenix Brewery

This also has potential to find a use for the important heritage building as part of the Heywood Station visitor offer, perhaps as a visitor attraction with a food offer. There is also a mill complex with an attractive courtyard that could potentially contain craft workshops and small retail units.



These buildings could potentially be converted into craft shops and cafes.



The Buttermarket Craft and Design Courtyard in Enniskillen, N Ireland, is a restored C.19th dairy market that now houses 15 different shops and workshops for local artists. A good coffee shop ensures regular footfall.

Planning and funding

With the phasing out of the New Deal for Communities (NDCs) there is the possibility to create a Heywood Development Trust which if linked to a regeneration and development plan around the Heywood Station could unlock significant funds. The Trust, if created will be responsible for the development of inner zone in Heywood. Funding is potentially available to support projects brought forward by the Trust from unspent NDC funds of around £1m.

In seeking funding, it is important that plans for the Heywood Station area are seen to be part of a bigger vision. It is important to ensure that both the Heywood and Castleton projects are developed in tandem.

There is also the possibility to draw funds from the Transport Innovation Fund. Rochdale Council is keen to see commuter traffic through Heywood and there is the opportunity to link up with Calderdale, Burnley and other towns. Rochdale shares the preference for heavy rail over Metrolink to Heywood.

1.6.2 Issues

Clearly delivering benefit from the railway at Heywood is going to require a long term plan and resources from both the public and private sector.

In Locum's opinion however, the opportunities at Heywood, linked to the Castleton developments represent a very significant and achievable opportunity that is worthy of serious attention from the Council. Of all the development proposals considered, the two projects combined will have the largest impact on the borough and on the wider Irwell corridor and will present an exciting opportunity to developers.

It is however undoubtedly worth serious attention. Development in and around Heywood Station would have a significant impact on the local area by attracting spend, creating jobs and acting as a catalyst for regeneration. It is also viewed as having a good fit with the strategic priorities of local stakeholders.

From the Company's perspective, Partners at the workshop session believed that the project has a good chance of securing funding with minimal increased costs to the ELLR and minimal risk. It was also felt that the Heywood project would not have a detrimental effect on the organisational culture of the ELLR and could create some economies of scale.

It was believed that the project could increase ticket revenues to a certain extent by significantly improving the visitor experience and attracting new visitors.



The impetus, however, needs to be driven largely by Rochdale Council.

The Company and the Trust in particular need to stay actively engaged in the process to ensure that the schemes are achievable and link to the railway's own longer term plans.

Of the two options suggested, developing the station and involving private developers is unlikely to deliver the scale and impact which is going to be needed.

It is also sensible to seize the enthusiasm demonstrated by the Council to look at the development of the wider area.

A **masterplan** is certainly needed for the area and the Council will need to lead on this, ensuring that the resources are in place initially to enable the first steps to be taken.

Creating a destination in the area is not going to be easy. Care is going to be needed in planning the **mix of uses** which will transform the area into a vibrant, attractive and sustainable destination.

At present, embryonic suggestions have presented a balanced range of potential uses for the buildings around the station which include commercial office use and food and beverage outlets as well as visitor attractions. This would provide the essential diversity required.

Timing will be essential. A good critical mass of businesses will be needed from the outset and it will be important that any early schemes are able to survive whilst the longer term developments are being realised. It would probably not be sustainable, for example, for a museum to open in the area ahead of other developments since it would almost certainly struggle to attract the necessary numbers.

For the Company's part, there also needs to be a demonstrable commitment to supporting the development plans. In the short term, ways of engaging Heywood better and ensuring that Rochdale benefits from high profile special events will be essential.

1.6.3 Recommendations for action

A dedicated destination plan is needed for Heywood that can excite potential private sector developers about the opportunity and inform the Council's regeneration plans.

The Rochdale Regeneration plan should be updated to take account of the opportunities around the Heywood station.

A key component of the destination plan will be a masterplan for the area. Rochdale Council will need to lead on this, followed by a detailed development scheme. The plans will need to identify the public resources which may be required, for example to bring some of the buildings back in to use, and to indicate how this will be secured.

The Council should also support the Company and the Trust in negotiations about the two museums.



In the short term, particular attention should be given by the Company to Heywood's role in special events. This could be through existing events such as the war weekends, or by identifying new events which could successfully involve Heywood Station.

The development of better facilities at the station should be timed to coincide with the wider improvements in the destination. There is little benefit at present in developing a café at the station whilst there are no other reasons for visitors to get off. Providing temporary facilities during events however will be important.

1.7 Castleton Extension

“The ELR currently stops 1 mile short of Castleton Village but enjoys by agreement with Network Rail, access through to the National Railway Network allowing for ELR excursion traffic, the movement of light engines coming into the ELR workshops or for use on the tourist line.

The closure of the Corus site at Castleton opens up the exciting possibility of extending the ELR tourist line through from Heywood to join up with Network Rail at their Castleton Station. Doing this would provide many benefits both to the ELR and the wider Castleton Village community enabling the ELR to arrive right in the heart of the Village Centre and meet up with the Rochdale Canal that is steadily attracting investment. It would also provide a Network Rail/ELR public transport interchange.

The major stepping stones will be the acquisition of enough railway land to extend though to the Castleton Network Railway Station, construction of an access under Manchester Road and the purchase of enough land to construct an ELR platform adjacent to the Castleton Network Rail Station for direct interchange facilities.”

Consultees agreed that Castleton Village was in need of regeneration. There is a development framework that is in place for the Trub area including high quality housing which exploits the canal frontage, offices and some leisure development. There will be a strong emphasis on public realm. There is potential that this area could be extended down to the railway line to create a high quality public space creating an attractive entry point.

A lot of the land surrounding Castleton Station has development potential which could unlock funds.



Figure 31: Area surrounding Castleton Station

Between the national rail line and the line that ELR would use to link to Castleton, there is a triangle of land that is currently undeveloped. It is unlikely that a station could be developed on this parcel of land due to technical constraints but it has been identified by the Castleton Township Forum as a potential development site. The preferred option of the ELLR Company is to run a line parallel to the line that serves the Corus site and into Castleton Station, to link directly with the national rail network.

The recently restored Rochdale Canal runs through Castleton but is currently under-used. Working with Manchester City Council, Oldham Borough Council, Waterways Trust and British Waterways, Rochdale Council has been given the lead role in developing the use of and activity around the canal. The Head of Planning will be exploring opportunities for pathways, nature trails, bridleways etc.

Parallel to this piece of work, there are two further developments that could help to unlock funds for any development at and extension to Castleton. The first is the Green Infrastructure Project and the second is the Croal Irwell Valley Regional Park.

It will be the responsibility of Rochdale Council to identify what part the ELR can play in the regeneration of Castleton by bringing together all of the emerging development work. Beneath the dereliction, Castleton still retains character and could prove to be a pleasant place to be in if the various opportunities are brought together.

Within Rochdale there are only a handful of councillors that are engaged with the ELR. The plans for both Heywood and Castleton need to be packaged and articulated showing the potential regenerative effects.

This project was seen as having a very significant and positive impact on the local area by packaging it with the regeneration of Castleton Village. It is believed that it would help



create jobs in the area and increase spending in local businesses. Partners also believed that it would have a positive impact on the operation of the railway increasing ticket and secondary income and improving the visitor experience.

It is recognised that it will be difficult to secure funding for this project but there is a real desire to make it happen. It is also recognised that the project increases risk to the ELLR and has quite significant organisational and cultural impacts on the company.

1.7.1 Issues

Without question, the Castleton extension project could have the most profound impact of all of the projects identified.

As one stakeholder commented, 'This is a unique opportunity to establish a framework that puts the ELR, the Network Rail Station, Rochdale Canal, the newly designated Castleton Village Centre Conservation Area and a reconfigured Whipp and Bourne site, including the Corus site, into some kind of dynamic that will kick start the regeneration of the whole Village'.

The area would almost certainly benefit from a detailed **destination plan** integrated into a masterplan. The 'ingredients' - water, rail access, a countryside corridor, business and residential uses - all have potential to transform the area into an attractive destination. A strategy which ensures that the mix of uses forms a vibrant and appealing visitor destination as well as a sustainable community will be essential if it is to capitalise on the railway as a unique element. A destination plan will guide the development, looking at both public and private sector development and considering how the regeneration should be planned to draw visitors as well as to work as a community.

It is a long term project, and one which will demand a strong will and partnership working between the Council, the Company and the Trust. The involvement of the Company and the Trust will certainly be more important in achieving the project than for the Heywood area development.

The key to realising the opportunity, however, lies in ensuring that there are the necessary resources in place to drive the project through.

1.7.2 Recommendations for Action

We suggest that a **dedicated project team** will be needed to work on this project and that the Council, the Trust and the Company will all need to agree and commit to it.

At present, the Council seems to have the necessary people and skills and has already started to shape its thinking. The onus is therefore now on the railway to formalise its commitment.

We address the resource implications in Section 3.



A destination strategy should be developed alongside the masterplan. Although the Council will need to lead on this, the Trust and the Company will need to remain engaged in the process. Selecting the optimum location for the station and planning excellent visitor facilities will be important for the area as well as for the railway.

1.8 Marketing

“Since the formation of the ELR Trust in 1984 there has been consistent close working in jointly promoting the ELR and the Irwell Valley. More recently with the opening of Heywood Station this joint working has been extended into Rochdale.

However, a Trust priority is now to revisit the existing arrangements by developing a Joint Marketing Plan that more fully takes account of the sub regional marketing framework that exists together with as yet only partially developed local markets such as short breaks, visiting friends and relatives campaigns and developing ‘days out’ packages and the group travel market.”

When the railway opened in 1987 a marketing agency was engaged by the Railway Trust to promote the Irwell Valley, facilitate the relationship between the Railway and its partner local authorities and coordinate/liaise with other attractions. This partnership and joint working arrangement led to a co-ordinated approach to marketing strategy and tactics.

Figure 32: Joint Marketing of the Irwell Valley



The Valley Marketing Manager was a key appointment in delivering this joint marketing strategy in addition to running joint events. Due to budget cuts and changes in local authority structures the funding was subsequently withdrawn from the joint marketing structure and for a number of years joint marketing was off the agenda. Similarly there



has not been a paid marketing post within the ELLR Company for a number of years. During this time the company has operated with a relatively low marketing budget, of which the majority has gone on events.

Consequently there has been a lack of co-ordinated strategic marketing focus both in terms of the railway and the Irwell Valley.

1.8.1 ELLR Marketing

All members of the Joint Marketing Group believe that the lack of a paid marketing post within the ELLR is a severe detriment to the success of the railway. The marketing pot is usually between £60,000 and £80,000 although the majority of this budget is spent on events and in the most recent financial year, marketing expenditure was only £37,000. There is no facility for visitors to book tickets online and the Tourist Information Centres have found it extremely difficult to sell tickets on behalf of the ELR.

Events at ELR are organised through a committee of volunteers but there is no single person doing the day to day work necessary such as taking bookings, organising advertising and booking 'acts'.

This un-coordinated approach very often leads to enquiries going unanswered and other partners have been frustrated at this lack of professionalism.

1.8.2 Joint Marketing

Since 2000, the Tourism Officers/Tourism Marketing representatives for Bury, Rochdale and Rossendale meet with the railway company on a regular basis to discuss issues of joint interest relating to the attraction and to develop joint projects throughout the railway corridor.

There is no joint marketing budget although the group has periodically bid for funds, for example from Visit Manchester for a joint leaflet. Although it is unlikely that funds can be found from local authorities it may be possible for some funding for future marketing activity to be obtained via the ELR Trust.

1.8.3 Issues

The lack of marketing support was probably the subject which elicited the most passionate comment from stakeholders during our consultations. There was an almost universal belief that the full potential impact of the railway could not be realised, either by the Company or the wider area without proper marketing support.

The concerns expressed are justified. Marketing is an essential component of any business, extending well beyond the most visible aspects such as promotion.



In the case of the railway, the lack of marketing resources, in terms of skilled people and funds, is having a range of limiting impacts. It is preventing the railway from taking advantage of working in partnership with the Local Authorities. Since the railway spends most of its limited marketing budget on events, there has been very little focus on growing core visits from key market segments such as families, group travel and schools.

The lack of marketing focus is also constraining the Company's ability to understand its customers and its customers' needs and to ensure that the experience is meeting their expectations.

The need for marketing in visitor attractions is, arguably, more critical than it is for other types of businesses. By its very nature, the 'product' is seasonal, which each year brings a fresh requirement to remind people to come back. Most attractions therefore gear much of their activity and expenditure towards the 'launch of the season' with dedicated events and promotional campaigns.

Both the Severn Valley and North York Moors Railway identified the critical role that having a professionally delivered and properly resourced marketing function has played in achieving their visitor growth.

The ELLR Company has acknowledged the need to develop its marketing capacity and has tried to recruit and retain a marketing officer. The fact that this has proved so difficult is indicative of a more profound issue.

For marketing to be effective it needs to be seen as an essential component of the organisation, at the very heart of success. It ensures that customers are properly valued and remain central to the ethos of the organisation.

The Marketing Manager, or Marketing Officer, is just one step in the delivery of successful marketing. The Marketing Mindset, or commitment to customers, needs to run right through the organisation.

Merely introducing a new and fairly junior member of staff to the organisation would not therefore, in itself deliver the marketing improvements that are needed.

The wider organisational implications, such as reporting structure, level of seniority and budgets need to be addressed as part of a more profound review of the optimal structure for the Company. We consider this in Section 3.

Recommended Actions

The Marketing post is certainly required. The role needs to be considered alongside the wider resource requirements of the Company to deliver the future strategy. We address this in the resources section of this report.



1.9 Visitor Improvement Strategy

“Each year the ELR is assessed under the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS) which gives essential feedback on how the ELR compares with other national and regional tourist attractions and receives advice on what things might be lacking in terms of customer care or customer expectations.

This advice from tourism experts is supplemented by regular surveys the ELLR Company carries out itself through asking its paying customers to the railway for comment throughout the year.

Priority 8 is therefore firmly rooted in the ELLR Company’s own annual Business Plan Review and is seen by the ELR Trust as an essential element that needs to be monitored and acted upon on a continuing regular basis to; maintain standards, develop customer care aspect further, and develop short term projects that will complement the main strategic Vision and Development Strategy outlined above.”

This is addressed in Section 2 which follows.

1.10 Other Development Options

Two other development options have been discussed which, whilst not included specifically amongst the eight priorities, could form part of the longer term strategy.

1.10.1 Passenger Service

The opportunity to offer a regular passenger service has been considered by the Trust and the Company. This is currently being reviewed in light of the recent rejection of the Greater Manchester Congestion Charge and the associated Transport Innovation Funds.

Clearly, the railway is in a position to explore this opportunity. In doing so, however, there would need to be a review of the implications for the organisation.

As with many of the priorities being considered, the ability to capitalise on the opportunity will be dictated by resources. It is worth factoring in the longer term potential for an expansion into a wider passenger service into considerations about the future structure of the organisation.

1.10.2 Freight

It may also be possible for the railway to transport freight on a commercial basis. This is being considered, working around the passenger services.

This is may be a medium term opportunity, depending on the implications for the core business.



Since it is likely to cause limited disruption to the organisation and potentially generate good additional income, it is certainly worth investigating further at an early stage.

1.11 Making the Most of Ramsbottom

Ramsbottom is without doubt the most attractive stop for visitors along the route. The town centre is pretty and well maintained and there are plenty of good quality shops and places to eat.

Although it was one of the most popular destinations for visitors in the recent summer survey, less than 10% of all visitors were getting off and visiting the town during the peak period.

Lack of awareness of the destination will be a factor. Many visitors will have little knowledge about Ramsbottom and therefore limited desire to visit.

One of the biggest challenges for small destinations is achieving distinctiveness or standing out in the market place. Destination marketing budgets are never big enough in themselves to make a noticeable difference to visitor numbers.

The most successful smaller destinations have created a unique position and have developed and strengthened their offer around the theme. If done well, and the proposition is both relevant and unusual, coverage in the media and guidebooks and word of mouth recommendations can generate real impact.

Ramsbottom therefore needs to find a reason to become famous in the way that Ludlow has for food, or Hay-on-Wye has for books. In both of these cases, the way that the towns developed their reputations was to nurture a growing cluster of specialist businesses - in Ludlow's case up-market restaurants - and to arrange a big annual event on the theme. Over a fairly short period of time, both became magnets for passionate businesses and consumers. It became a virtuous circle.

It is of course increasingly difficult to find something distinctive these days as more destinations attempt to do just this. Ramsbottom does however, appear to have a starting point. There are three shops and cafés selling up-market chocolate within a very small area! Ramsbottom could develop a USP²⁰ around chocolate.

A chocolate event would be needed to establish the proposition. More specialist retailers and cafes could be encouraged to open. The town could develop a 'chocolate' marque of quality, potentially endorsed by the Chocolate Society.

The railway should play its part, running event trains, retailing products, working with chocolate traders on promotional events etc.

²⁰ Unique selling proposition





The Chocolate Café receives good reviews and is just one of a number of specialist chocolate businesses in the town. The Cultured Bean, nearby, also specialises in good coffee and bitter chocolate torte.

Funding will be required initially to stage an event and to develop the business community. It may be possible to secure sponsorship from an upmarket chocolate producer.

Bury Council is already working to develop and promote tourism in Ramsbottom along with a Ramsbottom Marketing Group. There is an expanding programme of events including a series of Christmas markets in December and a proposed chocolate festival. However it is important that the railway link into these events and vice versa.

Recommended Actions

Look at the lessons from other towns and develop a strategy to give Ramsbottom a much higher profile. The railway should play an essential role in the experience.

1.12 Appealing to Children

The number of families using the railway except during certain special events is small. During the peak summer holiday period, when most attractions enjoy significant numbers of family and extended family visits, just 35% of visitors on the railway were travelling with children.

The popularity of the Thomas weekends and Santa Specials, however, demonstrates that the trains clearly hold a real appeal for children.

The family market is particularly important to visitor attractions since they have a particularly high propensity to seek out things to do to entertain the children during school holidays and at weekends.

Our informal consultations with families living in the area confirmed our own observations that there is not enough for families to do. As some parents explained, the train ride is too



short to be a meaningful visit in its own right and there is a perception that there is nothing suitable to encourage a stop off.

The Burrs Country Park Halt should provide access to a good family destination. As we have suggested above, whilst more facilities and outdoor attractions are needed, it has the potential to increase visits from this market.

In addition however the railway should consider adding its own children's play area at one of the other stations to strengthen the appeal and provide the necessary place for children to 'let off steam'! The location would of course depend on the availability of suitable land but Bury and Rawtenstall would be the obvious locations.

Good, imaginative children's playgrounds are always popular and well used. They are low maintenance and capital grants are often available to build them. In the case of the railway, a playground would send out important signals about being family friendly.



The playgrounds at Magna in Rotherham, Reghed in Cumbria and The Tree House at Alnwick Garden in Northumberland have all been used to increase the appeal to family visitors.

Becoming genuinely welcoming to families of course goes beyond offering play facilities. It is equally important to look at all the services and facilities on offer, such as the menus in the café, the pub, the retail range and the toilets and to ensure that they are appropriate.



Recommended Actions

Develop a broader family offer, using Burrs Country Park but also looking at low cost but good quality facilities at the stations.

Nominate a suitable volunteer to look at all the services and facilities on offer and find ways of improving the suitability for children and families.

1.13 Summary of Recommendations

- The resources needed to maximise the opportunities presented by the Transport Museum need to be considered carefully. Detailed plans are needed to make sure that the Museum is marketed and managed effectively.
- Careful consideration also needs to be given to the implications of developing the Buckley Wells site and the implications this will have on the current operation.
- Short term steps for improving Rawtenstall include: improve signage and the route to the town centre; work with the traders to put on events and kick start usage of the town; explore the heritage bus opportunity; marketing the initiatives; ensure that someone within the ELLR Company has responsibility for delivering the measures; draw up plans for the station improvements and café in tandem with other measures.
- Longer term measures at Rawtenstall include: work with the Council to develop the Town Centre plans; nurture the relationship with the traders; consider Stubbins Halt as a longer term possibility.
- Prioritise the Burrs Country Park Halt scheme and produce a detailed business plan. Develop a destination plan for the Country Park to add to its appeal and provide the necessary services.
- Rochdale Council should produce a masterplan for the Heywood Station area; in the short term, the ELLR / ELR Trust and the Council should look at opportunities to engage Heywood in special events.
- A dedicated project team is required to progress the major opportunity at Castleton. The Council should develop a destination strategy for Castleton alongside the masterplan. Whilst the ELLR Company states that the extension to Castleton will be a relatively straight-forward process, it is our view that people and resources need to be in place to capitalise on the opportunities that will present themselves as a result of the extension.
- Dedicated marketing resources should be a priority. The wider organisational implications need to be considered.
- A plan is needed to give Ramsbottom a much higher profile. It needs to become famous.



- Develop a stronger family offer using Burrs Country Park. Consider creating additional play facilities at one of the stations. Nominate a ‘Children’s Tsar’ to look at simple, low cost improvements to all facilities and services.



2. Business Improvement

2.1 The Business Context

In this section we consider improvements which could be made to the business, primarily delivered through the Company although in some cases with implications for the Trust.

We look at some ways in which the visitor experience and the commercial performance of the attraction could be improved.

It should be reiterated, however, that the business achievements of the organisation and of the Company in particular, are very impressive indeed given the very limited resources which are currently available.

It is very much easier for a visitor attraction with a big complement of paid staff to present a very polished and professional experience. They can also constantly refine and improve their commercial performance in a way that is just not possible for an organisation which is reliant on a large bank of volunteers.

The following improvements are therefore (as with the priorities discussed above) linked to the question of resources.

We reflect on this in the following section.

2.2 The Customer Journey

Although the VAQAS report suggests that overall the visitor experience is good, there are a number of ways in which it is currently falling short of today's expectations.

The concept of 'the customer journey' suggests that all attractions need to begin by considering the way in which visitors interact with the attraction before they arrive, usually through information channels.

The **timetabling** for the railway is complex and whilst finding ways of simplifying the presentation of information is not straightforward, the **website** could be used to much better effect. A relatively modest adaptation of the site would allow visitors to select which day or days they wish to travel and to find out whether trains are running.

The **telephone** information system is also very important. The administration telephone is not always answered and there is no automated voice message. Whilst clearly this is a resource issue, it is a very basic aspect of both customer service and sales and should be seen as a priority.

Similarly, the **information** available at the station needs to be simple and current. At the moment there is a confusing and ad hoc array of posters and information boards at Bury Station, whilst the information available out of hours at other stations such as Heywood and Ramsbottom is limited.



In some places, the signs are definitely not visitor friendly!



Signage at different points along the railway is not always helpful and does not reflect a visitor experience. Whilst there is a need to ensure security, this could be delivered in a manner which reflects the fact that the ELR is a visitor attraction.

Information provided at each station about what to do in the wider area has been subject to much discussion. At some stations it is good, at others less so.

There will always be a limit to the range and depth of information that can be provided on information boards however. It is probably worth ascertaining whether funding is available from Visit Manchester or the NWDA to develop more mobile information provision such as information which visitors can download on to their mobile phones.

The Tom-Tom sat. nav. Information is a very good initiative.





Signage about the area at some stations is comprehensive and well presented. The same quality is needed at each station. Thought should be given to other technology based information solutions.

2.3 The Visitor Welcome

The railway has managed to retain its traditional feel, which is all part of the experience. The **interaction** with ELR staff however is very important. Receiving a friendly and warm welcome at the ticket desks sets the tone for the visit.

The fact that the stations are manned by volunteers is not an acceptable reason for less than excellent service. The visitor is paying for the experience.

As a minimum therefore, the management of all ‘front of house’ staff needs to be considered. Minimum standards should be set and adhered to at all times. At present, the experience can only be described as variable, with some volunteers providing an excellent service whilst others do not.

The way in which the visitor transaction takes place also needs to be considered. **Information** needs to be provided by the ticket sellers about what visitors can do at different stations and the different options. This goes beyond good customer service and impacts on commercial income of course.

2.4 Onboard Marketing

One of the biggest opportunities on the railway is the fact that visitors are a ‘captive audience’, usually for over an hour.

This provides a great opportunity for them to find out about the things to do at each of the stations. Good leaflets and appropriate posters should be available in visible places in each carriage and at every station.



More importantly however, the volunteers on the trains and on platforms should use the opportunity to talk to visitors. This may be a matter of training. It may also be necessary to think carefully about the best roles for different people.

2.5 The Railway Experience

Although much of the focus of the strategy is, quite rightly, on the experience at the destinations, the train ride is still central to the visit. It is the primary reason why people are there.

The railway has natural magic and it would certainly not be good to destroy the traditional feel of the visit. More could be considered, however, to enhance the core experience.

Some suggestions include:

- Designating one coach a '**family carriage**' during holiday times with story telling or related activities taking place for children.
- Out of school times, one carriage could be designated the '**history carriage**' where visitors could hear about the history of the railway and the trains from knowledgeable volunteers.
- Volunteers in period costumes could walk through the trains talking to visitors '**in character**'.
- Children could be provided with a low cost **booklet** or leaflet to encourage them to find out more about the railway. These could be produced and sold at very low cost. Children's activity packs are often used at other attractions.

2.6 Getting Off

When customers disembark, there is an opportunity for volunteers at the stations to ensure that visitors know where they are going and what there is to do around. There is also a good chance to promote future special events.

Volunteers should be encouraged to wait for visitors when the train is due and to engage people who look receptive in conversation. Particularly they should look out for people clearly needing help.

At busiest times, volunteers should have leaflets about the area to hand out. (These would need to be provided by the relevant Local Authority).

2.7 Volunteer Training

Volunteers are there because they want to, and the fact that they are prepared to give their time freely is very valuable.



The visitors however are not there for free. They have paid the same price as they would for any other visitor attraction.

The same rigour needs to be applied to training volunteers therefore as it is to training any visitor attractions staff.

All volunteers in customer facing positions, on trains, at the stations or staffing telephone lines or sales desks should have a planned programme of training which includes:

- Welcome Host or similar **customer care training**. This should be done for all new volunteers and on a periodic basis thereafter.
- **Up selling** and cross selling training where they learn how to sell the railway and the surrounding area in a positive way.
- Any statutory training such as health and safety and any necessary food hygiene is of course essential but is clearly being delivered effectively.

2.8 Improving Retail Sales

Retail sales are currently very low compared to other visitor attractions. This is almost certainly due to lack of suitably skilled staff and a lack of focus on the opportunity.

Whilst the specialist product ranges are no doubt very comprehensive, overall the offer is not suitable for a general visitor attraction.

In the following section we consider the resources that are necessary to maximise the commercial potential of the attraction.

In addition, we suggest that specialist advice is sought to consider:

- The **range** of products which is sold. In particular, ‘instant gratification products’ (IGPs), pocket money items, ELR souvenirs and locally made products always sell well within visitor attractions.
- Careful consideration needs to be given to the **visitor profile** and expenditure patterns to ensure that the retail offer reflects this. **School children**, for example, are often very important to retail sales in attractions. Although they only come with a few pounds, they are usually determined to spend it! The product range and merchandising should reflect this.
- The ‘specialist’ product range also needs to be analysed and the way that this is sold assessed. There may be opportunities to move towards more **on line sales** for specialist products, freeing up space for more general products at the stations.
- The way that products are merchandised. **Displays** should be modernised and improved, with attention paid to accessibility, eye lines and appeal to different types of visitors.



- Product ranges linked to **special events**. The Santa Specials, Thomas weekends and War weekends all provide opportunities to introduce appropriate retail. Sale or return deals will need to be negotiated with suppliers to ensure that capital is not tied up in unsold stock.
- **Stock holding** and stock rotation. At present, the Company appears to be holding too much stock for the turn over. Whilst the optimum stock level would need to be determined for the attraction, as a guide the value of stock held should be no more than 50% of the total annual retail income.
- **Sales training**.

2.9 The Catering Offer

Catering is a very important part of the visitor attraction experience and particularly so on the Railway where visitors often have to wait in the cold for the next train.

The Trackside pub is very good and is a good sales opportunity for the railway. As previously noted however, it would benefit from being more **family friendly** with a small designated family area, a children's menu and good selection of soft drinks. The opportunities to promote future special events and the railway's products and services should of course be maximised.

The café at Rawtenstall is also very popular and the plans to extend it should improve its popularity. It should however be marketed better through the website and at each of the stations.

The on board buffet is not always open but is an excellent sales opportunity.

2.10 Summary of recommendations

- The railway needs to carry out an audit of all existing signage and information. Old or inappropriate signs should be replaced in a planned way as funding allows and new ways of conveying information considered.
- The volunteers working at stations have a particularly important role. Ensuring that stations are manned and that volunteers have a clear set of standards is essential.
- Opportunities for on board marketing should be maximised.
- Simple, low cost ways of improving the journey could be implemented.
- Volunteers should orientate visitors as they leave and ensure that they are taking advantage of the local area.
- There should be a comprehensive and compulsory training programme for volunteers.



- Significant improvements could be made to retail sales. We recommend that this needs specialist attention.
- The Trackside pub should aim to become more family friendly.
- The café at Rawtenstall should be marketed better as part of the experience.



3. Organisational Implications

3.1 Existing Structure

The current organisational structure for the railway is both a strength and a constraining factor.

The fact that the organisation runs with exceptionally low labour costs has without doubt helped the railway to establish itself as a viable visitor attraction and has ensured that it has weathered difficult times that have sent many other attractions out of business.

The relationship with the Trust is also in many ways excellent. It allows the three Local Authorities to develop the strategic direction of railway and provides a level of executive resource to deliver the strategic objectives. It acts as a financial and legal backstop for the railway and provides the expertise and resources needed to secure additional capital funding.

It also allows a beneficial degree of operating freedom for the Company, removing the constraints often imposed by public sector governance on other similar organisations.

Perhaps the greatest success that can be seen from the structure is that it has enabled the railway to operate effectively without needing public revenue subsidy for many years.

There is evidence however that the current structure of the Company is effectively ‘capping’ the extent to which the business is able to grow.

With limited dedicated staff resources, the business is not realising its full commercial potential in a number of areas. Visitor numbers are constrained by the limited development of the experience, by a lack of effective marketing and by poor performance of secondary income generators such as retail and catering.

The issues become particularly pertinent when the requirements of the development priorities are factored in.

The following summarises the negatives and positives of the current organisational structure (both the Company structure and the Trust model).

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The staff costs are low which means that ongoing revenue requirements are kept low. • The range of skills and expertise provided by volunteers delivers many of the necessary functions. • Arguably the volunteers are prepared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The visitor experience lacks the professionalism of attractions with a paid work force. • The service is not guaranteed - for example stations are not always manned. • The visitor experience is given a lower



<p>to do more for the organisation because there is nobody else.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a good ‘club’ feel to the experience because workers are there out of choice. • The Company / Trust structure is democratic and allows the LAs to be engaged whilst allowing the operating company a high degree of freedom. • The Trust provides strategic direction and assists in capital fund raising. 	<p>priority than the operation of the trains because that is what most volunteers are interested in.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and visitor related business development functions are particularly weak. • Development opportunities cannot always be acted upon quickly enough because of lack of resources.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater operating surplus is generally available to be spent on other product improvement schemes. • The value provided by volunteers can be used to help secure funding. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development priorities will put significant demands on the existing structure. • There is sometimes a ‘them and us’ relationship between the Company and the Trust which hinders developments. • The Company is dependent to a large extent on a relatively small number of exceptionally talented and dedicated individual volunteers. It cannot be assumed that when these people stop working for the organisation that others of a similar calibre will be found. • The organisation is legally liable for the actions of its volunteers. With limited resources for volunteer management the risk is increased.

The question has to be asked, is the current structure suitable to deliver the development strategy? If not, what is the alternative?

3.2 Future Needs

The future needs can be broken down into two categories: the skills and capacity to deliver ongoing improvements to the attraction in line with changing needs; and the capacity and skills which will be required to realise the future priorities.



In the first case, the lack of resources is already having a negative impact on the business performance and visitor experience. The opening of the Transport Museum is likely to bring the difficulties presented by limited staff levels more clearly into focus.

With the wider developments, although the lack of capacity is not necessarily apparent at present, it will almost certainly become an issue as the need to work on a number of potentially major schemes including Buckley Wells, Burrs, Castleton and Heywood is introduced.

All steam railways apparently reach a similar ‘**tipping point**’ when they have to decide whether to introduce a more professional operational structure, or to stay largely volunteer driven.

3.3 Future Options

There appear to be three different routes that could be taken.

3.3.1 Retain the current structure

The first is to accept that whilst the current structure has limitations, it is also the lowest risk strategy. Retaining the current set up would allow both the Trust and the Company to carry on largely as they are at present.

The drawback with this approach, however, is that the Buckley Wells and Castleton projects are likely to put serious strain on the organisation. If one or two key volunteers were to become unable to work, it is difficult to see how the developments could continue.

It may be possible to bring in additional paid resource to supplement during the development phase, but once the projects are operational, the ongoing resource requirements will need to be reconsidered.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low risk • Low cost • Tried & tested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot deliver the necessary business improvements needed in the short term • Will be increasingly unable to realise future opportunities • Will threaten the longer term future



3.3.2 Retain the overarching structure but increase professional support within the Company

The second option is to keep the existing relationship between the Trust and the Company, but increase the number of paid staff within the Company to meet the changing business needs.

This would almost certainly be done as a phased change, with additional staff being recruited as the new development requirements dictate.

Any changes would need to be managed carefully to ensure that the cultural shift did not drive away the volunteer ethos or threaten the relationship with the Trust.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be phased to meet the developing needs • Financial risk can be phased • Will allow immediate and longer term growth of the organisation • Protects existing relationship between Trust and Company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional costs would need to be met • Some increased financial risk • Could threaten the strength of the volunteer input

3.3.3 Develop a new independent organisation

The final alternative is to develop a new independent structure which does not require the support of a separate Trust.

The organisation would need to be large enough to be fully financially independent and to be able to raise all the funds it needs. It would need to be able instil the necessary confidence in stakeholders that it could operate without a ‘back stop’.

Whilst theoretically possible, it is difficult to see that this option could be achieved at this stage. It would almost certainly incur additional financial risk as the organisation would need to assume all of the functions currently performed by the Trust.

There is also a danger that without a suitable mechanism for engagement, it would be difficult to work effectively with the Local Authorities. It would probably reduce the likelihood of the Authorities developing plans which exploit the railway as an asset which would weaken the organisation’s position in the future.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would create a larger company with a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High financial risk



Advantages	Disadvantages
greater capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mechanism for working with LAs Major cultural change would be needed which could threaten the good will of the volunteers

3.4 A Phased Development

When the advantages and disadvantages are considered, the first and third options are both probably not feasible.

Staying with the current structure is already proving inadequate in some ways, whilst the third option, a radical change, is neither desirable nor achievable.

The preferred option therefore appears to be to look at increasing the amount of paid resource within the Company to deliver the necessary developments and improvements, whilst retaining the strengths of the existing structure.

The increases should be phased in line with development needs and increases in income.

The following shows the staff costs of other steam railways in the UK by way of comparison.

Figure 33: Staffing costs UK steam railways



3.5 Cultural Implications

Nearly all steam railways which have been faced with the decision about whether more paid staff are needed to deliver growth appear to have resisted the idea initially.

Most of the people we spoke to, who worked for or with railways that now employ a relatively large workforce, talked about the pain of the cultural change when more paid staff, particularly senior staff, were recruited.

The requirement for paid staff was often denied. The risks were seen as insurmountable. There was a strong sense that it would be better to just keep things the way they have been working in the past.

Most described how their organisations got it wrong at times, recruiting people for jobs that didn't need paid staff, or not using paid workers where these were most needed.

The way in which the change was handled with the existing volunteers was often, with hindsight, also seen as a mistake.

All of the railways which had been through change however, believed that it was absolutely central to the organisation's development.

It is likely therefore that if it is accepted that the Company needs to make a step change in this way, they will face exactly the same issues.

This should not become a reason not to do it, however. If it is accepted, as we believe, that a larger paid workforce is going to be essential to deliver the vision, then sensitive and appropriate ways need to be found to implement a growth plan which does not threaten the existing organisation.

3.6 Capacity Gaps

We have looked at the likely skills and capacity requirements which will be needed to deliver the current improvements identified, as well as to work with the existing Directors and senior volunteers to deliver the development options.

There are four areas where we believe professional, experienced paid staff are needed in the next twelve months. These are:

- **Commercial development** - to maximising income from retail, ticketing and catering and develop the commercial impact of the new Transport Museum. Additional commercial expertise will also be needed to support the Director on the new development priorities.
- **Volunteer management** - to ensure that the quality of the visitor experience is of a consistently high standard; to manage volunteer resources to ensure they are used effectively; to recruit new volunteers to meet the needs of the new developments; to arrange and manage a comprehensive and ongoing volunteer training programme.



- **Marketing** - to work with Local Authority partners, traders etc. on joint marketing initiatives; to develop relationships with media; to deliver an effective promotional plan; to engage with the community and other stakeholders; to ensure that there is ongoing product development; to research visitor needs and experiences and ensure that any improvements or changes are implemented.
- It may also be necessary to look at whether the **administration** resources are sufficient to manage bookings, handle enquiries and look after the day to day finances once the Transport Museum opens.

3.7 Resource Implications

The following looks at indicative cost and revenue implications for the above structure.

The costs have been based on relatively senior personnel being recruited. We believe strongly that staff at this level are needed to deliver the step changes required by the organisation for the future.

Figure 34: Indicative staff costs

Annual Cost

Commercial Manager	£45,000
Marketing Manager	£30,000
Volunteer Manager	£30,000
Administration support	£20,000
Total	£125,000

Costs include on costs

Figure 35: Indicative income growth

	<i>Current income</i>	<i>Plus 5%</i>	<i>Plus 10%</i>	<i>Plus 20%</i>
Core Ticket sales	£234,000	£245,700	£257,400	£280,800
Shop	£55,000	£57,750	£60,500	£66,000
Buffet	£39,000	£40,950	£42,900	£46,800
Events	£541,000	£568,050	£595,100	£649,200
Footplate	£60,000	£63,000	£66,000	£72,000
Red Rose Diners	£109,000	£114,450	£119,900	£130,800
Trackside	£235,000	£246,750	£258,500	£282,000
Non visitor income	£174,000	£182,700	£191,400	£208,800
	£1,447,000	£1,519,350	£1,591,700	£1,736,400
<i>Difference</i>		<i>£72,350</i>	<i>£144,700</i>	<i>£289,400</i>

An income growth of around 10% would be needed to cover the costs of the additional staffing. If only a 5% increase were achieved, there would be deficit of around £53,000.



We have not assumed additional operational budgets for the staff at this stage, although this may need to be factored in.

Further resources may be needed in future years as the operation grows. In particular, as the Buckley Wells Heritage Centre and Castleton extension are completed, resources will need to be reviewed and possibly reconsidered.

3.8 Implications

Introducing the changes to the existing structure would need to be planned and implemented with care.

In particular it will be important to ensure that by adding new paid posts, the good will of the volunteers is not lost.

It is equally important however to ensure that the new staff are given the necessary infrastructure and capacity to do their jobs.

This is without doubt quite a delicate balance and in the short term the company may require additional external help to assist in planning the new structure and ensuring the effective delivery.

We believe that it is particularly important to recruit the majority of the new staff posts **at the same time**. In the past, new staff have apparently struggled with the lack of infrastructure and support and this will need to be avoided once again.

For the first year, the organisation will need to cover at least part of the additional costs, before additional income is achieved. Whilst this may be possible using the Company's resources, it may be advisable for the Trust to consider the role they should play in supporting the growth of the organisation. The Trust may wish to underwrite at least a percentage of the costs in the first year. Alternatively, it may be possible for the Trust to contribute in other ways such as the cost of new infrastructure to accommodate the new posts.

3.9 The Roles of the Boards

It is also important to consider how the roles of the Boards of the Company and the Trust will need to be strengthened to assist the organisation in the future.

The development plans will almost certainly require different skills from Board members of both the Company and the Trust.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this study to consider any changes in detail, it is worth considering the following:

- The Local Authorities will be playing an increasingly important role in the future strategy. The representation of the LAs on the Board of the ELLR should be



considered. In particular, it will be essential to ensure that the Trust representatives on the ELLR Board are **servicing Councillors** with the ability to influence and effect change within the Authorities. It will be equally important to find individuals who have the time and personal commitment to dedicate to the project.

- The Board of the Company will increasingly need to be involved in the wider developments, particularly in Castleton and Heywood. The Company will therefore need a **high profile ambassador** on the Board who has excellent connections and influence within the community and who will be committed to networking with key influencers within the public and private sectors to 'sell' the ELLR developments.
- The Company Board will need to have the range of **skills and expertise** to support the delivery of the development plans. Specifically, Board members will be needed who have proven experience in; Project Management, Customer Services, Retail, Catering and Visitor Attractions in addition to the technical skills needed for the railway operations. It will be necessary to review the skills of existing Board members and to identify where there are gaps. We recommend that once the needs have been identified, individuals of the right calibre should be sought and approached personally to join the team of Directors.
- The relationship between the Trust and Company Boards should be considered to ensure that there is a meaningful process of communication between the two. Going forward, it will be increasingly important that the **two Boards communicate at a strategic level** to ensure that progress is made and that the dynamic for change is not lost. It may be necessary, for example, to arrange a joint meeting between the Boards on a quarterly basis, with interim project updates as required in between.

3.10 Summary Recommendations

- Retain the current Trust and Company structure.
- Conduct a skills audit on the Company Board to identify where there are gaps in the existing knowledge base. Recruit individuals with the necessary skills for the future.
- The additional costs will need to be covered in the first year, potentially by both the Company and the Trust.
- The role and make up of the Boards of the Company and Trust should also be reviewed in light on the development strategy.
- A structured communication process is needed between the Company and Trust Boards.



4. Delivering 200,000 Visits

4.1 An Achievable Target

The target growth could come from either events visitors or additional core visitors.

At 70% of the total, the number of event visitors is already comparatively high, at least as high as most other steam railways. Clearly this is a strength. There is probably limited capacity to grow event visitors further and it is probably not desirable to do so. Organising events takes additional volunteer resources and requires additional expenditure.

There is, however, spare capacity for additional core visitors and it is both realistic and beneficial that the majority of additional visitors should be users of the general service.

This means that to achieve the target of 200,000 visitors, around a **fourfold increase** in core visitors will be needed, from 35,000 to 135,000 people. This is a significant rise.

It is, however, almost certainly achievable based on the experience of other steam railways. It will be reliant on most of the development priorities being delivered, creating new things to do along the route but also improving the visitor experience.




Creating additional capacity in the areas identified will also be critical.

The rate of growth will depend on the timing of the developments being delivered and even so, it is difficult to predict accurately exactly what the impact will be on numbers.

We believe however that if Buckley Wells, Burrs Country Park Halt and the Transport Museum are all completed by 2013/14, which may be feasible, visitor numbers should have increased to in excess of 175,000. Achieving 200,000 plus visitors will depend on the success of Castleton and possibly Heywood.

The following table summarises the timescale for the developments which is followed by a second table outlining the responsibility for delivering each priority. While the projects range from the short-term tactical to the long-term strategic, it is important that the working groups and project teams do not become wide-ranging “talking shops” but focused action groups. This will require clarity in setting objectives and monitoring and reporting progress.

Key:

	Planning
	Resource and implement
	Complete



5 Year Development Timetable	2009/10				2010/11				2011/12				2012/13				2013/14			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
1a. Company structure - Accommodation.																				
1b. Company structure - Recruitment.																				
2a. Transport Museum Commercial Development																				
2b. Transport Museum Appoint Education Officer																				
3. Business Performance and Visitor Services Improvements.			Establish Targets		Review & Implement				ET	R&I			ET	R&I			ET	R&I		
4. Marketing plan ELLR Company																				
Marketing plan, ELLR / Local Authority Joint Marketing																				
5. Burrs Halt	Destination Plan				Resource Procurement															
6. Family Facilities					Establish Targets	Review & Implement														
7. Rawtenstall station & town centre			Masterplan Development		Resource Procurement															
8. Ramsbottom destination			Destination Plan		Resource Procurement															
9. Buckley Wells Phase1		Visitor Attraction Masterplan		Resource Procurement																
9. Buckley Wells Phase 2&3		Visitor Attraction Masterplan										Resource Procurement								
9. Buckley Wells Phase 4		Visitor Attraction Masterplan														Resource Procurement				
10. Heywood development			Masterplan Development					Resource Procurement												
11. Castleton development			Masterplan / Destination Plan					Resource Procurement												



Action Area	Responsibility
<p>1. Company Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment • Induction and Training • Line management • Reward • Physical infrastructure (offices, furniture etc.) 	<p>Lead: ELLR Company Board with a nominated director to be responsible for delivery.</p> <p>Support: Trust to explore how LA partners can contribute. (In-kind, officer time, budgets & accommodation?)</p>
<p>2. Transport Museum commercial development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate targets into ELLR Business Plan - report to Trust on progress. • Incorporate targets into the performance review process for the new posts. 	<p>Lead: ELLR Company implemented by Commercial Development Director and Commercial Manager (new post).</p> <p>Support: Marketing Director, Marketing Manager (new post), Volunteer Manager (new post) and Education Officer (new post), Admin Officer (new post).</p>
<p>3. Business Performance and Visitor Services Improvements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at good practice in other attractions. • Incorporate targets into ELLR Business Plan - report to Trust on progress. • Incorporate targets into the performance review process for the new posts. 	<p>Lead: ELLR Company implemented by Commercial Development Director and Commercial Manager (new post).</p> <p>Support: Establish an Action Team comprising Marketing Director, Marketing Manager (new post), Volunteer Manager (new post), Education Officer, Children's Tsar (new volunteer post) and a number of volunteers.</p>
<p>4. Marketing Plan (ELLR Marketing) Incorporate targets into ELLR Business Plan - report to Trust on progress. Incorporate targets into the performance review process for the new posts.</p> <p>4. Marketing Plan (Joint Marketing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate targets into ELLR Business Plan - report to Trust on progress. 	<p>Lead: ELLR Company implemented by Marketing Director, Marketing Manager (new post) and Commercial Manager (new post).</p> <p>Support: Commercial Development Director, Education Officer, Admin Officer (new post) and a small number of volunteers.</p> <p>Lead: Joint Marketing Group comprising Marketing Manager (new post) and Local Authority Tourism Officers.</p>
<p>5. Burrs Halt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate targets into ELLR Business Plan - report to Trust on progress. 	<p>Lead: Bury Council</p> <p>Support: ELLR Company/ELR Trust</p> <p>Wider Partnership: Caravan Club, Activity Centre, Bury Council Parks dept., other private sector partners.</p>
<p>6. Family facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at good practice in other attractions. • Incorporate targets into ELLR Business Plan - report to Trust on progress. • Incorporate targets into the performance review process for the new posts. 	<p>Lead: ELLR Company Board implemented by Commercial Development Director and Commercial Manager (new post).</p> <p>Support: Establish a Family Action Team comprising Marketing Director, Marketing Manager (new post), Volunteer Manager (new post), Education Officer, Admin Officer (new post), Children's Tsar (new volunteer post) and a number of volunteers.</p>



<p>7. Rawtenstall station</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate targets into ELLR Business Plan - report to Trust on progress. <p>7. Rawtenstall town centre</p>	<p>Lead ELLR Company Support Rossendale BC/ ELR Trust</p> <p>Lead: Rossendale Council Support: ELLR Company, Wider Partnership: Private Sector and others to be advised.</p>
<p>8. Ramsbottom Destination Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a formal communication between Bury Council, ELR Trust and ELLR Company 	<p>Lead: Bury Council Support: ELLR Company/ELR Trust Wider Partnership: Private Sector</p>
<p>9. Buckley Wells</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate targets into ELLR Business Plan - report to Trust on progress. 	<p>Lead: ELLR Company Support: Bury Council / ELR Trust Wider Partnership: to be advised.</p>
<p>10. Heywood Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a formal communication between Rochdale Council, ELR Trust / ELLR Company 	<p>Lead: Rochdale Council Support: ELLR Company / ELR Trust Wider Partnership: to be advised</p>
<p>11. Castleton Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a formal communication between Rochdale Council and ELR Trust/ ELLR Company. 	<p>Lead: Rochdale Council Support: ELLR Company / ELR Trust</p> <p>Wider Partnership: to be advised</p>

