

Response to draft West Yorkshire Combined Authority Rail Strategy September 2023

1 Opening remarks – welcome for strategy

Railfuture Yorkshire branch covers the whole of Yorkshire. West Yorkshire is in a central position for us. Nationally, Railfuture is Britain's leading independent organisation campaigning for a bigger, better railway, a voluntary group representing rail users, with 20,000 affiliated and individual members, and not affiliated to or funded by train companies, political parties or trade unions.

Yorkshire branch strongly welcomes the WYCA rail strategy which is well thought out. We can support it as far as it goes but look for more.

We seek:

- to identify gaps and which need to be filled, and to suggest solutions;
- and to suggest further developments.

We also welcome:

- relatively detailed, albeit outline, proposals for rail transformation across the “Five Towns” (Castleford, Pontefract, Knottingley, Featherstone and Normanton). These need to be matched in other parts of the county where existing services are thin, including the Huddersfield-Wakefield corridor, and the link through Brighouse from Kirklees to Bradford, upper Calderdale and beyond.

- suggested new lines (reopenings) within and outside the county. We look for development and early progress on all these ideas. Some of the ideas might be light rail (mass transit) rather than conventional “heavy” rail.
- plans for decarbonisation, specifically for a programme of rail electrification – hopefully a rolling programme where skills and engineering development are carried forward from one project to the following one. ***In energy terms electric trains are the most efficient means of powering rail transport; they waste less of the total energy supplied than battery-powered, hydrogen or conventional diesel trains.*** That does not mean we rule out battery or hydrogen use particularly in the short term or for shorter more lightly used routes.

This response is primarily about the role of conventional (“heavy”) rail. Benefits of heavy rail include:

- connecting people, businesses and communities with work, education & health services, and – increasingly – leisure and outdoor attractions and facilities in our towns and country;
- economic benefits that result;
- opening up a transport system that requires public support to more taxpayers and others who provide that support;
- reducing reliance on the private car;
- tackling the climate emergency;
- tackling road congestion and air pollution, and associated health problems.

WYCA now needs to waste no time in campaigning with all relevant bodies so that the many potentially transformative developments in the Strategy can make progress without delay.

There need to be much more clarity of timing, the lack of which is conspicuous in the strategy as it stands.

2 Strategic proposals

2.1 “Five towns” – a welcome, exciting package (Strategy p62-3 and Fig 13)

Proposals in Expanding the Reach for the “Five Towns” east of Wakefield are very welcome indeed. All of the following are required:

- a) restoration of hourly Huddersfield-Castleford service. This is expected to be an early development with extension to York, and also extension back from Manchester. It will provide a much needed cross-Pennine service for Wakefield (Kirkgate);

...followed by:

- b) doubling of frequency to twice hourly on each of the two routes Leeds-Pontefract (via Castleford and via Wakefield respectively).
- c) hourly service on Sheffield-Pontefract Baghill-York route (at present 3 trains/day);
- d) hourly service from Leeds extended via Askern route to Doncaster. We hope further investment might allow these trains to serve Knottingley;

e) hourly service from Leeds extended via from Knottingley route to Goole.

We call for:

- f) Sunday services of similar frequency to Saturdays. At present Sunday services at stations such as Glasshoughton – major shopping & leisure destination – are 2-hourly only;
- g) the promise of a **Five Towns to Bradford** service to be delivered. It is not clear whether this would be via Leeds, or via Wakefield (K) and the Calder Valley line through Brighouse. Leeds would be more direct but a pathing challenge with reversal required. The Calder Valley option would offer new connectivity. (See also 2.2.)

Railfuture strongly advocates the above programme and argues WYCA to press for progress and results in terms of new services in the next five years.

2.2 Calder Valley links – need to refine timetable and develop Brighouse route as key regional link. Can not be kept waiting for TRU.

The Calder Valley line timetable, serving Bradford and Calderdale extending through Leeds and Kirklees and westwards to Blackpool, Manchester, Wigan and Chester needs to be improved to eliminate uneven patterns at key stations such as Halifax and Hebden Bridge. All trains on both Manchester and Blackpool routes should call at Sowerby Bridge. The service at Brighouse (and future Elland) appears at first sight to be 2 trains/hr but in fact over two intersecting routes served there is only one train per hour to each destination.

At least doubling of service is needed. We look for a much even intervals and regular connections – a local “Taktfahrplan”.

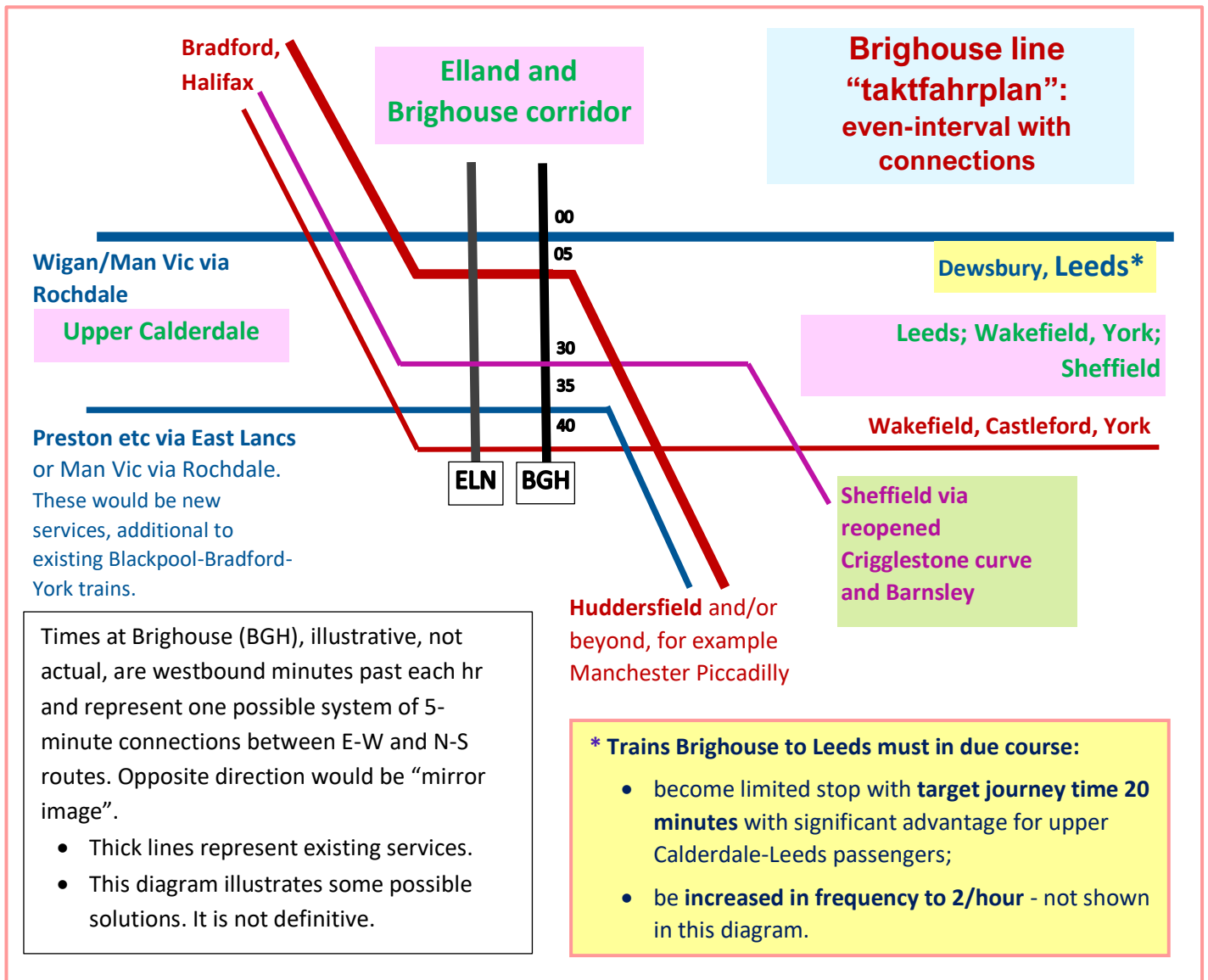
Issues include still painfully slow progress towards opening long-proposed Elland station, which should have opened at the same time as Brighouse. It will be 25 years late if – hopefully when – it finally opens in 2025. (We hear of further possible delay.)

We are pleased that the study (page 37) proposes **doubling the direct Brighouse-Leeds** service and making it semi-fast. However, this may be a challenge as long as work on Transpennine Route Upgrade is in progress which it may be until the early 2030s. We must not be asked to wait that long!

Starting with the assumption the present Brighouse line pattern is to be built upon, in order to at least double service frequency on all four arms, **possible additional services** include:

- a) **Upper Calder Valley to Huddersfield** fulfilling long expressed local desire for commuting, education and leisure. This could start from **Preston or from Manchester Victoria** and continue beyond Huddersfield perhaps to **Manchester Piccadilly** a near “circular” service.
- b) Bradford-Huddersfield (existing or additional service) **extended to Manchester Piccadilly** and serving intermediate stations Hud-Stalybridge.

- c) **Bradford (or upper Calderdale as in (a)) to Wakefield** and beyond, maybe to **Pontefract** or a second service each hour over the direct route Wakefield to **York** (i.e. dovetailing with Manchester-Hud-Castleford-York in 2.1).
- d) **Bradford via Brighouse and reopened Crigglestone curve to Barnsley and Sheffield**, (see 2.3). Headline journey time would be Brighouse-Sheffield 50 minutes.



Note that (a) and (b) above provide cross-Manchester connectivity providing some compensation for the broken promise of a **Bradford, Calder Valley and Rochdale service via the Ordsall chord to Manchester Oxford Road, Piccadilly and the Airport** – which still needs to be pursued sooner rather than later.

Connections between different arms of the service would be provided at Brighouse (or Elland) as shown in the diagram below.

Sunday service frequencies should match Saturdays reflecting the renewed visitor economy along the length of the line. (We welcome recent formation of a community rail partnership in Calderdale and Rochdale districts.)

Again, we look for a package approach to transform what we still sometimes hear referred to as a “Cinderella Line”. A start on this is already long overdue. **Greengauge 21** called for the Bradford-Sheffield service to be in the latter part of a ten-year plan. Railfuture Yorkshire calls for most of the package in this section to be delivered before the end of this decade – i.e. by 2030.

2.3 Medium and longer term development

2.3.1 We strongly welcome all of the following proposed openings (p65-6 of the Strategy)

- We call for more detail, and – again! – timescales.
- Some of this should be done in less than 10 years.
- Development work must be pushed forward now.

Scheme	Heavy/light rail	Notes
Menston-Otley	Either.	Heavy rail logical if linked to Leeds/Bradford-Ilkley line. Or tram-train?
Crigglestone chord (Bradford-Sheffield)	Heavy rail.	Journey times to Sheffield from Bradford 75min, Halifax 62min, Brighouse 50min. Could be new station for Ossett at Horbury. Would also serve Barnsley and Meadowhall. Possible extension to East Midlands. Massive connectivity benefits. Probably easiest scheme in terms of cost as Crigglestone curve is short and thought to be in good condition. Was recommended by Greengauge 21 in recent report on Leeds-Sheffield corridor (10-year plan).
Spenn Valley	Heavy rail	Shorter route for previous (still needs Crigglestone curve) ... or:
	Light rail	...to maximise local connectivity Bradford-Spen-Dewsbury
Penistone-Deepcar (in South Yorks)	Probably heavy rail	Direct route Huddersfield-Sheffield, journey time to reopened Victoria station about 50 minutes. Could be linked to Chesterfield-Sheffield “reopening your railway” scheme. Might not be directly linked to Sheffield Midland station but massive benefits for commuting,
Keighley-Oxenhope (Worth Valley)	Could be innovative light rail?	Connecting with existing Airedale trains at Keighley.
Skipton-Colne (N Yorks and Lancs)	Heavy rail	Leeds-Skipton-Burnley-Manchester service? A long-awaited development.
Wakefield-Cudworth-Barnsley	Heavy or light rail	Major scheme. Promoted by SYMCA.

2.3.2 It should be added here that Railfuture Yorkshire welcomes the recent start of work on the TransPennine Route Upgrade. It is important that TRU does not prove a distraction from the need

to develop other services including the Five Towns and Brighouse line packages in 2.1 and 2.2 above.

2.3.3 We expect when TRU is completed there to be further benefits for all lines in West Yorkshire including those mentioned above.

2.3.4 Railfuture is in favour of very long-term projects such as HS2 and NPR. ***It is important however that planning of these long-term schemes does not get in the way of or draw away resources from schemes that can make our railway more attractive in the much shorter term.***

2.4 Electrification proposals (3-tier plan).

2.4.1 Railfuture strongly welcomes the electrification proposals in the Strategy. ***Once again there is a need for a clearer sense of timing – and urgency.***

2.4.2 The schemes in Tier 1 are the right ones – Harrogate, Calder Valley and Dearne Valley. We note that Harrogate is mentioned first even though the Calder Valley had top ranking in the NETF “Northern Sparks” report. Perhaps as a relatively modest scheme Harrogate could start before TRU is completed.

2.4.3 WYCA should waste no opportunity to:

- Get on with planning rail electrification across the county.
- Get out the message that electric trains are more energy efficient, more reliable and cheaper to run than battery and hydrogen-powered trains.¹

2.4 To repeat the question? What is the plan to achieve all this? And the timescale?

- We make no excuse for repeating the question.
- This must not be just another report but the start of a ***programme of planning and action.***
- Politicians will need to be persuaded of the benefits for their constituents.
- And the document needs to explain that.

3 Selected points in detail – and critique (on next page)

¹ Though we agree that battery and hydrogen trains will be needed on some lines, if only on a temporary basis,

3 Selected points in detail – and critique

3.1 Links with the Mass Transit (MT) Strategy

In a metropolitan county rail development cannot be viewed in isolation from light rail (LR) and trams. WYCA needs a mass transit system, and Railfuture wants this to primarily be a tram or tram-train system. None of the maps in the strategy document combine the so-called heavy rail and mass transit modes. Some parts of West Yorkshire at present cut off from the railway system need rails back; at this point the rail strategy should identify these whilst accepting that trams may be the best solution. Examples might include the Spen Valley, Otley, Wetherby, Ossett, Methley and Hipperholme/Lightcliffe.

Note:

- Phase 1 MT proposals include East Leeds, Leeds-Bradford, and S Leeds-Dewsbury (all **LR/tram** leading option) and Bradford-Dewsbury (leading option not selected but bus, advanced bus and **ultra light rail** shortlisted)²
- **A concern** about mass transit is that development must not become a distraction from development of existing train routes that need to be achieved in the next 5 years or thereabouts.

3.2 West Yorkshire's Economic Geography (p11 et seq)

Figure 3 on page 12 shows commuting patterns in West Yorkshire. There is little commuting on certain corridors. Is this at least partly to do with congested roads and poor public transport links? These links are Calderdale to/from Kirklees; Wakefield to/from Calderdale and vice versa; Wakefield to/from Bradford and vice versa; and to a slightly lesser extent, Calderdale to/from Leeds. Calderdale is a large area, and whilst there are fair rail links to Leeds from the upper Calder Valley and Halifax, the service from Brighouse is inadequate, and from the Spen Valley and Hipperholme/Lightcliffe non-existent.

Daily commuting was reduced by the trend towards working from home. Growing optional travel is therefore important. It must be sustained as a way of opening up rail to a growing part of the population.

3.3 Strategic priorities (p18)

It is good to see:

- extra **track and train capacity** in a tentative 10-year plan, along with
- service improvements for Five Towns, Penistone line, Brighouse and S Wakefield. ***The additional schemes on p66 need to be mentioned here not least the Bradford-Sheffield proposal.***

² WYCA Mass Transit Vision, Aug'2022

- new stations noted. ***It is worthwhile mentioning here that there is again concern in Calderdale at possible further delays to Elland station.***
- decarbonisation albeit with no clear deadline for completion.

Government approval needs to be sought urgently for these schemes. Service enhancements such as those on the Five Towns and Brighouse lines (discussed in 2.1 and 2.3 above) are not reliant on provision of major new infrastructure, though additional rolling stock will be needed. ***These upgrades are however essential for passengers - existing and would-be – who have been kept waiting for years by the railway.***

3.4 Major Projects (p20 et seq)

3.4.1 The map “Wider rail network – IRP and beyond” (Fig 5, p21) demonstrates the importance of the Integrated Rail Plan including West Yorkshire’s connections beyond its borders.

3.4.2 It is important that the WYCA Rail Plan stresses **the need for a new underground section of Manchester Piccadilly railway station, joined by a new underground route to Manchester Victoria**, thus enabling through services from the Calder Valley line to Piccadilly and Manchester Airport.

- In the meantime action must be taken to provide at least interim N-S cross-Manchester links for Bradford and Calder Valley stations. This might be done as discussed in 2.2 above.

3.4.3 There is disappointment once again at lack of proposal to **join up the Aire/Wharfedale and Calder Valley rail networks in Bradford**. Should this not be a part of the WY rail strategy?

- We are aware that a locally favoured route for NPR is through a new station on a new route through Bradford, but remote from the city centre. Journey times from Leeds to the Calder Valley would be reduced (Halifax-Leeds could be more than 10 min quicker than at present) but at the cost of not serving Bradford city centre, it’s theatres, museums and nightlife, as well as business and educational venues, directly.
- The idea of getting off the train and onto a tram seems unattractive in a city where the present station is so central. Of course, in the future a travelator link might be possible.
- Could not an alternative route be found for the new line, tunnelled, serving (W to E) Interchange, then Forster Square before curving east towards Leeds? (We agree that Bradford-Leeds via Shipley is indirect and involves conflicting movements in the Shipley area.)
- If eventually there is to be a new NPR station in Bradford, this strengthens the case for a cross-Bradford rail or mass-transit link. It would be absurd if there were to be a new NPR station in Bradford, but with the northern half of the city not connected to it; passengers from the Airedale and Wharfedale lines would have to go to Leeds to connect to NPR. One option could be to operate **tram-train** services over the Airedale and Wharfedale routes to

Forster Square **then continuing via street running through the city** to Interchange and/or any new NPR station (such as the one that has been proposed at St James). This would also help within-city connectivity from Interchange, Forster Square or a new NPR station.

3.4.4 We are pleased that the map on page 22 shows, via the ECML “improved connections to Norwich and Cambridge”. However, we would like WYCA to be more specific, and state that there must be **a new major interchange station for both long distance and local services, together with four-way junctions, at the point where the new East West Railway crosses the East Coast Main Line** – this is at Tempsford on the latest route proposals. This would be an attractive route from West Yorkshire to Oxford as well as Cambridge and East Anglia.

3.4.5 The map refers to more frequent and faster services to Birmingham, and improved services to Scotland, both very necessary. But it ignores Wales (North or South) which is not directly connected to West Yorkshire. **The strategy needs to advocate the need for such direct connectivity.**

3.4.6 We note that a study has begun on linking Leeds to the HS2 network. Routes to the area of East Midlands Parkway need to be evaluated. This needs to proceed with due speed. Note:

- Using existing routes on the Manchester-Leeds corridor must be strongly opposed. It makes no sense to send HS2 from London and the Midlands out of the way via Manchester and then via urban and hilly areas. It ignores the need to improve links on the Leeds-Sheffield-Nottingham corridor.
- Existing communities on the Leeds-Manchester corridor already suffer from a substandard service because of capacity constraints. We have seen in the recent past how attempts have been made to enhance fast inter-city services on this route by reallocating capacity from already inadequate local stopping services (the notorious May 2018 timetable) and would oppose anything similar in future.

3.5 Passenger connectivity (p24 et seq)

3.5.1 It should be made clear within Fig 7 (p24), **Long distance car connectivity from Leeds**, that these are optimum times given no traffic hold-ups, and that such hold-ups greatly lengthen journey times. It would be good if the plan could give data on the likelihood of this on specific routes.

3.5.2 **Oxford** is missing from Table 2 (p26) and should be included.

3.5.3 Next steps for long distance connectivity (p28)

- Bullet point needed about need for an East-West Rail interchange on the ECML (Tempsford) served by inter-city services.
- Welcome for mention of need for service Bradford and Halifax to south Manchester and the Airport and other points in this section.

3.5.4 **Local and intra-regional connectivity** – bullet point needed on requirement for an enhanced service on the Bentham Line once the Eden Project in Morecambe is up and running.

3.5.5 **Local connectivity** - map (Fig 8, p31 – also in executive summary):

- Saltaire – bigger role for this local station in the city of Bradford? There is an argument for Saltaire being served by trains from and to Lancaster, Morecambe, Settle and Carlisle as well as Leeds-Skipton locals services particularly in view of Bradford’s status as City of Culture 2025.
- Sowerby Bridge needs an increase in service – all Calder Valley trains should call.
- Brighouse (and future Elland) are shown as having 2 trains/hour. This gives a misleading impression as the 2/hr are on two different routes (Bradford-Hud and Manchester-Leeds) each served by 1 train/hr. **The Brighouse spot should be pink.** The service needs doubling which could also increase frequency at Halifax and in upper Calderdale. (See also next para. and para. 2.2 above.)
- On the Ilkley and Skipton routes out of Bradford Forster Square the off peak frequency is at present reduced to hourly so trains/hr is **4** (not 6). This continues in the Dec’23 timetable and damages the attractiveness of the service from Forster Square. It needs to be addressed.
- Direct service Bradford/Calderdale-Huddersfield – extension of this (or the existing Halifax-Huddersfield service) beyond Huddersfield to Manchester would deliver a much-needed 2 trains/hr for Marsden & Slaithwaite. Local connectivity between Calderdale and Kirklees needs to include improved connectivity to locations west and south of Huddersfield, achieved by providing minimum 2 trains per hour on the Penistone line and at Slaithwaite and Marsden.

3.5.6 **Local connectivity – Table 4 p36-37** We broadly support the objectives in the table.

- Table 4 (pp36-37) identifies a service gap **between Pontefract and Bradford**. The only trains Pontefract to Bradford are the occasional Grand Central services. It would make sense to offer a local service over this route (routing via Leeds would involve reversal, consuming capacity). There is no mention in the Next Steps column.
- The table fails to identify the lack of **through services between Sheffield and Bradford**, which could be achieved by restoring the Crigglestone Curve.³ See our section 2.2(d) above.
- The table also fails to identify the **need for a direct service between the upper Calder Valley and Huddersfield**. There are different ways this could be achieved. Perhaps the most radical would be to introduce **bi-directional circular services** from Manchester Victoria via stations Rochdale to Brighouse, then Huddersfield and stations to Manchester Piccadilly. This would also make many other currently difficult journeys easier. Other options include:
 - Todmorden-Huddersfield/Stalybridge shuttle (less attractive?)

³ Running via Wakefield Kirkgate would require reversal – consuming capacity – and significantly increase journey time and threatening reliability.

- Blackpool/Preston or Hellifield via Blackburn and Brighouse, possibly reversing at Todmorden⁴, destination Huddersfield.
- (Another alternative would be reliable connections at Brighouse, less attractive for upper Calderdale passengers, perhaps.)

Regarding all routes, the strategy needs to identify as frequency gaps late starts on Sundays, and have as next steps **the need for Sunday services to start early and finish late.**

Regarding the Calder Valley Line, next steps should specify the need for all Blackpool –York and Leeds-Manchester services to call at **Sowerby Bridge**, and for evening timetable anomalies affecting Sowerby bridge and Mytholmroyd to be resolved.

3.7 Capacity needs – generally we support the proposals. **Interventions required (capacity train and track capacity)** Figure 11 (*page 50*) “Interventions required to meet our region’s objectives” should cover the enhancements we are advocating, including reinstatement of (for example) the Crigglestone Curve and the line to Otley.

3.8 Passenger Experience and Access

3.8.1 Access is critical. The stations and trains must be available to all would-be passengers. This must be an essential for all new trains such as the order at present being contemplated by Northern. Level access must become the norm.

3.8.2 Ticket offices and staff continue to be essential. This is not just about selling tickets but about providing a range of support, providing information, and assisting those with disabilities and special needs – opening up rail travel to more people, not less.

3.8.3 **On-train experience** - in Table 8 (*page 60*) “Principal train types used in West Yorkshire”, the diagram key here is unclear. The table excludes the Grand Central class 180s, which do not go off lease until December 2027.

3.8.3 **Toilets on trains** – nowhere in this section is there any mention of this – a major omission, given that Northern is using 3-carriage class 195 trains with only one toilet on routes that are up to over 3 hours in duration. This problem is made more acute by the increase in leisure travel, which increases the number of passengers in the demographics more likely to need toilet facilities – children, older people, indeed any who consume a lot of liquid. Northern’s next new train acquisitions must have a minimum of two toilets per unit, and should also have **end corridor/gangway connections** for when two units are coupled together. The existing class 195 and 331 units should have an extra toilet inserted when they are due a major refurbishment. These points should be included in the bullet points on page 61 of the Strategy.

⁴ But again reversal (at Todmorden and possibly Blackburn) consumes capacity and threatens reliability.

3.9 Expanding the reach

3.9.1 **New stations.** We think more should be added to this list of possibles.

- Lightcliffe/Hipperholme and Methley both serve significant residential areas.
- Golcar station needs to be incorporated in the planning for the TRU Hud-Stalybridge section, before it is too late to adapt the scheme.
- A station at Horbury for Ossett would be served by Manchester-Wakefield-York trains as well as Bradford-Sheffield trains via Craggstone curve.

3.9.2 **New routes** We think this section should be divided into two. Lines which can only be heavy rail, and lines which could be either heavy rail or tram-trains/trams. We are pleased that you mention two possible reinstatements which are beyond West Yorkshire's borders, but feed into (and could become) Leeds services. This is also covered our section 2.3 above.

3.10 Fare anomalies – cross-boundary anomalies, an issue for about 40 years, encourages irrational travel decisions. It needs to be dealt with urgently, along with other issues with the system of fares.

3.11 Freight

3.11.1 The strategy needs to stress that crucial developments outside of Yorkshire can result in important improvements to railway connectivity to and from West Yorkshire. WYCA needs to work with other CAs and Strategic Transport Bodies to **promote infrastructure developments outside the North which, if completed, will have great benefits to West Yorkshire.** These include:

- the **Ely Area Capacity Enhancement Project**, which will facilitate greater rail freight traffic between Felixstowe Port and West Yorkshire
- **Enhancement to the rail routes from Immingham**, to enable more freight by rail between Immingham port and West Yorkshire.

3.11.2 **Freight strategy must include planning reform.** TfN needs to advocate for planning law changes that necessitate new mail, parcels and logistics warehouses being rail connected, and incentives need to be offered to connect to the rail network existing warehouses that are adjacent to or close to railway lines.

4 Concluding remarks (on next page)

4 Concluding remarks

As remarked at the start, Railfuture welcomes and broadly supports the WYCA draft rail strategy.

The final version must contain more detail on plans and aspirational timescales for development including:

- Areas that have already been awaiting development for many years, such as the Five Towns and the Brighouse line.
- We must not be told we have to wait until major schemes such as the TRU (which we welcome) are completed (let alone high-speed lines which are in, at best, very early stages of planning). We need developments that will deliver for rail passengers – **actual and would be** – this decade.
- Proposals to electrify all of West Yorkshire's railways, starting with the top three – Harrogate, Calder Valley and Dearne Valley lines. Again, there must be a timed plan.
- New lines as noted in section 2.3 above. And again, this must be a timed plan.

There is a political imperative to persuade government that expanding rail (freight and passenger) will benefit the whole community, will be sustainable financially, and will be environmentally beneficial in the fight for air quality and against the climate emergency. – JSW

This submission prepared by Stephen Waring with contributions from Nina Smith, Graham Collett, David Hagerty and other Railfuture Yorkshire branch committee members.

3 Sep'2023

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