

SELRAP

Skipton–East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

Campaigning to re-open the Skipton-Colne railway

Briefing Paper – Spring 2003

About SELRAP

Formed in spring 2001, SELRAP – the Skipton–East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership – is a volunteer group campaigning for the re-instatement of the railway line between Skipton (North Yorkshire) and Colne (Lancashire) – see map on page 3 – for passenger and freight use. SELRAP’s first aim is to ensure that until the railway can be re-built, the trackbed is protected from *any* development which would preclude its future re-use as a railway.

The Skipton-Colne railway is seen as a major national and regional resource which needs to be re-instated to provide inter-regional and local rail services accessible to all. It will also help take heavy freight off the region’s roads.

SELRAP only fights FOR the railway: it does not, in itself, have a view on the proposed “A56 Villages Bypass” from Colne towards Skipton, which would use the railway trackbed for much of its route. If this road has to go ahead, SELRAP says it should be routed so as not to destroy the trackbed.

SELRAP’s aims are fully supported by Craven District Council (the planning authority for the section within North Yorkshire), by Skipton Town Council, and by members of all the main political parties in Pendle (restoration of the railway was adopted as policy by the Pendle Labour party in November 2002). SELRAP is also supported by the Countryside Agency as well as by all pro-railway and environmental pressure and campaign groups. The Members of Parliament for Skipton and Ripon, David Curry, and for Ribbles Valley, Nigel Evans, are Patrons of SELRAP.

About the line

The railway from Skipton to Colne was closed in early-1970, and the trackbed has remained virtually untouched ever since. Part of the western section, from the present Lancashire-North Yorkshire county boundary at Thornton-in-Craven to the pre-1974 boundary at Foulridge (Lancashire Ghyll), is owned by Lancashire County Council and is used extensively as a permissive footpath. The two-mile section north from Colne to Foulridge is still owned by British Rail Property Board (in residuary) – now a part of the Strategic Rail Authority – which formally re-confirmed that ownership in March 2003.

**The Skipton–Colne railway trackbed –
too valuable a national resource to be destroyed by *any* development**

The eastern (North Yorkshire) section, from Thornton to Skipton, is largely in private hands, mainly the Tempest Estate. Craven District Council's policy is to protect the trackbed in this area against development.

In the Lancashire section, the line runs through attractive open countryside, but also serves small towns such as Earby. In the Yorkshire section, having passed close to the 'picture postcard' village of Thornton-in-Craven and the hamlet of Elslack, the line passes through the Craven area, one of superb scenery. Colne, at one end of the line, is a former cotton town with very poor transport links, especially by rail: at the other end, Skipton, the gateway to the Yorkshire Dales, is a bustling and vibrant town with excellent rail services.

The road proposal

Lancashire County Council is proposing to use the majority of the trackbed in its area – the exception is the short stretch through the village of Earby – as the so-called "A56 Villages By-pass". A small stretch of trackbed has been earmarked for the Thornton-in-Craven by-pass by North Yorkshire County Council. The proposal would complete a high-speed road between the M6 at Preston and the eastern end of the A629 Bingley by-pass, north of Bradford.

continued opposite

Skipton–Colne railway trackbed

Key reasons for safeguarding this important national resource

++ **The 11.5 mile link** between Skipton and Colne is the missing link in what would otherwise be the lowest level trans-Pennine rail route between. It is an alternative to the heavily graded and trafficked Huddersfield & Calder Valley trans-Pennine routes. Although under increasing threat, the trackbed is essentially intact and the railway could be restored at a relatively low cost: any further incursion would destroy a resource of national value and would be contrary to government policies.

++ **The line connects** the cotton towns of north-east Lancashire (Nelson, Burnley, Colne, etc) to the more prosperous West Yorkshire area, and provides an alternative to road transport for people visiting Skipton, the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the Aire Valley from Lancashire and Manchester, and vice versa. This would make an important contribution to sustainable development in the near-by rural areas in North Yorkshire, including those on the Grassington and Bolton Abbey railway branch lines.

++ **Skipton–Colne re-opening** would benefit residents and road users by providing an alternative to road transport with better air quality and fewer road accidents. It could contribute to the achievement of the Government's ten-year targets for increasing rail passenger usage and to the reduction of traffic on the adjoining road network. It could also contribute to a transfer of freight traffic from road to rail.

++ **Development of** Skipton–Colne would complement improvements between Blackburn, Burnley and Colne, (being studied by the East Lancashire Partnership for Lancashire County Council) where the present train service in relation to population is very poor when compared with similar areas in West Yorkshire. Development of the whole Blackburn–Skipton corridor would bring large and widespread economic, regeneration and social inclusion benefits to a relatively poor area.

++ **A number of new** travel opportunities would open up, eg Aire Valley–Manchester, Preston–Skipton. Improving access to the Yorkshire Dales (via Skipton) would make an important contribution to sustainable development in rural areas in North Yorkshire.

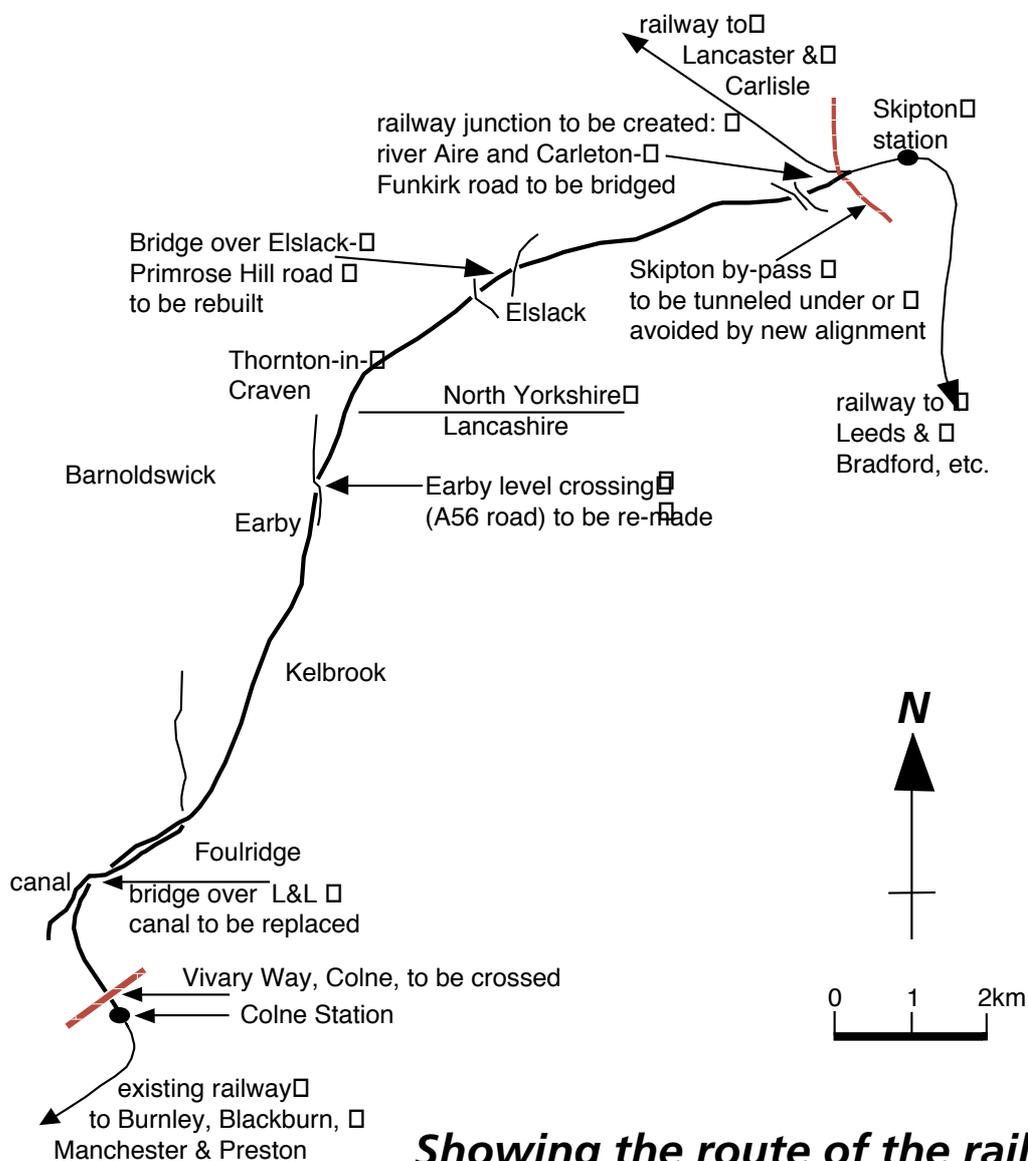
Our Feasibility Report

In summer 2001 members of SELRAP reported as to the feasibility and possible costs of re-opening the line. Copies of the report are available by post (small donation welcome!), or may be downloaded from our web site – the addresses are on page 4 .

The report concludes that the trackbed is in remarkably good condition and there have been very few incursions or breaches, with the exception of Vivary Way in Colne, the loss of bridges over the Leeds & Liverpool canal and the river Aire, and the A629 Skipton western by-pass.

In summer 2002 the group undertook a more detailed survey of the half-mile section between where the restored line would leave the existing railway just west of Skipton station and the western bank of the river Aire. This 'Skipton Junction' report, (also available by post or from the web site) concludes that construction would be entirely straightforward and would be in line with the broader estimates of costs given in the Feasibility Report.

SELRAP has also investigated ways the railway could cross Vivary Way in Colne and has concluded this would be feasible within present regulations: however, a more detailed and professional survey is needed to confirm the best option.



Showing the route of the rail link between Skipton & Colne and the key features along the line

SELRAP also supports the construction of a cycleway and footpath alongside the railway for as much of the distance between Skipton and Colne as would be practicable.

Lancashire & North Yorkshire County Councils' Study

In March 2003 Lancashire and North Yorkshire County Councils jointly contracted the leading transport consultancy Steer Davies Gleave to carry out a feasibility study into re-opening the line: the consultant's report is expected in mid-May and this will be eagerly awaited by SELRAP's supporters!

The benefits reopening the line would bring

It is government policy that former railway trackbeds should be safeguarded against development, and this is expressed in Planning Policy Guidance Notes 12 and 13 and the Government's White Paper on Transport.

Nationally, of all the former trackbeds which have not so far been safeguarded, that between Skipton and Colne is by far the most important and the most strategic. It is, SELRAP argues, simply far too valuable a national resource to be lost, just when railways are seeing a renaissance and there is increasing demand for new routes and new services – not to mention the increasing awareness of the need for more “green” transport and less reliance on the private motor car.

The key benefits SELRAP sees in re-opening the Skipton–Colne railway are detailed on page 2, but a Countryside Agency report, researched by TR+IN and published in April 2003, (*Railway re-openings: developing a regional network*) notes that it would: aid Regional Development; form part of the nation's Strategic Network; provide significant Local Benefits; contribute towards Sustainable Tourism; help overcome Social Exclusion; bring worthwhile Environmental Benefits; and offer Freight Potential.

'Grassington' branch

SELRAP whole-heartedly supports the development of the line from Skipton towards Grassington, and the related re-connection of the Bolton Abbey branch, which is an aspiration of North Yorkshire County Council's Local Transport Plan. Because of the alignment of the tracks at Skipton and the way the signalling is controlled, any development of the Grassington branch should allow for the future re-opening through to Colne, which, in turn, would bring far more traffic to the Grassington line. A through Grassington-Skipton-Colne and onwards service has been SELRAP's long-term goal since its inception.

Joining SELRAP

SELRAP faces a huge task if it is to achieve its aims, and needs as much support as it can gather. We meet regularly in Colne and Earby to formulate our plans. We especially welcome members who are able to contribute time, resources and expertise, and, for those who can help but cannot attend meetings we operate a “local buddy” system.

For more information on SELRAP see our web site www.selrap.org.uk or contact:

**Steve Broadbent, Chairman SELRAP,
35 Bromley Road, Bingley, BD16 4DA
Tel: 01274 569280 e-mail: steve@selrap.org.uk**

The annual subscription to SELRAP is £5.00.

**To join, (donations welcome, cheques payable to 'SELRAP') write to:-
Derek Jennings, 3 Hamilton Road, Carr Hall
Barrowford, Lancashire BB9 6DE**