



## **Bold proposal launched for Irlam to Timperley heritage railway & cycling route**

### **Detailed report argues for re-opening of passenger line closed since 1964**

A bold proposal has been announced today (Tuesday March 28<sup>th</sup>) to revive 9.5km (6 miles) of disused railway track for both an extension to the national cycleway and a heritage railway carrying steam and diesel trains between Irlam in Salford and Timperley in Trafford. The project would add 14km (8.5m) to the National Cycle Network (NCN).

The proposal was launched by businessman and philanthropist Neil McArthur, in the presence of rail enthusiast and former government minister Michael Portillo, the presenter of BBC TV's Great Railways Journeys series.

The plans for re-opening the line together with a cycle and pedestrian route were unveiled at an event at Irlam Station, at the celebration of the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Station House building restored in 2015 from dereliction to a thriving local café, heritage centre and community centre.

The £2m project was funded by Neil McArthur's Hamilton Davies Trust (HDT), and is part of more than £7m contributed by the charity to community facilities and activity in Irlam and Cadishead.

Neil McArthur's plan is based on a report he has submitted to the two councils, Transport for Greater Manchester, Network Rail, and Sustrans, the body responsible for the nation's cycle network. The report can be found at <https://hamiltondavies.org.uk/>

It calls for political support from the statutory bodies to re-connect communities along the line which lost the passenger service in 1964. The freight service ended in 1984 with the closure of the Cadishead viaduct over the Manchester Ship Canal.

The re-opening of the line, believes Neil McArthur, would be both a tourist attraction similar to the popular 20km (12.5 miles) Bury-based East Lancashire Railway, and also bring together on cycle, on foot and by train, the communities of Partington and Carrington in Trafford, and Irlam and Cadishead in Salford, which are relatively close but badly served by transport routes.

The report calls for:

- The re-opening of 9.5km (6 miles) of the former Cheshire Lines railway from Irlam to Timperley, near Altrincham – and as a key part of this, the re-opening of the 1.5km branch line from Irlam Station to Glazebrook East Junction.
- The re-building of stations at Cadishead, Partington, and West Timperley.
- The re-opening of the Cadishead Viaduct along the route, which is closed off by shipping containers and known locally as an ugly ‘Berlin Wall’ which cuts off the communities of Irlam and Partington.

Neil McArthur has calculated the cost between £25m and £30m. The Hamilton Davies Trust is proposing the establishment of a new trust, the Cheshire Lines Railway Trust, to deliver the project. Meanwhile HDT will continue to fund the feasibility and will be prepared to kick-start the work if a funding partnership can be assembled working with the statutory bodies.

The report points out that although the original line was a twin track, the canal viaduct and half the route was created to carry four tracks, meaning its width could not only create a crossing for trains but also for cycles and pedestrians.

In fact, the report holds out the possibility that once brought back into life as a heritage route for steam trains, that it could pave the way for a modern ‘heavy rail’ passenger service route, or even a future Metrolink extension from Altrincham.

The report has found that the entire route is in the ownership of Network Rail, which makes the realisation of Neil McArthur’s vision reasonably uncomplicated.

“We’re building on the success of what we’ve done here at Irlam Station, which enjoyed a 17% rise in passenger figures in 2015, one of the highest in Greater Manchester,” said Neil McArthur.

“The economic, social and environmental benefits would be huge. The East Lancs heritage railways shows the demand with 200,000 passengers a year, so there is a local example to learn from.

“We’re asking the political representatives and transport bodies to join with us in exploring the art of the possible. Before the launch today, we have held a workshop to discuss the options and we are encouraged by the positive response to take this forward.”

Former transport minister Mr Portillo said: “The building of Britain's railways during the nineteenth century required vision, determination and entrepreneurial flair. Today, the re-opening of closed tracks requires the same qualities.

“I'm impressed by the zeal shown by the Hamilton Davies Trust. Heritage lines run all over Britain thanks to that kind of enthusiasm, and they bring pleasure to many thousands, and greatly boost the economic health of the neighbouring communities.”

**For media information, images and interviews with Mr McArthur and Mr Portillo, contact:  
Andrew Spinoza (07711 718114) and Jason Grimsley at SKV Communications 0161 838 7770.**

#### **Editor's Notes**

**Hamilton Davies Trust** was founded by Neil and Anne McArthur in 2004 with the aim of supporting the local communities of Irlam and Cadishead in Salford, with additional support given to Rixton-with-Glazebrook (Warrington). Neil is a founder of the Talk Talk group. With a strong leadership with local roots and working closely with local people, it has invested £6m of private funds to date into the area. This includes distributing over 450 grants to local organisations and projects and, with partners, funding a number of major, high-quality infrastructure projects such as the building of a new sixth form college, the refurbishment of the local leisure centre, a £250,000 grant towards a new ground for Irlam Rhinos RL club, and the refurbishment of Irlam Station.

**Irlam Station House** is a delightfully-restored working Victorian rail station, featuring lovely railway-themed café bistro '1923', art installations and a permanent local history exhibition. There is a cycle hub and a 60-space car park at Irlam Station, which provides connections into Manchester and Liverpool. The new look-station house was extensively renovated in a £2m project after being derelict for 25 years. It now boasts heritage features such as the original colour scheme and iconic clock, along with modern facilities include new toilets, disabled access, free wi-fi and enhanced security and landscaping.

**NC Developments Ltd (NCD)** is a property company owned by Neil McArthur which delivers building and public realm projects part- or full funded by HDT to improve life in Irlam and Cadishead. According to a 2014 report by Commission for the New Economy, the work of HDT and partners is supporting significant social and economic improvements in the area, and local people identify the charity as the key driver of regeneration. <http://neweconomymanchester.com/media/1468/irlam-cadishead-report.pdf>

