

## Halifax station gateway consultation Jan-Feb 2021

# HADRAG's response

The Halifax & District Rail Action Group is a campaigning rail users' group centred on the routes through Halifax, Sowerby Bridge and Brighouse on the Calder Valley Line. We began in 1985 and campaigned for reopening of the lines through Elland and Brighouse, seeing success in 2000 with opening of Brighouse station, and we continue to argue for improvement. We are hopeful that Elland station will open in the next two year. In 1985, HADRAG along with three other user groups along the line launched the Electric Railway Charter to press the argument for a rolling programme of electrification, including the full Calder Valley route as recommended in the Northern Electrification Task Force report in March 2015: "Northern Sparks".

**In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic**, our railways must repurpose to flourish. We hope city travel will undergo a revival, but there may be a permanent reduction in city-based commuting and business travel. This should be seen as an opportunity not a threat. Rail and other public transport systems must be transformed to meet a wider range of needs supporting leisure and personal travel needs. **The climate crisis** becomes ever more urgent and all transport must become zero-carbon. Rail must play a major role, encouraging modal transfer to reduce congestion and pollution, improving individual human wellbeing and protecting the global environment. Modern, clean public transport needs to be branded "sociable transport", "popular transport" – transport for wellbeing.

**Summary:** This Halifax Railway Station gateway proposal is a very good scheme that needs to go ahead without delay. **Essential positive features include:**

- the pedestrian footbridge providing level access from station concourse to town. This is particularly important because it means people accessing the station on foot do not have to go down, up again and then down again to reach the platforms.
- future proofing so that platform 3 can be reinstated if needed to accommodate enhanced service patterns and/or more passengers.

We have included some points of concern in the comments below, which are related to the online survey questions.

**Climate crisis and need for green design** is an important additional point. We hope the building might be fitted with photovoltaic (solar) panels and other features with the aim of zero-carbon operation.

**1 Existing station (survey Q3, 4)**, rated POOR. Covered in previous consultations! Present station has insufficient space for passenger circulation, poor retailing facilities lacking good size shop and walk-in café. Single toilet unit very poor. The road approach bridge congested and hazardous. Road junction at the bottom of Horton Street inconvenient for all. Facilities for disabled and other users who find steps difficult are poor. The single lift down to the platforms is not seen as pleasant to use and is regarded as unreliable. **One advantage of the present design**, however, is that there is only one change of level from drop-off point to train.

*speaking out locally since 1985 for rail improvement  
for sociable, popular transport, supporting human and environmental wellbeing, and a railway  
serving the whole community*

**2 Proposed new station building (survey Q5&6) – VERY GOOD.** We have some concerns which prevent us giving “excellent”.

**2.1 The following essential features** are a massive improvement on earlier iterations and must remain and be strengthened in the final design:

- (a) **the level pedestrian bridge between concourse at ticket hall level and town centre** will be a massive improvement on the present congested approach bridge, and will mean pedestrians and cyclists will continue to have level access. (See section 3 below.)
- (b) **Future-proofing (passive provision) for possible reinstatement of platform 3.** This could provide for potentially more frequent or more complex service patterns and greater passenger numbers. It is not obvious from the published information plans where the link to P3 would be located but we assume this would be underneath the access to the footbridge to P1&2. We trust the design of the present scheme will allow for access to be created to P3 without major disruption. **In particular P3 would need to have direct access from the ground floor concourse/car park level so that passengers who do not need to go up to the first floor will not have to do so.** We trust design of the present scheme also will allow for this.
- (c) potentially much better **café and retailing facilities.**
- (d) potential for **community rail development** e.g. work by local students, artists, poets and performers, heritage displays, space for community events. Diverse and inclusive.
  - ➔ How about developing links with the varied and fascinating history of local transport? Part of the “future development” retail areas on the ground floor could be a “pop-up” exhibition area or mini-museum. (Perhaps it could even be a “taster” installation for the nearby Calderdale Industrial Museum.)
  - ➔ Could a community room be provided for meetings and events?
  - ➔ We would like to see encouragement of a station adoption “Friends” group to develop the station’s role in the community, working alongside the station operator and a proposed Calder Valley Line Community Rail Partnership.
- (e) Wider access links are very good, particularly for walking and cycling with links to the Hebble Trail as well as town. Indeed the station will become a hub linking the Hebble valley and town centre.
- (f) Buses: whilst the bus stops in Alfred Street East are not as close to the station entrance as we might have liked, this must will be turned into an opportunity:
  - We hope bus operators will be persuaded to serve the new stops providing interchange from the train station to all parts of Halifax.
  - We welcome the long-needed provision for rail replacement buses to pick immediately outside the station entrance.
  - Whilst the nearest stops for main buses will be Alfred St E, Horton Street and Church Street, we hope the station entrance by the drop-off point might become a terminus for a round-Halifax local minibus service linking train and bus stations, shopping and leisure areas close to town as well as Dean Clough business area, and visitor attractions such as Bankfield Museum and Shibden Hall. ➔ **The design must allow for this.**
- (g) Car parking. Whilst people understandably continue to demand “park and ride” at rail stations, sustainable access to the station must be encouraged. We note that Eureka pay-parking will be available in addition to the parking specified by the railway. **EV charging is mentioned and we hope most if not all parking spots will have EV charging points nearby.**

## 2.2 Concerns:

- (a) **Access between levels (new building).** Only one public lift is proposed in the new building, raising a serious concern about access if the lift fails or is under maintenance. Given that there is also only a single lift down to platforms 1 and 2 ((d) below) this problem is effectively doubled and is a major concern for people who are unable to use the stairs. There are two changes of level between drop-off point and train. A service lift is proposed in the staff area at the north end of the new building.
- Could this service lift be made available for public use when required?
  - Better still, could the service lift be relocated at the front of the retail area so that it is accessible to the public on a default basis when it is not being used as a goods lift? A small area of shopfront would be lost – outweighed by overall public benefit of significantly enhanced accessibility around the spacious 2-floor concourse.
- (b) **Ticket office/travel centre/information:** as with many modern stations, the ticket windows are direct onto the large concourse area, potentially causing difficulty for people buying tickets or making enquiries because of noise or other distractions:
- **A walk-in ticket office** more like the one in the present station building would be preferable. This would be more like a travel centre providing a wide variety of information on journey options and local facilities, as well as ticket retailing.
  - It is assumed that **ticket vending machines** would be located at several points about the concourse.
  - **Information screens** will need to be located at various points on both floors of the concourse. Local bus information should also be provided.
- (c) **Access to platforms (existing single lift).** We hope this will not be a step from bright modern newness into an old building looking down-at-heel. Work will be needed to keep the heritage buildings around the island platform at their best. As with the new building proposed, there is a concern that there will still only be a single lift (the existing one) down to the platforms. This needs to be logged as a priority for future investment though we appreciate there is no simple solution.
- (d) **Possible platform improvements.** We understand some changes may be made on the platforms to help reduce passenger congestion: this will be welcome and should include design features to encourage people to move along the platform and away from the narrowest part next to the waiting room. If the existing single-unit toilet is removed it might be possible to construct an exit from the waiting room at its south end, accessing the widest covered part of the platform area. There needs to be liaison with and between Network Rail and the train company about where trains stop along the length of the platforms and how this affect passenger movement and efficient boarding and alighting.

## 3 Town footbridge concepts – an iconic, visible and attractive design

We support the idea of an iconic design for this essential element of the overall scheme, complementing the new station and reflecting local heritage. The design must be visible from a distance – for example from the Southowram hillside as well as lower parts of the town – and attract people towards the station. We do not express a preference between the three designs illustrated but note that the most visible and distinctive may be the Twisted Weave design.

Seating should be provided on the bridge, alongside art and heritage displays reflecting the history and diversity of our community.

JSW  
12 February 2021