

Good Practice in Station Adoption – Train Operators

Types of Adoption Scheme

The extent to which Train Operating Companies (TOCs) have become involved in station adoption schemes varies enormously, from companies such as Northern Rail, almost all of whose stations are adopted, to others - notably inter-city and London & South East operators - many of whom have no or very few stations adopted. There is a variety of ways to adopt a station, of which the principal ones are described below.

Level 1 - Fault detection and reporting

Adoption by one or more individuals, who are tasked with checking the adopted station for faults at pre-determined intervals and reporting their findings to the TOC that runs the station. TOCs actively recruit volunteers and monitor their performance to ensure that their work and conduct are satisfactory. The use of this form of station adoption is becoming increasingly popular among TOCs; Northern Rail and TransPennine Express have most of their stations adopted, with substantial numbers also adopted at Arriva Trains Wales, and One Railway, for example.

Level 2 - Partnership with third parties

A group formed with the objective of improving the ambience and environment at a station; often a Station Friends group. Some groups carry out work at stations, such as tending the gardens. Others provide enhanced facilities, such as manning an information point, providing catering or, occasionally, selling tickets. Group adoption usually arises spontaneously from within the community, perhaps as a result of a particular issue such as the condition of the station (e.g. Handforth, where the station's general state of dilapidation prompted local action, and Saunderton, where the long-standing closure of the waiting room sparked action).

Where a complete line receives attention, such as the extensive publicity surrounding the run-down of the Settle & Carlisle line, this may result in the adoption of stations by the line group, in this case the Friends of the Settle & Carlisle Line. More recently, Community Rail Partnerships have been developed for a growing number of local lines, which may also generate interest in the adoption of stations (e.g. Bridlington on the Hull-Scarborough Yorkshire Wolds Coast Line).

Level 3 - Tenancies and re-use of redundant railway property

Station tenants fall into two broad categories: those who just rent accommodation at the station (e.g. as offices or for industrial purposes), and those whose businesses depend on and reinforce the rail business, to mutual benefit. The latter include the provision of catering facilities (e.g. at Bridlington, Carnforth, Crediton and Wymondham), tourist offices (Clitheroe, Haltwhistle), travel agencies (Chester-le-Street, Gobowen, St. Ives) and health facilities (Southminster).

At many stations tenants have no responsibility beyond running their own businesses, whereas at others the tenant is also the station adopter and participates in the station's upkeep (e.g. Bridlington, Wymondham).

Level 4 – Commercial Sponsorship

A small but growing number of stations have commercial sponsors, the sponsors appreciating the benefits of association with their local rail service and the value of a pleasant rail experience for their customers. Examples include Basingstoke (insurance company with premises in the town), Bourneville (adjacent to Cadbury World and sponsored by Cadbury's) and Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

Benefits of Adoption

Targets

A good adoption scheme has multiple beneficiaries and it is in the Train Operating Company's interest to exploit as many of these as possible.

Benefits to the train operator

The train operator benefits from Level 1 adopters enabling him to deploy his resources more effectively than would otherwise be the case. Maintenance and repair teams can be sent only where they are needed and time wasted looking for work to do is minimised. Northern Rail calculates that 25% of defects at its stations are reported by adopters. Level 2 adopters contribute to the upkeep of stations, most notably gardens, and/or enable an enhanced level of service to be provided for customers, such as a refreshment facility or information bureau. TOCs are able to encourage and incentivise group adopters, by contributing towards the costs of their activities, for example by providing plants, planters and gardening tools, or equipment and staff uniforms (e.g. at several stations in Lancashire, where County Council personnel man booking offices).

To the community

The community gains a station that is more attractive to current and potential users, and even to members of the local community who do not use it; and a station the community can feel proud of is more likely to generate custom. If a station is well cared for, it will be and be perceived as safer and more secure, and will be less likely to become vandalised or be used by undesirable elements in the community. Adoption brings the local station a higher profile within the community, especially where adoption is by a group such as Station or Line Friends.

Benefits to rail users

Rail users will find the station more pleasant to use; cleaner, free from wanton damage, with repairs and maintenance carried out in a timely manner. Adoption under a group scheme, such as by station Friends or by a tenant, may result in a human presence at what would otherwise be an unmanned station. This may just offer reassurance, or afford a specific service such as the provision of an information point, a community

facility or catering establishment. Where tenants occupy station premises that would otherwise stand empty or be demolished, rail users may be able to benefit directly from their presence (e.g. where a staffed ticket office or a refreshment facility are provided), or indirectly due to the activity generated by non rail-related businesses.

Benefits to volunteers

Volunteers will obtain the personal satisfaction of providing a real benefit to their community. They may also gain a more specific benefit, such as the ability to use their local station in greater security and safety. Such is the enthusiasm of volunteers that TOCs find turnover in their ranks to be very low; and that if there is a 'problem' with adopters, it is the need ensure that they are rigorously briefed not to stray beyond their designated duties (e.g. to stay within areas to which the public has access and not to undertake tasks for which they have not been trained).

Costs of Adoption

Most if not all TOC staff who carry out duties in relation to station adoption schemes do so as just a small part of a much wider portfolio (e.g. in station management, service quality monitoring or public relations).

Budget

A TOC need not therefore dedicate a large amount of finance to adoption schemes; and what funds are deployed will, at least in part, be recouped (e.g. from additional revenue accruing to a more attractive station or as a result of reductions in the cost of maintenance and repairs at stations associated with Level 1 adoptions).

Some expenditure will be required to operate adoption schemes (e.g. carrying out health and safety briefings, issuing instructions to adopters, running training programmes and 'thank you' events for volunteers, and the managerial and clerical cost of administering schemes).

Resources

Some TOCs provide adopters with equipment and materials (e.g. plants, planters and gardening tools) and uniforms for ticket office staff (e.g. in Lancashire where several booking offices are manned by County Council personnel). At Looe, Cornwall, the TOC provided ticket sales equipment and helped train volunteers, enabling a ticket office to be opened at the height of the holiday season after a gap in provision of some 30 years.

Launching an adoption scheme

Risk assessment

The risks associated with the presence of and reliance on volunteers must be assessed and minimised. This may be achieved by ensuring that volunteers are adequately trained for the tasks they are to carry out, that clear boundaries are set to minimise the risk of them going beyond these boundaries; and that company and statutory health and safety and drugs and alcohol policies are adhered to.

Faults and defects discovered by adopters have different levels of risk associated with them. Northern Rail, for example, provides adopters with a ranking of defects according to the degree of risk they pose, ranging from an emergency that presents an immediate risk to trains (fallen trees or overhead wires, large objects on the line, loose coping stones at the platform edge), which require immediate action, to less urgent items such as damaged poster boards and minor lighting defects. Full details are given in Northern Rail's Station Adoption Scheme handbook, which is issued to all adopters.

Setting the budget

Budgets must be set for costs associated with station adoption schemes, which will include the costs of recruiting, training, managing and retaining Level 1 volunteers; of developing and continuing good relationships with other group adopters, tenants and sponsors; the provision of materials and equipment to enable volunteers to carry out their duties (e.g. gardening equipment and plants), operational costs (e.g. power, water, administration) and the cost of repairs and maintenance carried out in response to Level 1 adopters' reports.

Costs must be compared with any additional revenue associated with patronage increases generated as a result of the improved travel environment and with cost reductions such as those occasioned by the more effective deployment of staff for maintenance and repair assignments.

Informing staff

It is important that relationships between staff coming into contact with volunteers and station adoption groups and those individuals should be cordial, harmonious and constructive. Staff must be made aware before adoption schemes come into force of what is proposed, be given the opportunity to comment on and contribute to proposals affecting their workplaces.

Similarly, it is important for the TOC to inform the trade unions, in order to allay any concern about the work to be done by unpaid volunteers. It is essential that the TOC views the work of volunteers as being 'additional' and complementary to tasks performed by employees.

Finding and retaining volunteers

The recruitment of volunteer members to groups such as Station Friends is generally undertaken by the groups themselves. TOCs will need to ensure that sufficient volunteers are recruited for Level 1 adoptions. Some TOCs (e.g. One Railway and First Great Western) devote sections of their websites to station adoption; details of what adopters are asked to do and an application form may be available on the site.

Using the media

Station adoption is a novel development and can easily attract media attention as a local, human interest story. Some TOCs (e.g. One Railway, issue a news release each time a new adopter is found for a station on their network).

Use of the TOC web site

Some TOCs also advertise for Level 1 adopters via the company web site. The Arriva Trains Wales' site, for example, lists stations adopted and those still available for adoption.

TOCs may wish to prepare a section of the TOC web site accessible to adopters. This could serve for two way communication; for the TOC to inform operators and for adopters to report to TOCs.

The role of younger volunteers

Schools, youth groups and centres for children with special needs each number among station adopters. Whilst concerns have been expressed about the safety of children working on an operational railway, such schemes have in practice proved effective and safe, with a high ratio of supervisors to children and many tasks undertaken (e.g. preparing artwork and posters). The public relations and community value of involving young people in station adoption activities is of great value to the rail industry.

Free travel incentives

Many TOCs reward adopters with free travel, either limited to travel on the line where 'their' station is situated, or across the operator's complete network. A further incentive is occasional 'thank you' events, to which adopters are invited for refreshments and to meet the management of the company they are working for.

Preparing the scheme

A station adoption scheme need not be excessively complex. A Level 1 scheme must ensure that the adopter/s know precisely what is required of them and how they are to undertake their duties.

The following documentation and instructions will be required:

- Statement of the terms and conditions of scheme
- Agreement to be signed by adopters
- Safety Briefing Note
- Specification of activities to be undertaken by adopters
- Fault reporting pro forma
- Instruction sheet or booklet giving contact information and descriptions of emergency and non-emergency situations
- Explanation of the rail industry alcohol and drugs policy
- Photo identity cards, identity badges, high visibility jackets

Northern Rail issues a comprehensive and attractively produced spiral-bound Station Adoption Scheme handbook to all adopters, which provides them with a single document containing all the information they are likely to need regarding membership of the company's adoption scheme, visiting their station, completing the Service Quality Log, defect reporting, safety, drugs & alcohol policy; and includes a copy of the Station Adoption Agreement for signature. Separate sections of the handbook apply to individual and group adopters. Individual adopters are also provide with a laminated Station Adoptees Fault Reporting Procedure card, which summarises key procedures and includes the Northern Rail helpline telephone number.

In order to demonstrate the situation to rail users, and to indicate to adopters the value of their contributions, it may be possible to erect "This station is adopted" plaques at adopted stations.

Adopters may be rewarded for their services by offering a complementary rail travel scheme. This may either cover the complete network operated by the TOC, or be limited to the line on which the adopter's station is situated.

Advising the BTP

The local British Transport Police should be advised which stations are adopted, by whom, and the type of scheme, in order that they may be prepared to meet adopters at work; and to prepare them for possible calls from adopters. At Maghull, Merseyside, the BTP is a stakeholder in the adoption scheme.

Checking the insurance cover

Most TOCs consider that adopters are adequately insured under existing passenger and/or staff cover, and that no separate insurances are required.

Selecting stations for adoption

Different TOCs have different policies for station adoption schemes, some seeking the adoption of most or all stations, others limiting the approach to smaller and/or unmanned stations.

Unmanned stations

The adoption of an unmanned station, whether by an individual or a group, enables the station to receive attention and a human presence on a regular basis, which it would otherwise only receive by means of visits by maintenance and repair teams. Adoption of such stations ensures that all visits by repair and maintenance staff are productive (i.e. only occur when there is a task to be carried out).

Staffed stations

Whilst Level 1 adoption at staffed stations can enhance the level of attention to faults, the task of reporting defects can also be carried out by staff. However, many stations are staffed on a part-time basis only and resources for defect reporting may be limited, even at staffed stations. Even some quite large stations have Level 1 adopters (e.g. Bradford Interchange, Blackpool North and Harrogate on Northern Rail).

Both staffed and unstaffed stations benefit from the environmental and cosmetic activities of group adopters.

Activities of adopters

Additionality

A key criterion for adoption schemes is that work undertaken by volunteers must be additional to that carried out from existing resources; and that the adoption resource should itself be additional to and not instead of existing staff.

What tasks volunteers can and should not perform

Suitable tasks for adopters include:

- Provision of additional platform furniture
- Provision and tending of gardens, planters and hanging baskets
- Provision of public art

Adopters should not be permitted:

- to work in areas to which the public does not normally have access
- to work on or close to operational railway tracks (in 'red' zones)
- to carry out safety critical tasks
- to expose themselves to danger; e.g. with reference to the use of ladders and to working in electrified areas

Managing the adoption scheme

It is crucial that TOC management is aware of and appreciates the work being undertaken in its area by station adopters of all kinds and manages their work at an overall level to ensure that it is carried out competently, safely and to a consistent standard.

The need for central co-ordination

The management of adoption schemes will be assisted if schemes and their performance are monitored and co-ordinated centrally. At Northern Rail, for example, this is undertaken by a Service Quality team, which reports to the Managing Director. In other companies, different structures may be in use, for example involving local management on First Great Western.

The role of the station manager

Although he may not have direct responsibility for the work of station adopters, it is essential that local station managers keep in touch with adopters and show a close interest in what they are doing. The station manager is usually the main focal point for contact between the TOC and adopters and will deliver the safety briefing and agree the scope of work to be undertaken with adopters.

Maintaining interest – best kept station competition

In addition to the involvement of operational management, interest in station adoption schemes and the enthusiasm and loyalty of volunteers may be maintained by involvement in competitive events such as best kept station competitions – a good example of an event from which publicity for station adoption programmes can be gained. Several station adoption schemes have also become associated with Britain in Bloom competitions.

Maintaining contact with adopters

A popular way of keeping in touch with adopters is periodically to run a 'thank you' event, at which TOC management can formally thank adopters, present them with information about the company and receive feedback from the adopters, as well as rewarding them with refreshments.

Feedback

It is important for adopters to be given designated names of company officials they can contact whenever they want to; and are required to contact on a regular basis to present their reports. TOCs can enhance the value they gain from adopters by seeking information and observations from them over and above that which will be presented regularly in the adopters' reports.

Volunteer Safety and Training

TOCs will be required to ensure that every adopter receives suitable safety and other training, which should be updated and reinforced on a regular basis. Briefings will need to take place for individual volunteers and for adoption groups.

TOCs will need to consider the following aspects of training programmes:

- Who does the briefings (local station managers or centrally based training or safety personnel).
- Whether there is scope for delegating training of members of adoption groups and, if so, to whom.
- The need for refresher courses and updating including issues of frequency, location and depth.
- What a safety briefing should cover: sufficient to ensure that volunteers appreciate all aspects of safety and related issues they will need, without being overburdened with information they will not require.
- Special requirements will apply in areas with third/fourth rail electrified lines and on overhead electrified lines (e.g. regard to safe working areas, use of ladders and equipment, what to do in cases of emergency).

Role of the BTP

Informing the BTP

TOCs must inform the BTP of the appointment of voluntary adopters, when and where BTP officers can expect to encounter them, what tasks the adopters are permitted to carry out, and what training they have received. BTP must be prepared to receive emergency and perhaps other calls from adopters and ready to respond appropriately to them (e.g. by recognising that they are coming from someone working on the railway and not from an 'ordinary' member of the public).

Benefits to BTP

The BTP will learn to recognise the value of volunteers as part of the regular flow of information and intelligence that will help them police the railway as effectively as possible.

Crime prevention surveys

A potential benefit to the BTP would be to invite volunteers to participate in crime prevention surveys (e.g. by reporting on areas susceptible to crime, vandalism or inappropriate behaviour).

Education and safe railways

TOC managers can play an important role in educating children and other members of local communities about railways; how to use them, the benefits they bring to society and how to use them responsibly.

The role of station adoption

Station adopters can collaborate with TOCs to prepare and present such programmes of public education. With appropriate supervision and constraints, it is possible for children and young people to participate in group station adoption schemes (e.g. through the design of public art, preparation and operation of safety campaigns and by joining in the regular activities of adopting groups such as tending station gardens).

Funding and Resources

The cost to a TOC of having some of its stations adopted, whether under individual fault monitoring and reporting schemes or by groups, tenants or commercial sponsors need not be great. Part of the cost – perhaps the whole cost – may be offset by increases in revenue as a result of the additional publicity and improved service quality, and reduced costs of station maintenance and repairs, associated with adoption schemes.

Cost

Costs to TOCs will include the employment of staff to run the schemes, but this may only represent a small addition to existing duties and may not involve the recruitment of additional personnel. There will be costs for printing and distributing documentation: training and information documents for volunteers, reporting forms; software design and operation; for travel concessions for volunteers; and for ‘thank you’ parties.

Funding

TOCs may, in recognition of the commercial value to them of successful adoption schemes, wish to contribute funds, for example by paying for materials or equipment such as plants, planters, gardening tools or uniforms for independent ticket sales staff.

Voluntary groups may be raise their own funds through running or participating in events such as local fairs and fetes, community rail and leisure events. Group adopters may also generate income through trading activities such as catering or running an information/book stand at the station.

Internal resources

Many adoption groups benefit from contributions in kind by the TOC operating the station. Local authorities and potential sponsors, such as local companies, may also be prepared to make contributions in kind or in cash in return for acknowledgement or publicity for their involvement.

External sources

In addition to sources referred to above, financial contributions may be sought from local regeneration bodies, charitable foundations, and business bodies.

The key to obtaining support in kind or in cash is to be proactive and innovative. The TOC must keep in touch with potential benefactors (e.g. through membership of local bodies such as Chambers of Commerce, Town Centre Partnerships, Britain in Bloom Committees), obtain their interest and support in principle, develop and maintain good relations with them, offer mutual benefits such as displaying their publicity and offering them space at any events the group runs.

Role of partners in leveraging in external funding

Liaison must be maintained with the voluntary adoption groups to ensure that the potential benefits of any alternative funding sources to which they may have access (e.g. local or national charities) are fully exploited.

Commercial sponsorship

Commercial sponsorship may be sought from local businesses or venue operators, e.g. operators of visitor attractions (Bourneville), leisure facilities (Blackpool Pleasure Beach), retail outlets (Church & Oswaldtwistle) or employers (Basingstoke).

Rail Safety and Standards Board Evergreen House 160 Euston Road London NW1 2DX
Reception Telephone +44 (0)20 7904 7777 Facsimile +44 (0)20 7904 7791
www.rssb.co.uk

Rail Safety & Standards Board Registered Office: Evergreen House 160 Euston Road London NW1 2DX. Registered in England and Wales No. 04655675.

Rail Safety & Standards Board is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee.