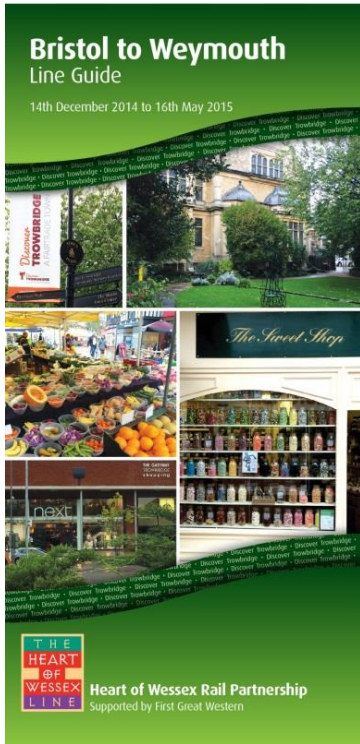
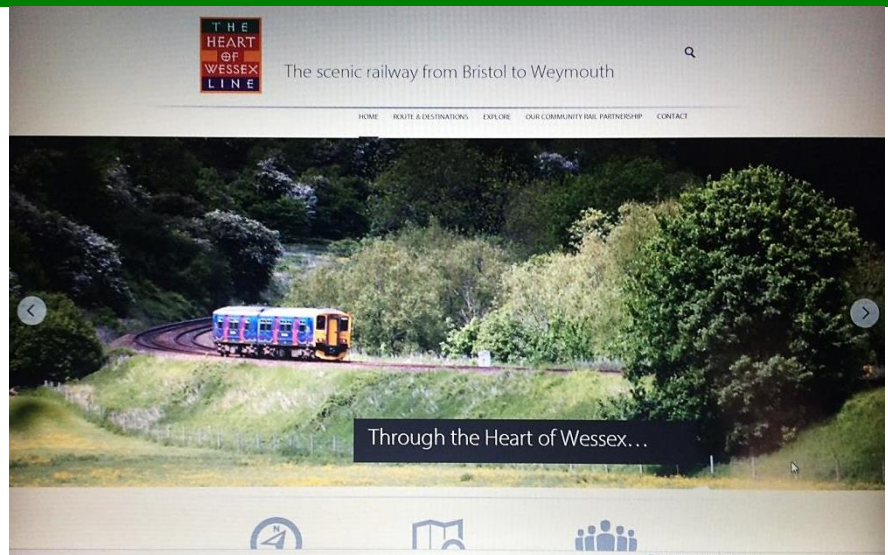


# THE HEART OF WESSEX RAIL PARTNERSHIP



2014/15

ANNUAL REPORT



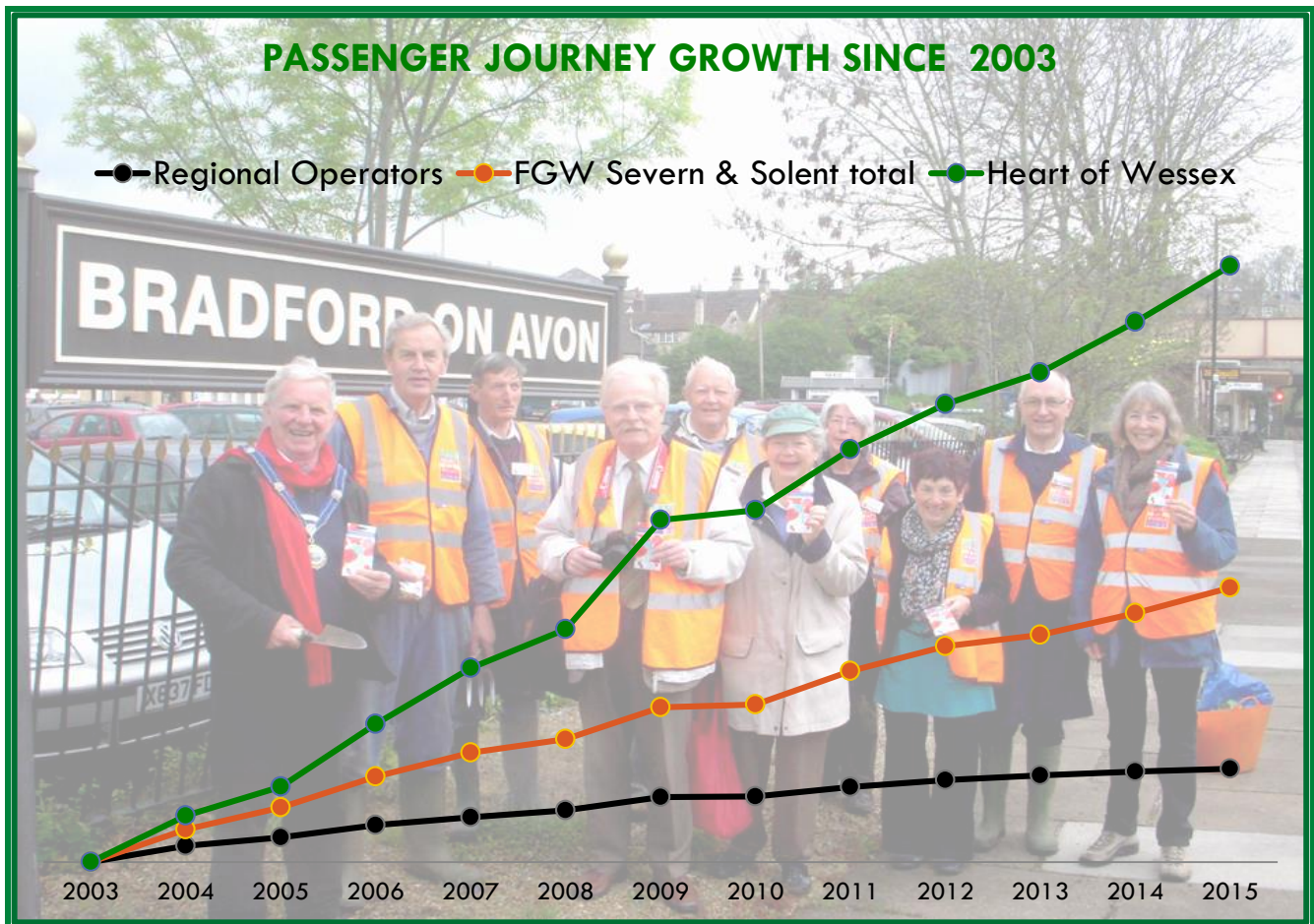


**THE HEART OF WESSEX RAIL PARTNERSHIP** is a joint venture between Bristol City Council, Bath & North East Somerset Council, Wiltshire Council, Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council, Dorset County Council, West Dorset District Council and First Great Western. The overall objective of the partnership since 2003 has been **to raise awareness and use of the Bristol to Weymouth rail services**, by marketing the line, enhancing stations and access to them and working with local communities.

Funding partners meet quarterly, and produce a **Line Plan** for jointly agreed priority areas of work for the partnership. Representatives from local groups come together as the **COMMUNITY RAIL WORKING PARTY**. Community projects and aspirations are summarized and managed through an action matrix, updated several times a year, which includes the longer term **Community Wish List**. Voluntary contributions to the line and its stations are substantial – 120 people contribute over 13,000 hours of their time to enhancing stations, promoting use of the line to the benefit of their local economies, running guided walks from stations or helping to improve customer information.

**OVERALL RESULTS TO 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2015**

Between April 2014 and March 2015, passenger journeys grew by 140,000 to **2,046,000**. For the first time in 12 years, growth did not outstrip that for the region as a whole (6% versus average 7% for total Severn and Solent<sup>1</sup>). Cumulative percentage growth against the national average<sup>2</sup> is shown below



<sup>1</sup> FGW data. SEVERN & SOLENT (corresponding roughly to FGW CENTRAL region) TOTAL includes total of passenger journeys on: Cardiff-Portsmouth, Bristol-Exeter, Bristol-Weymouth, Bristol-Great Malvern, Bristol-Severn Beach, Bristol-Cardiff, Bath-Filton and Swindon-Westbury. SEVERN & SOLENT, represents approximately 13% of FGW’s total passenger journeys.  
<sup>2</sup>. Office of Rail Regulation. Regional Rail Operators excludes London and South East.

## PASSENGER JOURNEY COMPARISON (000s)

To end March	Severn & Solent Total	Cardiff to Portsmouth	Bristol to Exeter	Heart of Wessex
2003	6641	3842	903	707
2009	10154	4561	1589	1489
2015	13750	5573	1929	2046
12 year growth	107%	45%	114%	<b>289%</b>

- **Service levels remain unchanged** meaning that for every **100** passenger journeys made in the year to 1<sup>st</sup> April **2003**, there were **290** on the same trains in the year to 1<sup>st</sup> April **2015**
- Of the two principal regional services between Bristol/Bath and the south coast via Westbury: In **2003** Heart of Wessex carried **9%** of the 7.3m passenger journeys. In **2015** it carried **15%** of the 15.8m total
- Heart of Wessex Line annual journeys have overtaken those of Bristol to Exeter to make it the second service behind Cardiff Portsmouth Harbour in passenger volume for the Severn & Solent region

## HIGHLIGHTS: APRIL 2014 TO MARCH 2015

### MARKETING & CUSTOMER INFORMATION

Focused on promoting sustainable visits to our local economies & adding value to customer information by capitalising on the knowledge base of our network of voluntary supporters, small businesses and local organisations.

### LINE GUIDE

The printed edition of the Line Guide has maintained its hold on customer demand, despite the steady trend towards online only information provision. The large print, accessible A3 sized timetable with minimal notes explains part of continuing demand for print quantities of 32,000 per issue, but there is evidence that the approach to content is also popular – each edition focuses on fresh ideas for visiting destinations along the route and “insider” tips (often from local rail users, voluntary supporters and rail staff) for making the best of the line.



**IDEAS FOR FURTHER ADVENTURES BY BUS!**

Bristol & Bath have “jump on/jump off” open topped buses with guided tours of sights, & stops outside both stations.  
[www.citysightseeingbristol.co.uk](http://www.citysightseeingbristol.co.uk)  
[www.bathbuscompany.com](http://www.bathbuscompany.com)

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**TROWBRIDGE**  
 Bus 49 from Trowbridge to Swindon via Devizes.  
[www.stagecoachbus.com](http://www.stagecoachbus.com). See [www.devizes.org.uk](http://www.devizes.org.uk) for more on this charming historic market town.

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**YEovil**  
 Bus 68 from front of the station to the town centre & Yeovil Junction station. “Borough” bus stop at the top of the town is a good one from which to start a visit.  
[www.southwestcoaches.co.uk](http://www.southwestcoaches.co.uk)

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Bus 57 or 58/SBA from in front of Pen Mill Hotel, at the top of station approach road, to picturesque **SHERBORNE** with great range of independent shops.  
[www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/dorset](http://www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/dorset)

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Excellent insider’s guide to exploring by public transport in Dorset, including Weymouth & Portland  
[www.dorset-transport.info](http://www.dorset-transport.info). Also worth following on Twitter @DorsetTransport for local news.

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**DORSET**  
 Two bus services include a stunning route along the coast – X31 from **Dorchester** to Bridport & Lyme Regis and X53 from **Weymouth** via Abbotsbury, West Bay (setting for ITV’s “Broadchurch”), Bridport, Lyme Regis, Seaton & Exeter.  
[www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/dorset](http://www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/dorset)

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Plan end to end journeys with  
  
[www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)  
 0871 200 22 33

Main features for 2014/15 included exploring Bristol, the arrival of a major international arts centre in Bruton (Hauser & Wirth), a focus on local food including the Freshford Community Shop and Café, Farmers Markets along the line, specialist small producers and the Great Bath Feast, a special feature on Trowbridge and the arrival of the Ninesprings Café in Yeovil Country Park.

“Ideas for further Adventures by Bus” promoting enjoyable public transport links to destinations further from the line generated a great deal of positive feedback, and may be more fully developed in the future.



## CONNECTING UP



The first of these custom designed maps were produced to answer very specific needs that were not addressed by any existing resources (routes in to town from Yeovil Pen Mill and the station to station link in Dorchester). Further maps in 2014/5 have also responded directly to issues raised on behalf of customers (especially first time visitors). The series will continue to build, but we do not intend to reinvent any wheels – if existing resources answer all needs, we direct people to those. Walking routes, current key bus connections and general local facilities are included according to requests and suggestions from rail staff, councils, volunteers, local businesses, as well rail & bus users themselves.

Example: Local BRUTON businesses reported to us that visitors to Hauser & Wirth arriving by rail were going in the wrong direction on exiting the station, and having to ask for directions. This map was designed and published immediately in response to this, pending the completion of pedestrian signing to this important new attraction. The map was also

included in the next edition of the Line Guide.

## WEBSITE RELAUNCH

A major project for the third quarter of 2014/15 was a complete redesign of our website, with entirely new, extensively researched content.

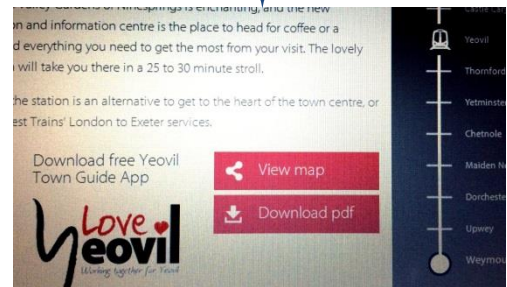
### Main objectives:

- Informative, easily navigable and responsive guide to the line for visitors and local people, with a close focus on the unique local characteristics of each of our destinations, adding value to, rather than duplicating, content of more generic tourism & travel marketing sites
- Easily navigable location for all resources generated by the partnership including Connecting Up maps, and a more permanent “home” for the extensive research and selection of material that goes into each Line Guide
- Direct links to the local transport sites of the four transport authorities, plus the best local/community generated resources, apps, websites or social media.
- A distillation of substantial local knowledge and range of contacts that has been built up over more than a decade, with a web of links to relevant local community groups and businesses. The site has a total of nearly 200 links including bike hire, nature reserves, walking and cycling routes, local food and markets, specialist independent retailers and attractions, and links to parish and town council’s own, often excellent, sites with a detailed local focus. Where local groups or organisations have created “insiders’ guides” (to their communities or how to travel to them) these are given special prominence.
- Information about the Heart of Wessex Rail partnership, with a library of publications (reports, line plans etc) and a gallery of images and project highlights that will be updated several times a year.

[www.heartofwessex.org.uk](http://www.heartofwessex.org.uk)

**FIRST GREAT WESTERN  
ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY  
RAIL FUNDING**

New small projects grant introduced in 2014/15 enabled us to relaunch our website.



## “FIXING THE LINK”



Taking a lead from this Abellio study, their title has been adopted for an area of our work focused on making it easier for people to find their way from/to stations. Above average **passenger growth** has brought a steady **increase in customers new to the line**, unfamiliar with stations and local geography. New custom continues to be generated by our promotional work - in a survey carried out in October 2014, 1 in 5 respondents were using the line for the first time<sup>3</sup>. The growing **presence of volunteer station adopters**, together with regular input from the Community Rail Working Party, continues to identify and underline issues that we can help to address.



## DORCHESTER WEST TO DORCHESTER SOUTH STATION



Below left: Sue McGowan, **Dorset County Council**, Sue Blake, **Friends of Dorchester West** and Maria Clarke, **West Dorset District Council** who, together with the **Rail Partnership** officer, carried out a detailed survey of the c 10 minute pedestrian route between the two Dorchester stations, identifying key “decision points” for new or replacement signs. Dorset County Council funded and installed the signs in late Spring 2014.



<sup>3</sup> Passenger Focus: Survey to be published in 2015.



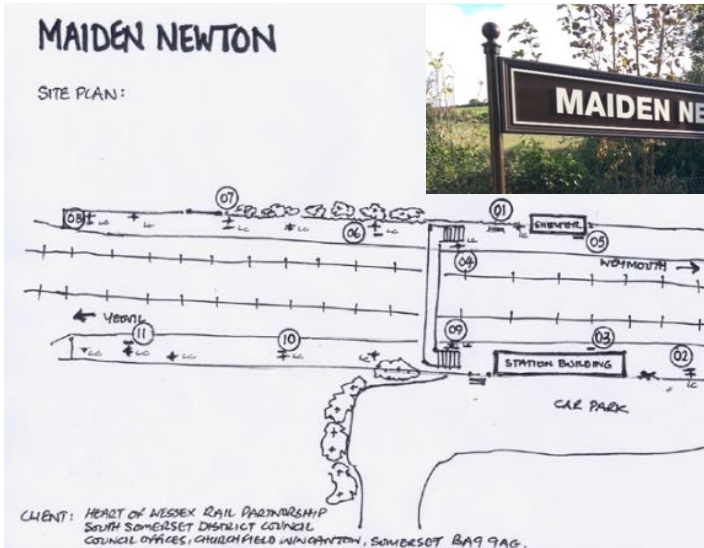
## CASTLE CARY COMMUNITY WALKING ROUTE TO TOWN

A scenic walking route developed and way-marked by the local community and featured in their own **Community Tourism publication**, was complimented with a series of **directional signs within the station itself** together with a new poster board to welcome arriving visitors with a map of the route.



**FIRST GREAT WESTERN  
ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY  
RAIL FUNDING**  
Extra grant to the partnership  
for 2014/15 for station  
projects, & further station  
investment underway.

This project was one of the **STATION IMPROVEMENT** investments facilitated by **extra capital funding for the partnership from FGW in 2014/15**. A new double free standing poster board and signs to the footpath at Castle Cary were funded directly by this extra contribution, which also enabled us to address some of the outstanding items on our long term **Community Wish List**. **Running in boards** and complete new schemes for **additional** and **replacement station signs**, with a particular emphasis on clearer and earlier notification to passengers of their arrival at the station.



Additional funding from FGW for Community Rail also began to supply some of the larger items on our long term Community Wish List, the first of which was a new shelter at **DORCHESTER WEST** completed at the end of the financial year. The **much expanded shelter provision** responds to the doubling of use of Dorchester West since 2010 - incidentally the year the voluntary **Station Friends group led by Wally Gundry** began working there every Friday - totally transforming the environment of this unstaffed station, and creating a real sense of welcome and security for customers.

## COMMUNITY RAIL WORKING PARTY (CRWP)

Local community & voluntary group representatives held three all-day Working Parties in 2014/15. Their intensive local knowledge came into its own at the November CRWP in a workshop with **Jon Morgan**, FGW Project Manager for Bath 2015 electrification work. Detailed discussion on anticipated local needs and possible solutions to them were followed up later with further sessions to focus on local details with members of the CRWP. The opportunity to learn about the intricate planning for a project like this, & most especially the chance to contribute to it, was a highly valued part of our year.



There were several other joint events, including a welcome to **Devon's Tarka Line** team, hosted by **Dave Walden and his Garden Gang**. The exchange of ideas and expertise on this day was voted the most productive of the year by all who were able to attend, and we will try to repeat this format in the future.

## COMMUNITY STATION ADOPTION

14 stations benefited from over **10,000 hours** of voluntary time over the year, ranging from all day gardening sessions by a large group from the local community (e.g. Freshford & Bruton), to regular weekly sessions (e.g. Dorchester West & Bradford on Avon), to less formally arranged but often even more frequent attention for stations lucky enough to have active local citizens living right beside them, or using them daily on the way to work (e.g. Upwey, Avoncliff and Maiden Newton).



Some focus on gardening, some undertake cleaning, recycling of rubbish & litter picking, some apply their skills to small infrastructure projects, some address information gaps with noticeboards or signing projects. All enjoy the contact with customers, and the invaluable feedback they give us from this is a key driver for other areas of our work.



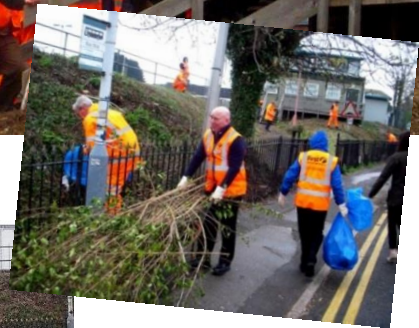
Every adoption is unique, and each group is free to decide what they want to do and when. No obligations, expectations or definitions are imposed on those who voluntarily choose to contribute part of their valuable time to their station and railway line. The only firm rule is regular consultation and collaboration with the **Station Manager**, and **Nick Reid** meets regularly with local volunteers. He has taken safety briefing onto a new level with his particularly thorough approach – and we are now becoming well established in Nick's "Safe Manor"!





## COMMUNITY RAIL TASK FORCE

Volunteers from Bristol to Weymouth and most stations in between come together to help with larger projects, one of the most impressive of which last year was a major clearance of the front of **WESTBURY** station (see before and after photos below) together with Network Rail and FGW.



Other joint projects included working groups at 10 stations to sow Flanders poppy seeds along the line for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War 1. Launched at **Trowbridge**, only

Upwey, Dorchester West and Bradford on Avon had a good showing of flowers. The stunningly successful Meadow Mix garden at **Yeovil Pen Mill** (with a series of different flowers blooming over the summer, including poppies) may be a better approach for semi wild garden areas, and the **Yeovil in Bloom** team kindly offered a training day on this for Task Force members.



## COMMUNITY PROJECTS GRANT FUND

**15% of the rail partnership's budget** is allocated for projects initiated by voluntary/ community groups for station gardening & equipment, small scale infrastructure, community notice boards, tourism, walking or customer



information initiatives. Bruton Chamber's excellent map guide was a good example of local knowledge used to encourage sustainable visits into local economies. The **Wessex Wanderers** bring over 500 people a year onto the line to enjoy 30 or more free guided walks into countryside, city or town. They come from all around the country, and, thanks to their increasingly popular website, from abroad.





## PROGRESS AGAINST LINE PLAN

Funding partners' priority areas from Line Plan (page 4) used here to sum up 2014/5 projects

Green text = supported by the partnership's Community Projects Grant Fund

Blue Text = FGW additional new funding for community rail projects

FUNDING PARTNERS' PRIORITIES	April 2014 to March 2015
<b>1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</b>	
Promoting more use of the line to the benefit of local economies	<a href="#">Website redesign and relaunch</a> 3 Line Guides Chamber of Commerce: Step into Bruton/ "Visit us by Train" Wessex Wanderers Guided Walks (+ 1450 hours of voluntary work from 30 walks leaders and coordinator)
Making it easy for visitors to understand and use services, stations and connections	Dorchester Fixing the Link (funded by Dorset County Council) <a href="#">Castle Cary: New signing to footpath and visitor welcome board</a> <a href="#">Maiden Newton &amp; Bruton signing schemes &amp; running in boards</a> <a href="#">Yeovil 68 bus link signing/ information improvements</a> New website: clearer navigation to, and greater focus on maps, tips, connections. 3 new / revised Connecting Up maps
Stations as community gateways and "shop windows" to destinations	Friends of Bruton Station: new visitor map <a href="#">Additional poster casings and/or new or revised community or Friends posters: Westbury, Frome, Yeovil, Maiden Newton, Dorchester West and Welcome to Ansford &amp; Castle Cary</a> Continual enhancement of station environments by voluntary groups, especially with ongoing development of gardens
Supporting and promoting local businesses	Line Guide & new website = strong focus Maiden Newton & Castle Cary Community Welcome posters Step into Bruton/ "Visit us by Train"
<b>2. CARBON REDUCTION, HEALTH &amp; STAYING SAFE</b>	
Encouraging more people to switch to rail by assisting understanding of services, stations, connections.	<a href="#">Friends of Bruton Railway Station: www. Brutoncarytrains.co.uk</a> Further resources and tips developed with Website, Connecting Up and Line Guides. Fixing the Link at Dorchester & Castle Cary
Continued improvement of station facilities/ making stations feel safer and more welcoming	Station adoption – new volunteers take total regularly working at stations to 92. 10,000 volunteer hours at stations. <a href="#">Replacement, larger capacity shelter at Dorchester West</a>
Encourage, facilitate and promote more walking to/from stations	New website includes Walking page, and total of 18 links to particular walking opportunities on the 20 destination pages. Connecting Up guides, Wessex Wanderers, Fixing the Link
<b>3. LOCALISM</b>	
Manage, motivate, sustain and build community contributions to the line	3 Community Rail Working Party (CRWP) meetings; 5 Task Force/ special joint events; 4 updates of CRWP "The Matrix"(short, medium and long term action areas/ community wish list) <a href="#">17 Grants for Community Projects</a>
<b>4. ACCESSIBILITY</b>	
Assist understanding of connections, services and stations & those with visual and learning difficulties	Accessible/ easy to read A3 TT in Line Guide Website, Connecting Up guides