

The Strategic Potential of Carnforth Station within the Rail Utilisation Strategy Programme.

Outline Document.

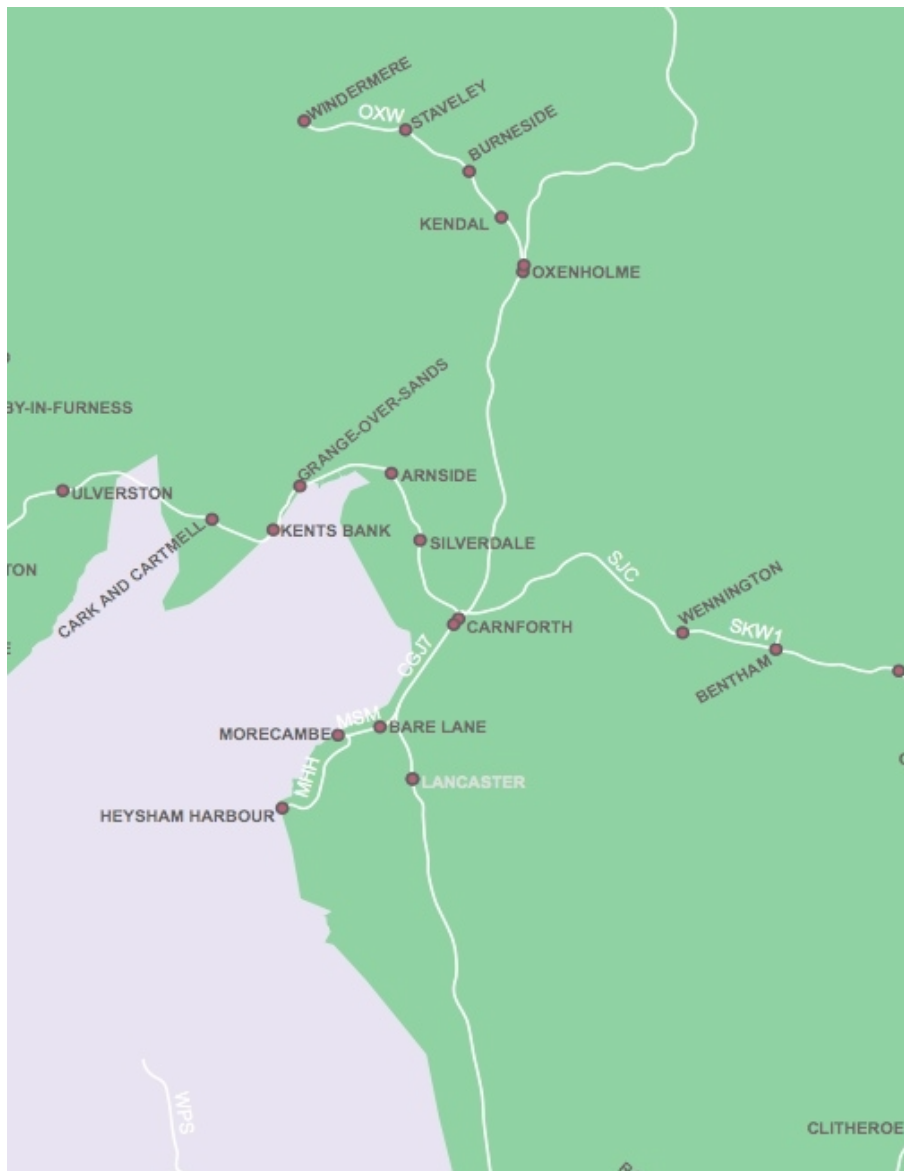


Image from "Geography of the RUS Area", Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008).

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Sources & References:

Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008)
Lancs and Cumbria RUS – Final Recommendations
West Coast Main Line RUS Scoping Document.
www.networkrail.co.uk
www.ACORP.co.uk
maps.google.com

Executive Summary.

This document is intended as a preliminary outline of the significant benefits to be derived from reinstatement of the West Coast Main Line platforms at Carnforth railway station. At the heart is the premise that:

Carnforth station is a natural tourism hub for rail travel in the North West with the ability to service the Government's need for future sustainable transport through the efficient use of its existing assets.

The following is written with reference to the existing *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008)* and to the forthcoming *West Coast Main Line RUS* and is intended to inform the pending business case for platform reinstatement at Carnforth by broadly defining the station's potential contribution to the network within the RUS programme.

The benefits identified of platform reinstatement would mitigate at least three of the seven gaps identified in *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008)*, and necessarily form a forceful case for Carnforth's inclusion in the *West Coast Main Line RUS* consultation. Indeed this document demonstrates in principal that, as a stakeholder in the *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS*, Carnforth station's interests and subsequently its strategic significance within the area have historically been overlooked by the established processes of the RUS programme.

The identified benefits include but are not limited to:

- Opening up destinations to tourists and commuters through direct rail links.
- Displacement of road traffic from Lakeland and other tourist destinations.
- Increases in network efficiency through utilisation of spare capacity on existing lines.
- Integrated transport links and local tourism.
- Additional options for contingency planners.
- Enhanced local area investment and development.

Referencing these benefits to 6.1 of the *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008) Table i* outlines some of the potential for Carnforth to enhance network operations through alleviation of identified generic gaps.

RUS Generic Gap no.	RUS Generic Gap	Gap alleviation
4	Rail services are not well-integrated with the local tourism market (Tourism)	Carnforth's main strength lies in its potential direct links to major tourist attractions. Its location, existing infrastructure, amenities and services, integrated transport links and status as a tourist attraction itself render it essentially a ready made solution to RUS generic Gap No 4.
1	Inter/intra-regional links are typically poor (Regional Links)	Carnforth was formerly a hub connecting north, south, east and west. Reinstatement of the platforms would provide more direct travel options to travellers. <i>(See 1.1 Available Capacity)</i>
2	The rail service is unattractive to commuters (Commuter Demand)	Increased opportunity for direct travel would make commuting a viable option for more local residents and correspondingly increase commuter demand.

Table i

Crucially, this document proposes that, as much of the existing infrastructure and required service provision is currently in place, these benefits can be achieved with no discernible disruption to current services and minimal financial investment.

Introduction.

“ ..this strategy focuses on how to make the best use of what is already available.”

Network Rail's then Chief Executive Iain Coucher, in his forward to the Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008).

Carnforth Station is the result of a successful £1.5m regeneration project undertaken by local people. It is the epitome of *Big Society* principles, and a triumph of community endeavour. An acclaimed and popular tourist attraction, surrounded by areas of outstanding natural beauty, wildlife reserves and historic towns, railways and heritage sites, Carnforth station lies at the centre of a once-pivotal rail interchange reaching to the four cardinal points. It is a natural gateway to the Lake District and beyond.

Perhaps it is due to Carnforth station's popularity that the cover of the *Lancashire and Cumbria Route Utilisation Strategy (August 2008)* sports its iconic clock from the film *Brief Encounter*, and the interior of the document is illustrated throughout with images of the station's myriad distinctive historical and architectural features.

Unfortunately, beyond the wonderful aesthetics of the station, Carnforth's vital strategic importance to the rail network appears to have been overlooked in the content of the RUS programme.

This document is intended to advise the business case for Carnforth station's inclusion in the future strategic vision of the railway network through the reinstatement of the West Coast Main Line platforms. The driving force behind the argument is the potential for Carnforth station to act as a tourism hub for rail travel in the North West, and to service the Government's need for future sustainable transport through the efficient use of its existing assets, namely:

- Carnforth's strategically unique network location.
- The station's proximity to tourism hotspots.
- The availability of existing services (including Ticket Office, Parking, Visitor Information Centre, acclaimed refreshment rooms, public conveniences, etc.)
- Existing and potential integrated transport links. (Including the M6 motorway at Jct 35 and the demonstrated use of Carnforth Connect bus service.)

The assets listed above form the structure of this brief outline document. The following pages describe and expand upon each asset to demonstrate obtainable benefits to the RUS programme.

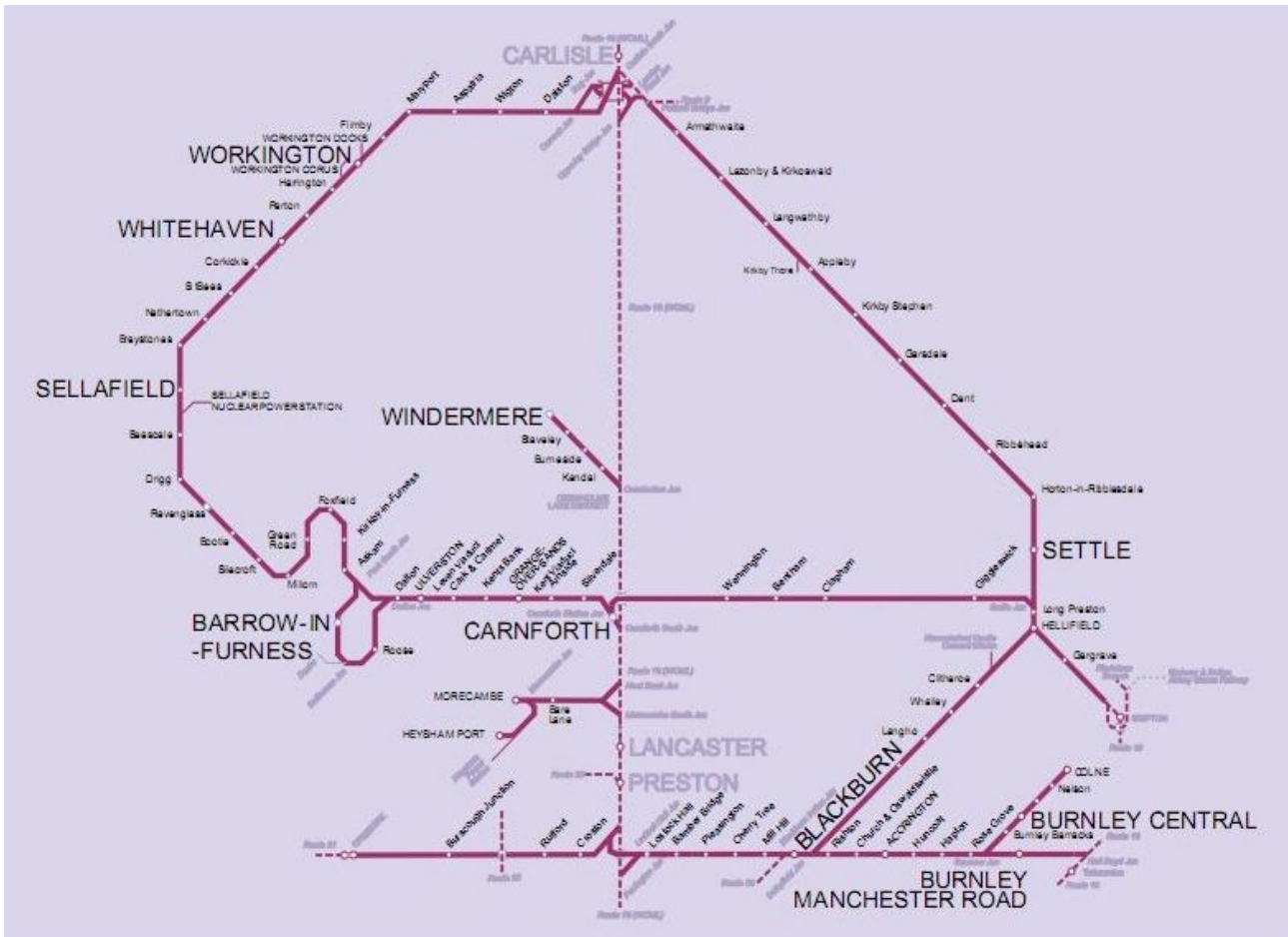
In order to facilitate this the RUS Programme, specifically the *Lancashire and Cumbria Route Utilisation Strategy (August 2008)* mentioned above, will be the primary source of reference throughout.

By beginning to describe ways in which the station could enhance the RUS and alleviate gaps already identified, it will be shown that major and irrefutable benefits will be derived from the reinstatement of the West Coast Main Line at Carnforth railway station.

Carnforth's Strategic Location.

Carnforth station is a ready-made crossroads.

Figure 1i illustrates that Carnforth station occupies a strategically unique location offering the potential to travel in all four cardinal directions.



(From Figure 2.2, Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008) www.networkrail.co.uk)

Figure 1i

Currently significant direct rail travel is only possible to and from the East and West. The restoration of the main line platforms would further open up the North-South direct travel route, and provide a gateway for travellers to access, for example, the Lake District to the North and London to the South. It would follow that the existing services to the West (incorporating the beautiful Furness Peninsula) and the East (to the Dales and beyond) would then be conveniently accessible as tourist destinations from the West Coast Main Line.

Consequently, Carnforth simply by virtue of its location within the rail network has the potential to once again become a valuable interchange, allowing more passengers wider direct travel opportunities with the added benefit of enabling more efficient utilisation of local commuter trains and other vital links such as Manchester Airport Services.

Some additional beneficiaries would include:

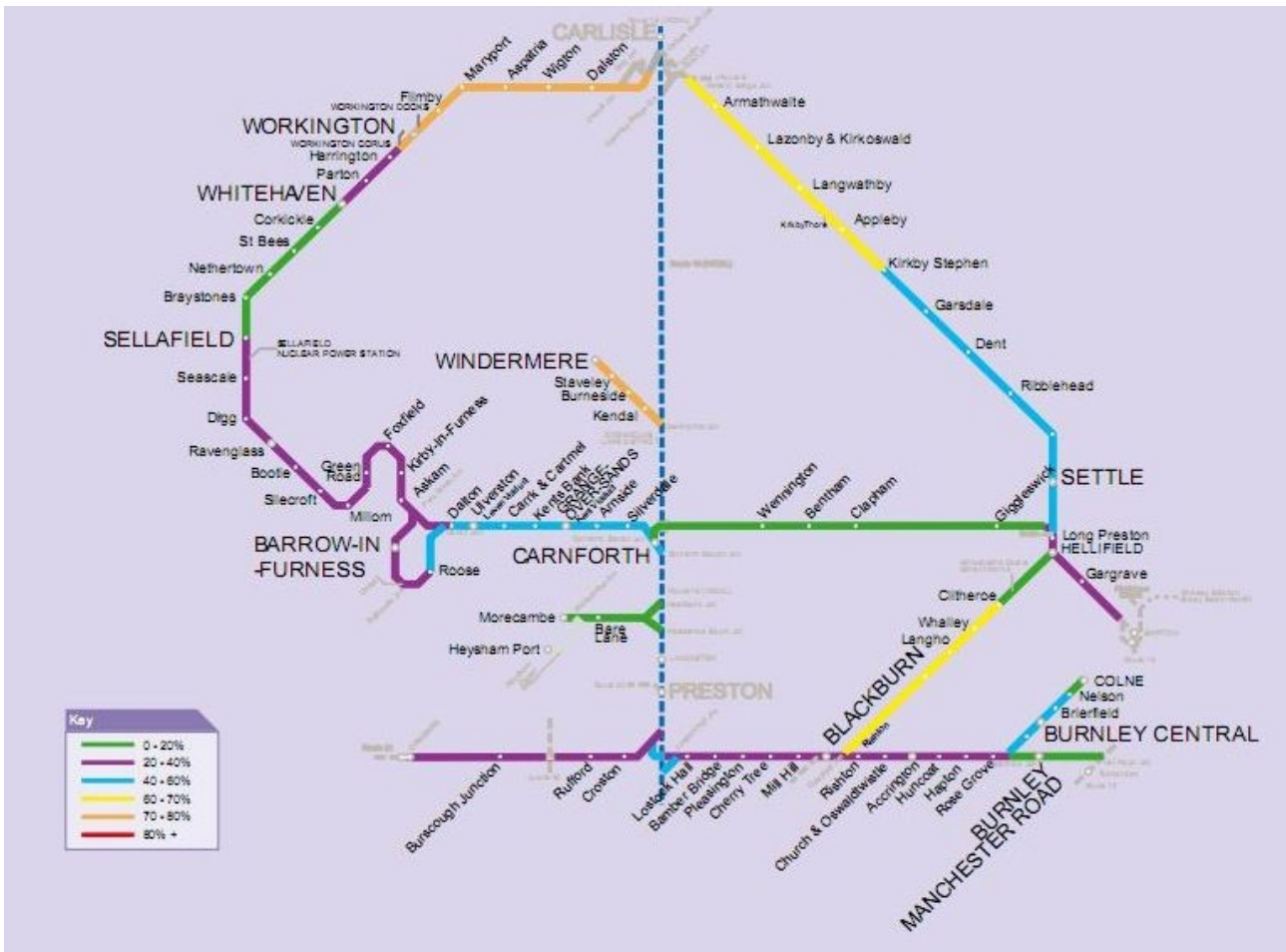
- Tourists wishing to access the Lake District from the East coast via a direct rail link.
- Commuters to and from Kendal and Windermere.
- Those wishing utilise Manchester Airport Trains that traverse the West Coast Main Line.

1.1 Available Capacity

The *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008)* states that:

“the challenge usually faced when producing a RUS, that of insufficient capacity to meet current or future demand, is not a major problem here [in the L & C RUS].”¹

Additionally the document provides a graphical representation of the current capacity usage, referenced in *Figure 1ii*. Since the Capacity Utilisation Index indicates that “in general 50% means there is room for growth”², the graphic clearly shows the spare capacity available in the system which could be deployed to meet the latent demand for rail access to tourism in the area.



(Figure 3.16 from Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008) www.networkrail.co.uk)

Figure 1ii

The *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008)* mentions on pg. 96 that:

“Good connections at Carnforth would give a better South Cumbria – Leeds regional link.”

“Good connections” is an ambiguous term, but the reopening of the West Coast Main Line platforms would create new opportunities such as this to exploit the existing and under-utilised Lancashire and Cumbria network.

With regard to West Coast Main Line capacity, a statement from Virgin Rail is attached demonstrating the Company’s willingness to make Carnforth a scheduled stop should the business plan prove satisfactory.

1 Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008), Introduction, Pg 4
2 Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008), Section 3.6, Pg 48

Rail Access to Tourism.

Carnforth station is a popular tourist attraction and is perfectly placed to fill a tourism gap in the RUS.

In its baseline analysis of current demand, infrastructure, capability and performance, the *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008)* stated of Tourism:

3.3.10 Tourism

Reviving tourism within both counties is considered to be a significant element in regenerating the area and increasing growth and wealth. The RUS area benefits from having a vast natural and unique landscape, and hosts a number of key tourist destinations. These include areas of natural beauty such as the Lake District National Park and the Yorkshire Dales, and other popular attractions, including wildlife centres, historic railways and RSPB reserves.

Figure 2i

A reader could be excused for mistakenly believing the passage was written about Carnforth. The station's position lends itself to direct access to all the listed attraction types in figure 2i. Specifically:

- Leighton Moss: **RSPB Nature reserve**. Located 4 miles north-west of Carnforth.
- Wildlife Oasis: Exotic wildlife display centre. Located 5.5 miles from Carnforth on the A6.
- Eric Morecambe Statue, Midland Hotel, and Morecambe Promenade, Located 6 miles west.
- The **Yorkshire Dales** accessible via eastbound rail link.
- The **Lake District National Park** potentially accessed directly via West Coast Main Line.

(A handful of specific relevant attractions have been listed here in order to demonstrate a gap in this area of the RUS. The huge variety and number of attractions exist in the local area, the details of which are easily ascertained.)

Despite this, at no point is Carnforth mentioned as a potential station which might contribute toward the “revival” of tourism in the area. In fact, the passage goes on to read:

To encourage a revival, local authorities and other interested parties are developing new and improved visitor focussed products and are promoting targeted marketing activity.

Figure 2ii

Carnforth station has a sustained proven track record of exactly this type of activity, yet receives no mention in any proposed plans for tourism.

The paragraph goes on to say:

A key objective in the effort to deliver an enhanced visitor experience is to develop sustainable transport networks to secure further community and environmental benefits. The safety and environmental benefits of the railway in comparison to other forms of transport strengthens the case for its promotion. Where a station is within a reasonable walking distance of the tourist attraction it can be a viable stand-alone choice for access. Where the attraction is some way away from a station or is itself dispersed, rail is only really viable in conjunction with other public transport modes such as buses.

Figure 2iii

Carnforth station visitor's centre boasts a visitor's book bursting with travellers from all over the world. Tourist numbers have increased year on year, and the privately-run tea rooms (equipped to emulate the tea rooms in the film *Brief Encounter*) was recently acclaimed with a third-place in the category "Best Station or Train Retail Outlet" by ACORP³.

The reinstatement of the mainline platform would provide a superior base from which to access the Windermere branch, and hence the Lakes, by rail on a sustainable level with room for growth. Currently Lakes services are boarded at Oxenholme, a station that is in every way impractical as a hub for such a popular tourist destination.

Despite the opportunities for growth, wealth creation, regeneration, environmental and community benefits identified in *Figures 2i, 2ii and 2iii* the *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008)* identified only one route planning gap to be addressed for tourism, addressing timetabling on the Windermere branch to provide better connections at Oxenholme⁴. It also stated a plan to increase car parking at Oxenholme⁵. Such measures do not constitute an adequate strategy to serve a popular tourist destination with such potential for high passenger volumes.

A wider stakeholder consultation process which actively involved Carnforth station and took a broad view of opportunities, facilities and services available would have immediately identified the solution to the Lakes' rail tourist link issues: Reinstatement of the Main Line Platform at Carnforth Station.

³ <http://www.acorp.uk.com/2010%20Awards%20winners.html>

⁴ Planning and Regulation Route Planning/RUS. Lancs and Cumbria RUS – Final Recommendations, Pg 5.

⁵ Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008), Table 4.1- Committed Enhancement Schemes, Pg 59.

Existing Services and Amenities

Carnforth station has existing services designed for tourist traffic.

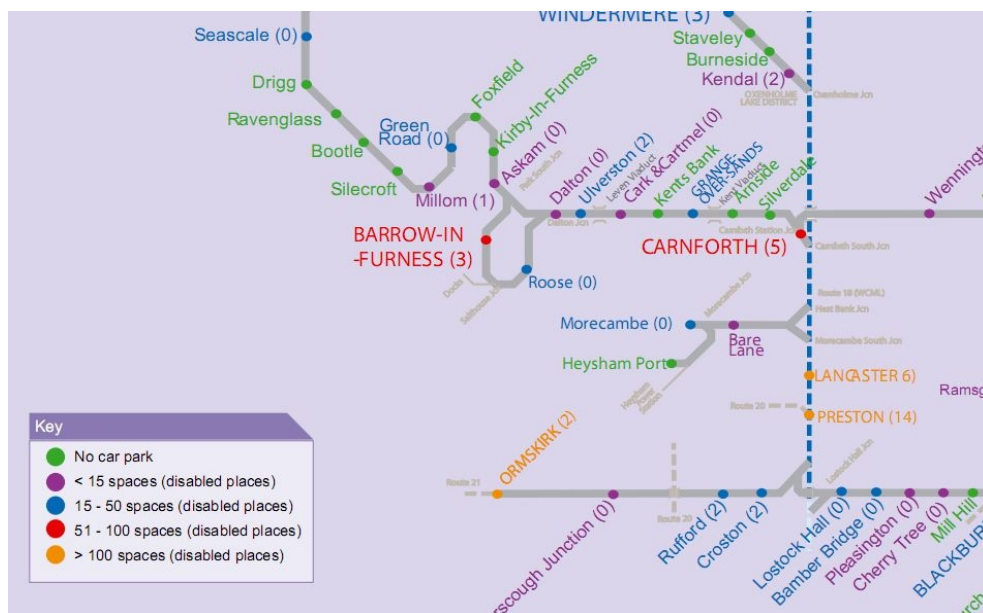
Carnforth station is a stand-alone tourist attraction. Accordingly it has all the required facilities to cater for large numbers of visitors and travellers.

From the earliest days of the regeneration the station complex has been at the heart for plans to enhance Carnforth town. Consequently, there is ample capacity to accommodate growth in visitor numbers and station throughput.

Existing amenities and services include:

- Victorian market-town Location.
- Disabled accessibility.
- Manned ticket office, with exceptional staff committed to the travelling public.
- Retail units housing local businesses.
- Vast visitor centre and award-winning tea rooms
- Quality public conveniences.
- Parking for cars, coaches, disabled bays and cycles.

Figure 3i shows the availability of parking facilities compared to surrounding stations as defined by the RUS.



(From Figure 3.15, Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008) www.networkrail.co.uk)

Figure 3i

The station is designed to serve as a lively, bustling tourism hub. Ancillary services such as function room hire at the Visitor Centre and regular social events held in the complex all add value to the local community.

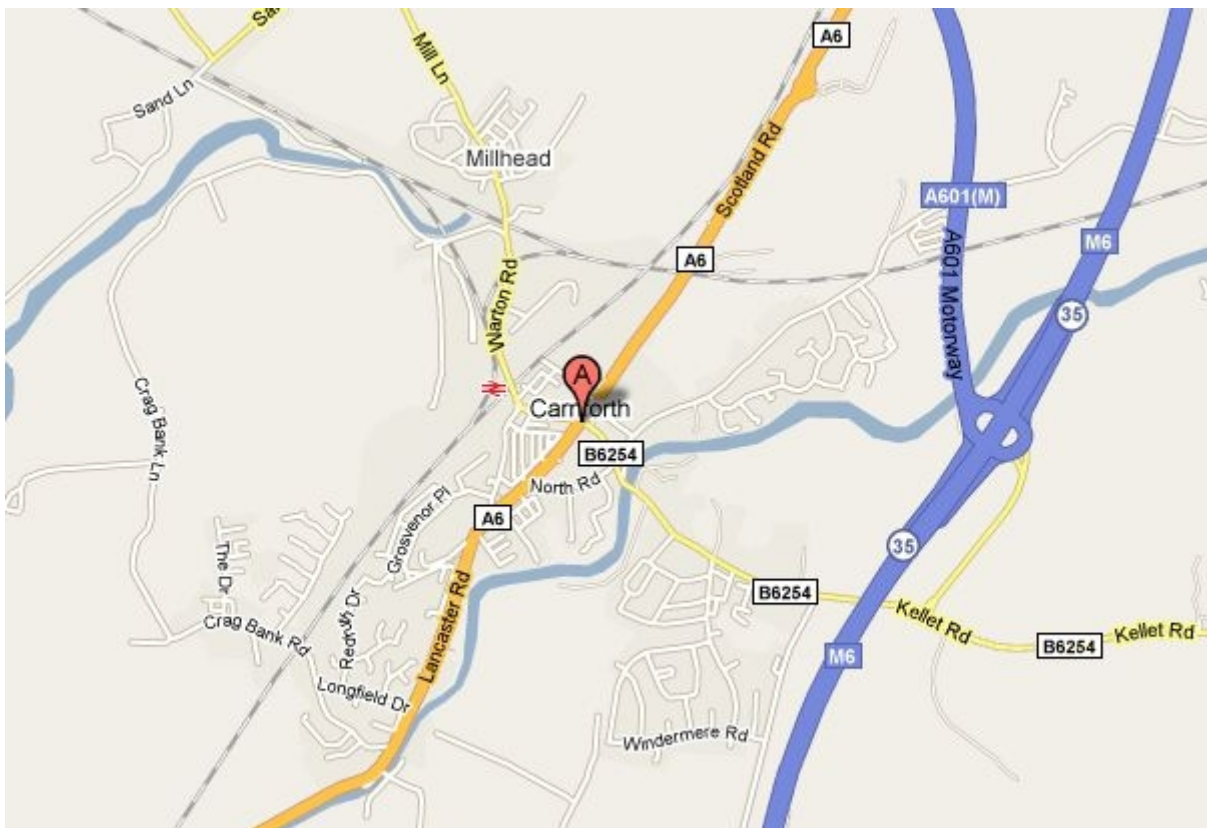
Grant funding has recently been obtained for a **Visitor Information Centre (VIC)** to be located in of the Station's retail units, which will provide information to visitors about the countless other tourist attractions around the local area, further enhancing the station's viability as a tourism hub.

Integrated Transport.

Motorway, main road, rail interchange, canal and cycle path.

Carnforth has remarkable transport links originating from its industrial heritage as an iron works town. From the railway station, there are established transport links including (Figure 4i):

- The M6 motorway accessible at Jct 35.
- The Main A6 running North-South.
- The rail links as described.
- The Lancaster Canal.
- Various cycle paths and walkways.



Source: maps.google.com

Figure 4i.

Carnforth railway station has for several years benefited from *Carnforth Connect* bus service to the surrounding area, with a stop directly outside the station building. Should the Platforms be reinstated, more direct travel and subsequent demand increase would create scope for building on this service to enhance integrated transport links.

As indicated in *Section 3.0* of this document, standard and disabled car parking facilities at Carnforth are already more than sufficient to promote accessible park and ride initiatives for tourism and commuting. With capacity for future growth. Coaches are also accommodated.

Conclusions and Further Action.

Notwithstanding the difficulties inherent in producing such a comprehensive strategy, from the point of view of Carnforth station The *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008)* did not adequately address stakeholder concerns and aspirations.

The baseline analysis in section 3 of the *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008)* acknowledged the significant benefits of Tourism to local areas, and the major role that rail could and should play in increasing access to tourism, but found a gap in the ability of the current rail infrastructure to supply those benefits. This gap was never addressed adequately by any subsequent recommendation.

Through the ongoing West Coast Main Line RUS consultation Carnforth has the opportunity to bridge that gap.

The following table summarises the case presented in these pages and directly addresses at least three of the seven generic gaps identified by the *Lancashire and Cumbria RUS (August 2008) Section 6.1:*

RUS Generic Gap no.	RUS Generic Gap	Gap alleviation
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2	The rail service is unattractive to commuters (Commuter Demand)	Increased opportunity for direct travel would make commuting a viable option for more local residents and correspondingly increase commuter demand.

Table i

The availability of existing infrastructure, services, transport links, and amenities mitigate the financial risk involved in the bringing back to life Carnforth's vital interchange.

In conclusion:

Carnforth station is a natural tourism hub for rail travel in the North West with the ability to service the Government's need for future sustainable transport through the efficient use of its existing assets.

This brief document has outlined a case. Action must now centre on the creation of a viable business plan for the reinstatement of the Carnforth station West Coat Main Line platforms and on developing a constructive level of stakeholder input into the Rail Utilisation Strategies of both Lancashire and Cumbria and, crucially, the West Coast Main Line.