

Plans for Part of the Original Severn Valley to be Re-instated in the Ironbridge Gorge



A steam train at Ironbridge railway station on the Severn Valley Railway. (Ron Miles)

According to a report in the Shropshire Star, The Ironbridge Railway Trust wants to re-instate a derelict stretch of the old Severn Valley Railway line providing a modern yet nostalgic public transport link for more than one million visitors who come to the World Heritage Site each year.

Making the area more accessible through green public transport and an enhanced accommodation offer is key to a vibrant future for the town's visitor economy, particularly in the recovery from Covid-19. The Trust proposes a re-instated rail link from a park & ride station in the former Power Station site at Buildwas directly to the Iron Bridge itself and the multiple attractions along the line's route at Jackfield and Coalport. Plans are already in place for a major commercial and domestic development on the former power station site and the developers are keen to restore rail links to the Shrewsbury/Wolverhampton line, using the former goods line that carried coal to the power station. Adding this line would only enhance the overall appeal of the development. It would also help to remove traffic from the Ironbridge Gorge area which has only very narrow roads and very little parking.

Offering a connection from the M54 and the M6 corridors, the Trust said that the rail service would support sustainable growth of the economy, ambitions for more environmentally-friendly traffic management in the town, flood-resilience, and future potential to develop onwards to Bridgnorth.

Opportunity

The Trust proposes that the service would be operated both with both heritage trains and modern environmentally-friendly passenger units, with the energy storage technology used by the Parry People Mover (PPM) which currently runs on the nearby National Rail Stourbridge Town branch.

Peter Lyons, chairman of the Ironbridge Railway Trust, said: "As a gateway to the Gorge, we believe the rail link can be an innovative and imaginative part of the regeneration of the Ironbridge Power Station site, building on and going further than current proposals for the site."

The Trust is preparing to make a bid in November 2020 to the second stage of the government's Restoring Your Railways fund which, if successful, would finance a full study of the feasibility of the plan. It is also in discussion with Telford MP Lucy Allan, Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Council, and the Ironbridge Gorge Museums.

Telford & Wrekin Councillor Eric Carter, chairman of The Marches Strategic Railway Group, said: "The Trust's exciting proposal can help us sustain and grow the Ironbridge tourism economy, which along with our many other attractions such as Cosford RAF Museum, the Severn Valley Railway, our market towns and beautiful countryside make Shropshire the country's principal inland tourist county."

John Parry, MD of PPM, said: "This will be a sensational opportunity to develop the World Heritage Site sympathetically and for a joint Ironbridge Railway Trust/PPM solution to be recognized internationally as a model for environmental, economic and community improvement."