

Bala Lake Railway Seeks Welsh Government Support as it Seeks to Finalise Bala Town Extension Plans



The Bala Lake Railway has sought investment from the Welsh Government for its £2.5 million extension into the town of Bala itself. The Bala Lake Railway Trust has called it an opportunity to deliver substantial capital investment in this area of Snowdonia, which would pay off with thousands of visitors every year visiting the town.

The Bala Lake Railway extension project has reached a milestone, with the design work being finalised which will take the narrow-gauge railway into Bala Town. A planning application will be submitted to the local authority later in 2020.

The railway was forced to close earlier in 2020 due to the coronavirus crisis, but work continued behind the scenes with Caulmert, the engineering company brought in to design the new extension and assist the BLR Trust with the planning application. Caulmert is completing an environmental impact assessment on the protected site and is producing designs that will be submitted to the Snowdonia National Park Authority in December 2020.

The current railway runs for 4.5 miles from its base in Llanuwchllyn to Pen-y-Bont. However, the £2.5m project will see another 3/4 mile of railway track laid to take the railway over the River Dee and into Bala Town.

Caulmert Civil Engineer, David High, says “While the railway extension may be short in length, it is incredibly complex due to its surroundings. The site is protected, and the new route takes it over a Grade 2 listed bridge, all in the Snowdonia National Park which presents many interesting challenges. Our engineers have been extremely innovative in overcoming some of these issues and making sure that the project will have minimal impact on the environmentally and historically sensitive site.”

Julian Birley, chairman of Bala Lake Railway Trust, said they had bought a site just off the high street and an extension of the line would allow people to leave their cars in the town, then catch a train to Llanuwchllyn, enjoying the lake and scenery.

He believes it could mean 55,000 people visiting the town, adding: "This is a long-held wish of the railway and we've been working on it now six years.

Image captionThe train leaves the station at Llanuwchllyn

"We've spent in excess of £1.2m already. We are applying for the full planning permission next month and we've set up a petition now requesting people to show their support.

"We want to be able to go to the government to say look, this is a one-off project... this is a leg up and never has there been a more urgent need for capital investment in this part of the (Snowdonia) national park, and once it's delivered it's done forever and it's completely sustainable."

A Welsh Government spokesman said: "We are continuing to have positive discussions with the Bala Lake Railway Trust as we see this as being a strategically important project for the area."