

# The History of the Mouldsworth to Chester Northgate/Dee Marsh Cheshire Lines Railway Now the Millennium Greenway

*With acknowledgement to Steve Howe who gave permission for us to include material from his excellent Virtual Stroll at [www.chesterwallsinfo](http://www.chesterwallsinfo) web site.  
A wonderful source of well researched historical information about the city.*



The railway line was first opened to freight traffic on 2nd November 1874. A bridge plate commemorating this can still be found on the bridge at Newton Lane. On 1st May 1875, after the Chester & West Cheshire Junction Railway had become part of the Cheshire Lines Committee, use was extended to passenger traffic. In 1896 John Summers and Sons, Manchester steel manufacturers, opened a new steelworks at Shotton, which was well served by the railway.

Following the closure of Chester Northgate Station in October 1969 passenger trains diverted to Chester General. The Deeside line continued to be used for freight until it too closed in 1984 only to be re-opened in 1986 as the diversionary singled line route could not cope with the traffic to and from the Shotton area! The 1986 re-opening provided a link to and from the Warrington direction only at Mickle Trafford.



Newton Bridge February 1955



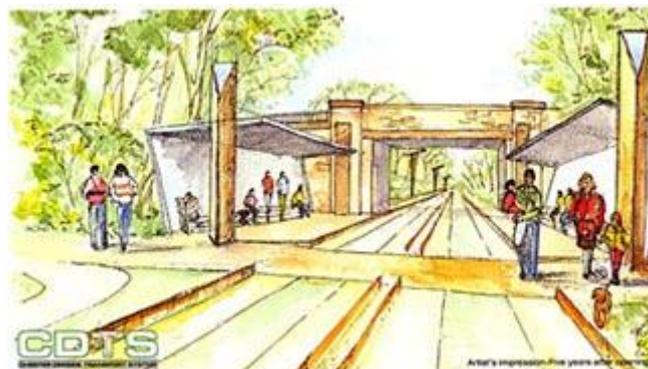
The line was finally closed for good in June 1992 following the closure of Ravenscraig steelworks near Motherwell as Shotton Steelworks, by then used only as a plant for coating the massive steel rolls, received all of its inward traffic from South Wales via Wrexham.



Unofficially the route was used by walkers and by cyclists too once the sleepers were removed. Some Mickle Trafford and Guilden Sutton people even accessed it by carrying their cycles over fields. It must have been a rough old ride even with mountain bikes! It does, however, show how keen some were to access a traffic free route especially on their journey to work.

For a few years following the closure of the railway possible uses for the track were discussed and in August 1984 Cheshire County Council published a report which suggested three options: tarmacking it over as a new main road, use as a place for preserved steam trains or developing it as a smooth surfaced path suitable for use by cyclists, pedestrians, wheelchairs, prams and dog walkers. Such a path would have run from Blacon to Mannings Lane South with access points at suitable places along its length. None of the suggestions were in fact acted upon and the track became derelict, festooned in places with fly tipped rubbish although it continued to be used by walkers and cyclists.

Eleven years later, in 1995, cycling charity [Sustrans](#) was awarded National Lottery money for the creation of a national cycle network, although Chester was excluded from this - the national route map was published showing gaps between the Welsh coastal route and Chester and also between Liverpool and Chester. In that same year, however, a new use of the track was proposed this time as a Chester Deeside Transport System (CDTS) 'Guided Busway' running into the centre of Chester with a new Park and Ride facility on the outskirts of Hoole.



The plans included a cycleway/footpath, constructed by Sustrans, which would run alongside the busway. Such a cycleway / walkway however was to be placed along the *edge* of the old railway (not down the

middle as was Sustrans normal practise) thus allowing space for the construction for the busway at a later date.

It is fair to say that there was a significant amount of local opposition to the idea of a Guided Busway and a long hard battle led by Audrey Hodgkinson, later to found the Millennium Greenway Friends Volunteer Group, was fought. 'People *can* move mountains' her rallying call. Surely as true today as it was then if there is enough determination.



The battle continued over a number of years, sustained by the determination of the local people to prevent the building of a busway, until in September 2002 Cheshire County Council Councillors withdrew financial support for the CDTS. This decision was followed, in February 2003, by a statement that Chester City Council now regarded the CDTS as being 'off the table'

There was reason for the 'No Busway' campaigners to celebrate.



In the meantime, planning permission having been given in 1998, Sustrans had been busy constructing their shared path.

Newton Bridge October 1997



Near Newton Primary School and Woodlands Drive April 1999



July 2000. What a difference!



The derelict railway track has been transformed. The shared path, created by Sustrans, has been open for six weeks and is already very popular with walkers and cyclists alike. The narrow green area running along the left hand side of the path had, as demanded by the council, been set aside to accommodate their planned busway.

The first phase of the Sustrans shared path finished at Newton Hollows and users were directed to the Kingsway playing fields from where they linked with local roads.



To the left of the picture below is the derelict section of the railway track set aside to accommodate the busway.



Construction of the Phase Two section of the shared path, extending it from an entrance at Fairfield Road to Guilden Sutton and Mickle Trafford, and built to celebrate the Millennium, began in 2009. Partially funded by the Northwest Regional Development Agency as part of the REVIVE project, it was launched in October of that year with a sponsored walk and fun day. Millennium Greenway Friends and others assisting Sustrans to win the Connect2 public vote lottery bid.





Sponsored walk event



Ardent campaigner Audrey Hodgkinson (on the right) with her husband Ralph who was once an engine driver on the railway line.

The Millennium Greenway continues to provide a safe, healthy, traffic free route for walkers and cyclists alike as well as a wonderful haven for a diverse number of plants and wild life creatures. How lucky we are to have it!