

This biggest ever investment by the South Tynedale Railway (STR) will protect and enhance railway and industrial heritage in the remote and beautiful upper South Tyne Valley. It will also build long term environmental sustainability into the railway's business plan, open up employment opportunities, develop a stronger education programme for visitors of all ages and expand skills training in the charity's volunteer and paid workforce.

In addition to acknowledging the tremendous encouragement given by the team at the HLF in developing a successful bid, Brian Craven, STR Deputy Chairman, said: "Some time ago we realised that, if we are to continue to build on the success of thirty years of development, we had to do new and different things. We have to attract new visitors and more of them to the lovely South Tyne Valley and our railway. When we reviewed how we work we recognised that we were spending far too much on resources like power, fuel and other essential utilities and we must do something about that. Our customers tell us that our excellent volunteers provide a great visitor experience. So we must ensure that, in turn, our volunteers get the most they can out of their hobby. Alston is a remote town and the STR is important to its economy. We are keen to work with others to do still more to extend quality employment opportunities to local folk. This project will fulfil all of these aims and more."

There are several large capital developments. Firstly there is a mile and a quarter of railway to build from the temporary terminus at Lintley to reach the village of Slaggyford in Northumberland. There the STR will transform the station site by repairing the wooden buildings, reconstructing a replica North Eastern Railway signal box with equipment rescued from Battersby in North Yorkshire, and reinstalling level crossing gates to ensure both road and railway are safe to use. The

village will benefit too. New fibre optic cabling essential for the railway's signalling needs, could bring fast broadband to the village through joint work with locally based Cybermoor.

In Alston the grant contributes towards long term repairs to the 160 year-old historic wall that kept the rivers Nent and Tyne away from the railway. It was storm damaged a little over a year ago and temporary repairs will now be made permanent ensuring another century and more of life.

Alston Station will get a new roof spanning platform and tracks and a second platform for the first time in Alston Station's history. Along with all of the STR's other buildings, except for the Grade II listed Station House, the new roof will be fully fitted with solar PV panels. This major electricity generation scheme will cut fuel bills and leave power enough to heat newly super-insulated workshops. The Railway has also obtained two almost new battery-electric locomotives from Transport for London. They will be regauged to fit the STR's two feet wide track. Powerful enough to pull passenger coaches, they will be used on the building work. The greatest good is that their batteries will be charged from the railway's own solar power supply.

An historic steam engine built by Hunslet in Leeds in 1937 and housed in Alston since the 1990s will be sent away for overhaul. When it returns it will be equipped to burn waste wood briquettes and will be a rare example of a 'sustainable energy' steam engine. It will join another Leeds engine 'BARBER' that is returning to Alston in 2014. Together these two will be the first British-built steam locomotives on the line and will be used alongside British diesel and electric engines.

There will be an enlarged education programme based at an expanded heritage centre at Alston Station emphasising opportunities for children and adults to learn about our industrial heritage and its effects on the Pennine landscape. Importantly, the project gives scope to develop and train the volunteers that run the railway and make the best use of the huge variety of skills they bring with them and pass them on to the next generation.

Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, Ivor Crowther, said: "South Tynedale Railway is an important reminder of our transport heritage and is a fantastic example of the bygone and glorious age of steam. We were really impressed with the dedication and passion that the South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society demonstrated towards this conservation project and also its commitment towards nurturing volunteers, providing educational sessions to local schools and passing on valuable knowledge and skills. We know that this project will make a huge difference to the local area and visitors will be enjoying the site, and the wider natural heritage of the North Pennines, for many years to come."

A project team, including a Railway Manager, is included and recruitment will start soon. A new cafe will allow expansion of the catering business and offer local employment year round. Rain water collection will fuel our coal burning steam engines. There is more that the project will deliver - too much to list here in full, many just small but important changes to the way the business will work.

Richard Graham, South Tynedale Railways's Chairman and Alston resident, added: "This is a huge opportunity to build the economy and wellbeing of the South Tyne Valley. We are really pleased that the Heritage Lottery Fund has shown such faith in our small but flourishing organisation and I am looking forward to leading our enthusiastic team as we get to work on the project."

Notes to editors

The South Tynedale Railway
Built on the trackbed of the former Newcastle and Carlisle standard gauge Haltwhistle to Alston line the STR is 610mm

(2 foot) gauge. The voluntary South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society opened its first short stretch of track in 1983 and has extended it over the years. The charitable society's goal is to reinstate a railway all the way from Alston in Cumbria to meet the national railway network at Haltwhistle in Northumberland. Trains run from early spring until November each year and Santa Specials operate at weekends leading up to Christmas.

February is part of the railway's closed season and essential maintenance is underway. We cannot guarantee that there is anyone present at the station or office to take enquiries.

Further information

Katie Owen, HLF press office on 020 7591 6036 / 07973 613820

Brian Craven, STRPS, 01744 752 397, email: brian.craven@clara.net.