



Beyond Ellesmere Port

A long-term vision for a 'metro' styled service around the Mersey Basin...

Following the successful re-establishment of 2-way passenger services over the Halton Curve linking Liverpool Lime St with Cheshire and North Wales, NCRUG has focused on services beyond Ellesmere Port as our headline campaign.

Why beyond Ellesmere Port?

Ellesmere Port currently marks the terminus for Merseyrail services from Liverpool coinciding with the end of the electrified 3rd rail. This leaves the residential and industrial corridor from Ellesmere Port to Helsby without a regular rail service to the Liverpool City Region and Wirral. The current yet frequently cancelled 3x daily services from Ellesmere Port are limited in scope and run at times not suited to the needs of most passengers. Northern currently provide this service as a franchise obligation.

Prior to mothballing for structural repairs, the station at the Stanlow refinery site was on the record as the least used station in the UK. Currently Ince and Elton station vies for that title. A regular metro styled service from Ellesmere Port connecting Cheshire, Warrington and Widnes to Liverpool would open new markets, reduce vehicle journeys, reduce emissions and bring all the benefits of a more environmentally friendly way to travel.

How would the new service work?

In the absence of an electrified 3rd rail beyond Ellesmere Port the new battery powered Merseyrail Class 777 units provide an obvious solution for extended services beyond the Wirral. So far battery trials with this new rolling stock to the new Merseyrail station at Headbolt Lane have proven highly successful and Merseyrail have stated their intention to now extend their current network beyond both Bidston and Ellesmere Port.

What route would the new service follow?

It is envisaged new services will be staged. Initially a regular service to Helsby as an extension of current services and then returning back to Liverpool via Ellesmere Port.

The 2nd stage will likely be services from Ellesmere Port to a new station at Daresbury. Daresbury alongside Woodside and St Helens was one of the 3 new stations committed to by the Liverpool Metro Mayor as part of the recent re-election campaign. There is no funding set aside for this station yet.

The 3rd stage could involve a return to Liverpool via Warrington Bank Quay, Widnes and Hunts Cross where trains could re-connect to the electrified 3rd rail on the Northern Line. The Option of

returning to Liverpool via the Halton Curve and Runcorn is unlikely to be feasible due to congestion on the West Coast Main Line approach to Lime St and lack of a 3rd rail to connect to.

What has been done so far?

A Strategic Outline Business Case, jointly funded by Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaC) and Merseytravel has been completed. The business case included a new station to be located between Ellesmere Port and Stanlow and overall the project meets the minimum requirements to go forward to the next stage. Additionally, a further demand study commissioned by CWaC and provided by AECOM suggested there was sufficient demand by both residents and businesses between Ellesmere Port and Helsby to support the scheme.

NCRUG has provided support to both CWaC and Merseytravel throughout. We have pushed hard for the owners of the Stanlow site (and station) to fund the necessary remediation work to enable the station to be re-opened and serve the refinery as was originally intended. We have lobbied Northern to re-schedule their limited services to align with shift changes at Stanlow although this has met with continued resistance due to their own crewing requirements. Northern themselves have little interest in this route and I suspect would gladly see it removed from the franchise obligations.

Please help NCRUG by supporting this campaign. Services beyond Ellesmere Port won't just benefit Ellesmere Port; Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn East will enjoy direct access to such places as Hooton on the Wirral, Daresbury, Widnes and Hunts Cross.

A true metro styled service around the Mersey.

Mark Warren 03/07/24

