



Monitoring Rail Services &
the Travelling Environment

Newsletter Autumn 2017

FROM THE CHAIR

The work of North Cheshire Rail Users' Group has not relented over the summer break. In terms of stalled national infrastructure upgrades, NCRUG has added to the clamour of other industry lobby groups in criticising the abrupt postponement of electrification upgrades and the apparent mis-match in investment expenditure nationally. The commencement of the electrification project without Network Rail obtaining an important derogation from the Office for Rail and Road (ORR) for an indigenous developed standard has left affected parts of the network with no choice but to accept slower journey times, higher cost, less efficient and more polluting rolling stock for decades to come. I frequently look at the over-spend on electrification so far and added to the cost of expensive new 'Bi Mode' units and ponder how much could have been done for long outstanding local rail projects.

Locally; despite the welcome news that scheduled passenger services are due to re-commence over the Halton Curve in December 2018, other developments continue apace. NCRUG continues to champion the local user and lobby for improved facilities and services, and we have been doing this at a number of levels: We have met with 3 of the 4 preferred bidders for the Wales and Borders franchise, with the 4th meeting to take place mid-September. Included in NCRUG's wish list is improved facilities for passengers, timetable improvements, increased provision for cyclists and refurbishment of rolling stock. A degree of localised control is also desirable; passenger information needs to be relevant to the user, which might not always be those of south Wales.

NCRUG continues to lobby for improved services between Helsby and Ellesmere Port, and ultimately Hooton. This route has been identified as integral to connecting places of employment and education linking with new development around Ince and Elton. We have met with Northern several times and some improvements are on the way including new services from Ellesmere Port to Leeds and more appropriate timetabling, however frequency on the line remains an issue.

The move towards establishing a Community Rail Partnership continues, the CRP will be a forum for all stakeholders to come together and promote the railway and also lobby for improvements.

Finally; all on the NCRUG committee were deeply saddened to hear of the passing away of John Hobbs in early September after a short illness. John's tireless work and contribution to NCRUG in his 25 years on the committee including 8 years in the Chair can't be underestimated. He will be sadly missed by all those with whom he came into contact, (see the following obituary).

Mark Warren

JOHN HOBBS

Since the North Cheshire Rail Users' Group (NCRUG) started its campaign for improved local rail services, including the 'Halton Curve' re-opening, John Hobbs has been an active key figure.

John's childhood in Prestatyn gave him a detailed knowledge of the North Wales railways which was enhanced by his volunteer work on the East Lancashire Railway.

John led the NCRUG as Chairman for many years with great ability and professionalism. It is an understatement to say that NCRUG will never be the same again.

He travelled widely both in this country and abroad, taking hundreds of photographs of all aspects of rail operations and infrastructure which were carefully catalogued and often shown at informal gatherings.

John was an excellent organiser and played a key role at local events, often dressing up as the 'Fat controller' complete with top hat and tails.

More recently, he worked with local politicians and Arriva Trains Wales to transform the area around Runcorn East station from a run-down location into an attractive well used facility.

His death has come too soon and he will be greatly missed by the rail community.

Philip and Janet Briggs

HANSFORD REPORT FOR NETWORK RAIL

This report was commissioned by Network Rail, at the behest of the DfT, to seek ways for attracting private finance into the railways. This would seem to be an obvious way forward for a 'so called' privatised railway.

The report came out in July and has been cautiously welcomed by some and treated with considerable scepticism by others. Both views are easy to understand. On the one hand funding from the private sector would bring much needed added investment into the railway infrastructure and should, therefore, be welcomed and developed, whilst the other points out, rightly, that we have heard all this before and very little has happened. Rail magazine No.833 recently covered this topic with an article by Andrew Roden giving details, Campaign for Better Transport, largely in favour, and the other by Christian Wolmar providing the sceptical view.

The sticking point in the past appears to be the apportionment of risk and the cost element of that risk to the Exchequer. The report points to inappropriate standards leading to expensive 'gold plated' schemes rather than less expensive but, nevertheless, appropriate and safe schemes. Asset protection, typified by a risk averse approach by NR, has also militated against private funding becoming available. Private funders need to be assured of certainty from Politicians for the whole duration of the project and past experience shows that this is seldom achieved. Unfortunately, the

Hansford report does not give much attention to this crucial matter. However, it recommends 9 areas for consideration by NR for improving the situation.

To realise the infrastructure improvements and extensions which are necessary to bring our long serving Victorian railway into the 21st Century, it is incumbent upon the Government and Network Rail to examine closely their historical positions and find a way to overcome the difficulties which have prevented private money being invested in the network in any significant way. This, I suspect, will involve a cultural change in both organisations. Cultural change sounds simple but, in fact, is extremely difficult to achieve, particularly in such large organisations and particularly when vast amounts of money and risk are involved.

Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that Mark Carne, CEO Network Rail, will be able to bring his previous experience in the private sector to bear upon this issue and that, somehow, a way forward will be found to harness the money and expertise of the private sector to the great advantage of the railway and GB Plc.

CWG

HALTON CURVE NEWS

The main work officially started on 14th July when Merseytravel issued a Press Release to the media which was widely publicised throughout the region's press plus local radio and TV, (BBC Look North).

To provide material for the media an event was held trackside and in the nearby Holiday Inn, in Halton. Cedric Green was invited to attend as representative for NCRUG and was duly dressed up in the full high vis Network Rail protection clothing including helmet, glasses, gloves and boots for a photoshoot at the site of the former Halton station, (closed in 1952). The new Metro Mayor for Merseyside, (Steve Rotherham), was there together with two local MP's, (Derek Twigg and Mike Amesbury), the NW Region NR Director, (Martin Frobisher), Merseytravel Chairman, (Cllr Liam Robinson) and Karla Telford, NR Project Manager for the Halton curve.

Short speeches were then made by Steve Rotherham, Liam Robinson, Martin Frobisher, Karla Telford and Cedric Green at a reception in the Holiday Inn followed by press interviews. It was a memorable occasion and a proud moment for NCRUG whose efforts over many years were applauded.

The annual trip over the Halton Curve by the Parliamentary train was held on Saturday 29th July and was well attended on what could well be the last of its kind. We again had John Whittingham, attired as a Thomas Brassey look alike on board and this time he gave a commentary on the history of the line and its surroundings. Northern Rail's trainstaff, Jackie Ross and Tony, the driver, added to the friendliness of the occasion. The weather was good and everybody was excited at the prospect of the line re-opening in both directions in December 2018.

We noted some of the basics for signalling equipment had been installed. There was some new ballast beside the track and trunking troughs in place together with sleepers and rails stacked ready for laying. We queried with Merseytravel as to why some rails were 'bullhead' and others 'flat bottomed'. The bullhead will replace worn sections where the existing sleepers, chairs and track will remain in situ. They have advised that NR are not replacing all the track because some sections are in good condition. A rough split is that NR are laying new track at either end of the Curve and the central section will remain as is with isolated renewals of track and sleepers where required.

CWG

PUBLICISING THE HALTON CURVE SERVICE

NCRUG have been in preliminary talks with Merseytravel about publicising the Curve nearer opening time. Suggestions are to incorporate the unveiling of a Thomas Brassey statue at the entrance to Chester station, (if timings coincide), Chester Town Crier, Michael Portillo, Paul Atterbury, (Portillo might be too expensive!), steam hauled, (as Settle/Carlisle re-opening), together with leaflets, posters, (all regional stations), editorials, media, websites and local Radio and TV. Discussions are on-going.

CWG

RUNCORN EAST STATION PLAQUE UNVEILING

On a sunny Thursday 20th July some thirty people turned up at the station to witness the unveiling of a plaque to honour the achievements of our former Chairman, John Hobbs, and for his long and unstinting contribution, not only to NCRUG, but also the Halton Curve re-opening, the East Lancashire Railway, The Cheshire Best Kept Stations Awards, and engagement with Arriva Trains Wales, (and their predecessors), and Community Rail.

When all were assembled close to the booking office John and Kathleen Hobbs appeared from the car park area, John having no knowledge of what was about to take place.

Mark Warren, Chairman of NCRUG, gave a speech and presented a bouquet to Kathleen, (for her excellent service as treasurer over many years), before inviting John to unveil the plaque.

John made an emotional, unrehearsed speech in which he, typically and modestly, stressed that teamwork was responsible for our various achievements rather than one person. However, we know teamwork depends upon the enthusiasm and determination of people like John and that it is right that we recognise his huge contribution.

After photos some of those present joined John and Kathleen at the nearby Community Centre for refreshments and the exchange of pleasantries to round off an enjoyable, if emotional, event.

Thanks go to ATW for providing the plaque and to our member Ian Whitney for organising the event.

CWG

LIVERPOOL LIME STREET STATION UPGRADE

As part of the Great North Rail Project Lime Street station is undergoing major engineering work in order to deliver substantial improvements from 2019. This work will necessitate the station's closure from 30th September to 22nd October during which time rail replacement buses will operate between Hunts Cross and Liverpool South Parkway, (for Virgin, London Midland, TPE, Northern and East Midlands services) and with a non-stop service to Moorfields and a stopping service to Lime Street.

Rail replacement buses will also operate between St Helens Central and St Helens Junction to Lime Street.

There will be changes to the Merseyrail timetable including Kirkby and Ormskirk services starting and terminating at Moorfields throughout most of the day. This is to relieve pressure at Liverpool Central which is expecting a considerable increase in passenger numbers during the disruption.

Merseytravel strongly advise passengers to print/pickup pre-paid tickets before the day of travel as there are expected to be long queues/delays at stations which could cause problems if left until the day of travel.

For more information on the upgrade visit www.networkrail.co.uk/lcr or phone Merseyrail on 0151 555 1111 or Merseytravel on 0151 330 1000.

For those of our members living on the Wirral it is worth mentioning that Chester may be a better option than Liverpool for direct long distance services to London, Birmingham, (NS & BI) and Cardiff. Frequent services from Chester to Manchester, (Piccadilly & MIA), and Crewe may provide a better option than going through Liverpool.

CWG

LLANGOLLEN RAILWAY PROGRESS

As of Saturday 9 September the first rail vehicle to get to the end of the line at the Green Lane buffer stop was.....the Musclem!

The Track Alignment Machine was operating to slew the track on the head shunt which is now connected up to the buffer stop.

All this in the rain as showers piled in from the west.

A notable link is in place - but in terms of track work, all that remains now is to install the points and complete the loop at the eastern end of the platform area and reconnect with the railhead at Dwyrain Corwen East, once the breach in the embankment has been filled in of course.

Before that can be tackled there is a lot more civil engineering to be undertaken on the site but 2018 becomes a possibility.

George Jones

BOOK REVIEW – “JOURNEY OF A RAILWAY SIGNALMAN” by TONY COOK

Just published, this book takes us into the mysterious world of the railway signalbox. The steam locomotive footplate always looks accessible, when viewed from the platform; “like to come up?” from the smiling driver needed no second words! It still happens, but the signalbox, visible but often a distance away, with its ringing bells, crash of levers and point-red or signal wire sounds seems so SECRET. Indeed it is – even General managers have been refused entry if lacking “iden”.

Born in Stamford, Lincolnshire in 1930, by age 4 young Tony was living in New Brighton, north-western credentials already established. At a young and working age, he gets a job in Wigan, involving a railway commute. WIGAN No. 2 signal box comes to fascinate him! His railway uncle urges him to join the L.S.M.R. – so he becomes a “box-boy” at EDGE HILL No.13, where he carried out many menial, but necessary tasks for 18 months. This was typical railway method of “working on the job”. It turns out “all rounders”, as a rule.

He goes up the grades, working at several ‘boxes, with a gap for military service as a paratrooper.

The post-war years find him becoming a relief signalman, at the age of 24. This had several effects. He could work a ‘box anywhere in the Liverpool-Warrington-Wigan triangle, now the British Railways London Midland Region (N.W.). He needs an agile mind, and a good memory of all the locations – no two ‘boxes are ever the same! All told, until retirement whilst at Warrington Power S.B. in the mid-nineties, he worked some 80 ‘boxes – quite remarkable.

If you have RAILWAYS IN YOUR BLOOD! – this is a book for you.

Our reviewer adds the following true tale:-

With a job like that, many stories – true ones, just build up and your reviewer just marvels at this one:-

BULL “Running away on ?? line” (for a TRAIN, an emergency signal).

Whilst on duty at OLIVE MOUNT JUNCTION S.B., Tony gets a message from the “bobby” at EDGE LANE S.B. – a bull had escaped from a cattle train heading for Stanley Abattoir, two miles away. “Going like the clappers!”, he reported. Tony grabs a RED FLAG, shows it to the beast through an open window, but it did ‘nt stop!** It was duly put down near Broad Green station.

(** Clearly an old hand in the bull-ring, it had become wary of noticing silly men with red flags).

JMR

Editor – Purchase direct from Cook Publishing, 29 Gaskell Crescent, Thornton Cleveleys, Lancashire, FY5 2TB, email tony-cook2016@outlook.com or phone 01253 821458, price £23.00.

PARLIAMENTARY TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE

Following the recent General Election the following MP’s form the new committee:-

Lilian Greenwood – Labour – Nottingham South - Chairman

Ronnie Cowan – SNP – Inverclyde

Steve Double – Conservative – St Austell & Newquay

Paul Girvan – DUP – South Antrim

Huw Merriman – Conservative – Bexhill & Battle **

Luke Pollard – Labour – Plymouth, Sutton & Devonport

Laura Smith – Labour – Crewe & Nantwich

Iain Stewart – Conservative – Milton Keynes South **

Graham Stringer – Labour – Manchester Blackley & Broughton **

Martin Vickers – Conservative – Cleethorpes **

Daniel Zeichner Labour – Cambridge

** Members of the previous committee who are serving on the new one.

The former chairman, Louise Ellman, unfortunately, was not eligible having served the maximum prescribed number of Parliaments on the committee. We thank her for her support and encouragement over many years.

An interesting observation is that a member for Crewe & Nantwich again appears on the committee. Will Laura Smith be as formidable as the previous Crewe & Nantwich constituency member and Chairman, Gwyneth Dunwoody?

CWG

ATW DOUBLES SERVICES SINCE 2004

.....but only in South Wales, (within and into Cardiff – 6,244 in 2004 – 14,237 in 2017), (between Cardiff, Swansea and West Wales 753 in 2004 – 1,697 in 2017). By contrast the Marches line services increased from 1,777 in 2004 to just 2,116 in 2017 and North Wales services by only 5%. Borderlands services still hourly whilst comparable routes into Cardiff now have several trains per hour. ATW passenger numbers have increased from 18 m to 30 m over the same period. Welsh Government and Network Rail have invested in reopened lines, (eg Ebbw Vale) and redoubling east of Llanelli, new stations, resignalling, track alterations and additional platforms at Cardiff Central and

Queen Street, all in the south and redoubling Saltney to Rossett in the north. Let us hope the new franchise addresses this huge imbalance between north and south.

CWG

NEWS IN BRIEF

Liverpool South Parkway – temporary platform 4 extension is complete ready for Lime Street closure. Extra toilets and taxi rank added. Coffee shop run by Costa is now also open. Use public transport if possible as parking will be even more restricted than usual.

East Midlands Franchise – consultation for the new franchise closes 11/10/2017. New service from Manchester to London St Pancras via the Midlands Main Line suggested. NCRUG have added that such a service should start from Liverpool.

Wales & Borders Franchise renewal – the issuing of the ITT, (Invitation to Tender), has been delayed until 26th September amidst issues still to be settled between the DfT, the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales. NCRUG have engaged with Welsh Government, Transport for Wales, DfT and all four bidders.

TransPennine Express Club 55 – offer started 18th September and finishes 19th November for outward travel. Return must be within a month. Travel before 09.30 hrs not permitted Monday/Friday. Weekend anytime permitted. Standard class cost £21 return (England) and £31 return (Scotland) with both subject to 20% discount with Senior Rail Card. First class returns are £41 and £61 respectively less 20% with SRC.

Arriva Trains Wales Club 55 – offer started 6th September and finishes 1st November for outward travel. Return journeys must take place within 8 days. Travel before 09.30 hrs not permitted Monday/Friday. Weekend anytime permitted. Fare is £26 return, (£1 off with Railcard). Due to a major sporting event in Cardiff on 28th October the offer is not permitted on journeys to/from Cardiff on that day. More details on website: www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/Club55/FAQ

Helsby & Mouldsworth Branch Remembered – the second Nick Harling painting, (limited to 50 signed prints), commissioned by NCRUG, is now available at £25 + p&p from Helsby Post Office or via the NCRUG website or Facebook page. The painting depicts the long closed Helsby & Alvanley station on the Helsby Mouldsworth branch which was mothballed on 14th September 1991.

Crewe Hub consultation – closes on 12th October and seeks views on, amongst other things, infrastructure options to facilitate maximum advantages for those areas not directly served by HS2.

=====

Contacts:-

PHONE

EMAIL

Chairman:	Mark Warren	07979 513205	chair@ncrug.org.uk
Vice Chairman:	Martin Patrick	0151 4201910	martinpatrick@btconnect.com
Secretary:	Cedric Green	0151 6258017	cw.green@talktalk.net
Membership:	Bob Florence	01928 731209	r.florence45@btinternet.com
Newsletter:	Cedric Green	0151 6258017	cw.green@talktalk.net
LSP contact:	Mike Taylor	0151 4272288	mikeporg@btinternet.com
British Transport Police:		0800 405040	

Website: Visit our website at www.NCRUG.ORG.UK and/or our Facebook page to leave your comments, favourable or otherwise.

Note: The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily those of the North Cheshire Rail Users' Group, (NCRUG).

=====



Monitoring Rail Services &
the Travelling Environment

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

at

Frodsham Community Centre
Fluin Lane, Frodsham

Wednesday, 18th October at 19.00 hrs

Guest Speaker:-

Merseytravel have kindly agreed to provide a speaker

Details to follow

**Followed by a question & answer session and
then the 2017 AGM business meeting**

Non members are welcome to attend

Light refreshments will be available

Thank you for your continued support