



Newsletter - Autumn 2018

FROM THE CHAIR

The most significant recent news over the summer is the extremely disappointing announcement by Transport for Wales (TfW) that the Halton Curve services won't now commence until May 2019 to coincide with the phasing of a new timetable. The lack of rolling stock has been cited as the cause of the delay. This problem, which wasn't unforeseen, isn't unique to just our area or TfW but is also an issue with Northern Rail and the broader industry. Initially the Halton Curve route will be served by Class 150 'Sprinter' units formed of 2-cars giving an approximate capacity of 280. NCRUG does not expect the capacity to be adequate at peak times however we note that TfW, who take over the Wales and Borders franchise in October have an ambitious program of rolling stock procurement which will give additional network capabilities above those currently. We look forward to the future connectivity improvements but lament the fact that a full year will transpire from completion of the HC engineering works to the first scheduled service.

In terms of the Halton Curve timetabling the proposals submitted to the Office of Rail Regulation were for a service leaving Chester at 6.17am, running hourly, and a final service leaving Lime St at 23.16. NCRUG believes the early morning service fails to meet the need of connecting with the first wave of departures from LJLA so we will be lobbying for an additional very early morning service to cater for this. There has been no official announcement on fares yet although we are putting pressure on the operator to ensure fares are broadly in line with the current Merseyrail fares from Chester to Liverpool so the route is seen as a truly competitive alternative to the car and associated costs such as bridge tolls.

Beyond the Halton Curve, NCRUG continues to lobby Merseyrail to step in and provide an effective rail service on the Ellesmere Port-Helsby line. This ongoing campaign will ramp up as Merseyrail take delivery of new rolling stock that has the capability to extend beyond the limits of 3rd rail electrification (Ellesmere Port). Locally, the potential to connect with the places of employment and education on this route with a frequent rail service is understood, but additionally the opportunity to have the additional (under-utilised) car-parking resources at stops along the route help relieve the communities of Helsby and Frodsham of town centre congestion and parking pressures must be considered. It is the long-term aspiration of NCRUG to see a frequent Ellesmere Port-Helsby service effectively complete a regular 'rail ring' around the Mersey Estuary connecting Frodsham and Helsby with the economies of both the Liverpool city region and the Wirral.

More locally, news from Helsby is the footbridge refurbishment should be complete by mid-October and in Frodsham CWaC council have submitted planning application for the demolition of the community landmark that is the Goods Shed in the station car park. This has been the subject of much local comment and something NCRUG takes a keen interest in.

The NCRUG AGM is 7.00 pm, October 24 at the Frodsham Community Centre. Guest speaker will be George Jones of Llangollen Railway fame, it promises to be an anecdotally fuelled interesting evening.

Mark Warren

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We hereby give notice in accordance with our Constitution of our 2018 AGM. It will take place on Wednesday 24th October in Frodsham Community Centre, Fluin Lane, Frodsham - a short walk from Frodsham station. Parking is available at the Centre.

The meeting opens, at 19.00 hrs, with a talk by our friend George Jones and will feature the progress made on the Llangollen Heritage Railway on its long aspired journey towards Corwen. As readers may know a temporary station, Corwen East, has been operational for some months but this talk will take us through to the new permanent Corwen station nearer the town centre. This is an exciting project which has been on the radar for many years and is now coming to fruition. All the hard work of volunteers will open up an alternative to starting and ending a day's outing at Llangollen with one starting and finishing at Corwen. The trip in between, of course, goes through the beautiful Dee Valley, at a leisurely pace, to enable passengers to relax and enjoy the surrounding countryside. We urge you to come and hear George's presentation on this fascinating heritage line which has done so much good for the local economy and tourism.

There will be a question and answer session at the end of George's talk.

After a short refreshment break the formal business of the Group will follow with reports on all our main projects including, of course, the very latest on the Halton Curve service. Members and visitors are cordially invited to attend this important part of the proceedings.

We look forward to welcoming a record number of attendees!

CWG

CHESHIRE BEST KEPT STATION AWARDS

Make a note in your diary for the Best Kept Station Awards ceremony which will take place on Tuesday 5th February 2019 from 7.00 pm.

The venue will, as in previous years, be The Grange Theatre, Bradburns Lane, Hartford, Northwich.

The Awards evening is an undoubted highlight of the Community Rail year in Cheshire, and honours and celebrates the work of volunteers, station adoption groups and community groups in improving their local stations across the county of Cheshire.

It brings together these volunteers and groups, the rail industry and civic leaders in an enjoyable and inspirational evening of celebration.

Cheshire Best Kept Stations have invited nominations from volunteers, community and station adoption groups across Cheshire, for five categories of Awards this year.

Not all the hard work done at our stations can be seen by judges when they visit, so they need us to tell them what we have been doing.

The five categories are:

Youth Challenge Award
Art Project Award

Community Award
Diversity Award
World War 1 Centenary Award

Nominations had to be in by Saturday 29th September, except for the World War 1 Centenary Award, for which the deadline is Saturday 24th November (but the judges would like prior notice of intentions to enter by 29th September).

CWG

CROSS COUNTRY FRANCHISE RENEWAL

Submissions against the draft consultation for the renewal of this franchise had to be submitted by the end of August. NCRUG duly complied. However, the Secretary of State has, subsequently, set up a Government Rail Review on 20th September, (yes, yet another review). It is a wide review and not confined only to examining franchising, as first thought.

The review will be led by Keith Williams, Deputy Chairman of the John Lewis Partnership. He is not a railwayman but has transport knowledge gained at British Airways and Transport for London,.

In view of this it has been decided that the Cross Country franchise renewal will not take place as planned.

CWG

WALES & BORDERS STATION BRANDING

In our Summer 2018 Newsletter we mentioned that the rolling stock for the new franchise, commencing 14th October, will have "Transport for Wales" branding. This branding has now also started to appear on Frodsham, Helsby and Runcorn East Stations. Our friends on the Borderlands Line and the Chester/Shrewsbury line have reported these changes at all of their stations. Indeed it appears all the English Stations encompassed by the new franchise have already been changed to the new branding, including Chester. Chester, of course, has a high percentage of services, (Northern, Virgin and Merseyrail), which do not fall under the Transport for Wales banner.

In view of the sensitivities which exist now that the Welsh Government will be running this franchise through their wholly owned subsidiary Transport for Wales, and as the Agency Agreement Number 2, (paras. 4.1, 12.14.1 & 12.14.2), referred only to Wales, not England, a gentle request has been made to TfW for their assurances that English Stations will be treated exactly the same as Welsh Stations insofar as upkeep and funding are concerned. It is felt that any move to downgrade English Stations should be "nipped in the bud". We hope, of course, that there is no intention on the part of TfW to focus on Welsh stations, to the detriment of English stations, but experience warns us that we need to be vigilant on such matters.

CWG

HALTON CURVE & PARKING

Firstly, we have to advise that the service due to start in December 2018 has been put back to the May 2019 timetable change. The reason given is a shortage of rolling stock. Our committee member, John Ryan, a retired British Rail Civil Engineer, has studied rolling stock provision in detail on a nationwide basis. Guess what! John raised alarm bells about the none availability of rolling stock to run the Halton Curve service, over twelve months ago, stating that, for various reasons, no stock was available. Contrary to this we were assured by the TOC that 2 x Class 150 units were available. Now, it seems, our man was correct and the TOC wrong. Pleasing in a way that we are ahead of the game but disappointing in another. At least we were prepared for the setback.

However, this delay gives more time to consider solutions to the worrying situation regarding extra car parking needs once the Halton Curve service commences. We know that local authorities are concerned that the new service will generate the need for considerably more parking spaces. Helsby is already over capacity and Frodsham is nearly at the same point. If the Halton curve service is to be a success the parking issue has to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Unfortunately, creating new spaces is neither quick nor inexpensive and certainly could not be completed by May 2019.

NCRUG are in the final stages of completing a proposal which would solve the problem quickly and without any infrastructure expenditure. The proposal is quite simply to bring into play unused car parking spaces which exist along the Ellesmere Port to Helsby line, (between 110 and 210 spaces), depending upon private landowner conditions. Nonetheless, 100 spaces are available, without any landowner issues, right now, at Ellesmere Port station, (operated by Merseyrail). The other 100 spaces are at an unused Essar car park at Stanlow & Thornton station. This may have security issues which would prevent its use. We are awaiting clarification on this point from Essar. There are also 10/15 unused spaces at Ince & Elton station making a minimum of 110 and maximum 215 spaces available immediately.

To bring these spaces into play, of course, would require a train service on the Ellesmere Port/Helsby line which would accommodate commuters and other users throughout the day.

We are mindful that the current TOC, Northern Rail, have suffered grievous bad publicity this year and have probably carried the can more than other offenders for the May 2018 timetable shambles. Is this the time for Northern to generate some very positive publicity by providing, at short notice, a shuttle service on the line? They have done impressive things before when they brought the "Tornado" steam locomotive to the Settle to Carlisle line after the line's re-instatement last year, at short notice. So it can be done.

We appreciate there would be costs involved but the infrastructure is in place and, we believe, demand along the line is substantial quite apart from the extra demand the Halton curve service will generate.

We are in the process of putting this proposal to the stakeholders and would be delighted if they accept that the idea is worth serious consideration.

CWG

RUNCORN EAST 35TH ANNIVERSARY.

There will be an informal event, cake and photos, at about 11.00 am on Wednesday 3rd October when we will launch the new fridge magnets including a limited edition, (50 only), Runcorn East 35 version. There will also be some in the booking office for sale with a secure collection box for the proceeds, subject to ATW's approval.

Kathleen Hobbs, wife of the late John Hobbs, is going to pop in as we thought it would be nice to get her to officially launch the fridge magnets.

It will also be an opportunity to thank ATW for all their help and support over the past 15 years of the franchise. No doubt photos will be taken to mark the occasion. We anticipate the event will last about an hour so we can do it between trains.

Pip, (the late friendly and frequent canine visitor to Helsby Station), magnets will be free to anyone who paid into her memorial fund to help rebuild Llangower Station on Bala Lake Railway. The project raised an amazing £2,000 for the Heritage Railway.

IW/CWG

TRANSPORT FOR WALES

Although the award of the Wales & Borders franchise to Keolis/Amey was announced by TfW at the beginning of June, there has been no subsequent meaningful contact with either TfW or Keolis/Amey. However, a series of stakeholder briefings have just been arranged by TfW and Bob Withy will be attending the one in Llandudno on 9th October on behalf of NCRUG.

We hope this will be the first of many as we feel it is most important that the operators engage with those organisations which represent the passenger such as NCRUG.

CWG

NEWS IN BRIEF

Helsby Station Footbridge – work on renovation is expected to be completed in October.

Frodsham Station Footbridge – routine inspection has revealed sections have started to deteriorate. ATW and Network Rail in discussions to arrange remedial action.

Transport for Wales – take over the Wales & Borders franchise with effect from 14th October 2018.

Transport for Wales – their website is:- <https://tfwrail.wales/>

Association of Community Rail Partnerships - AGM on Thursday 13th December at The Church, Carrs Lane, Birmingham B4 7SX. **14:00 - 16:30.**

National Rail Awards – Merseyrail/Merseytravel won three awards plus one highly commended. They were:- Customer Service Excellence for the ‘Wirral Loop Line Track Renewal’, Sustainable Development Award for ‘Investing in Tomorrow Today’, Passenger Operator of the Year winner Merseyrail and a Highly Commended for Liverpool South Parkway station.



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Website: Visit our website at www.NCRUG.ORG.UK to leave your comments, favourable or otherwise, and to catch up on latest developments.

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).



APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OF NORTH CHESHIRE RAIL USERS' GROUP

I/We wish to apply for membership of NCRUG at the annual subscription of £6.00. Subscriptions run from 1st January to 31st December. Donations are always welcome.

Name:

Address:

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Postcode:

Email address:

Telephone:

I/We enclose a cheque made payable to NCRUG:

Subscription:£6.00

Donation:£.....

Total:£.....

Signature:

I/We wish to receive the NCRUG newsletter and updates by: Post / Email (circle).

PLEASE POST THIS FORM WITH REMITTANCE TO: Bob Florence (Membership NCRUG),
9 Weaver Crescent, Frodsham, WA6 7HU.

A WELCOME TO NCRUG LETTER WILL BE SENT IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT