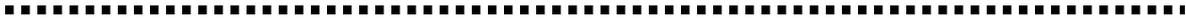




Monitoring Rail Services &  
the Travelling Environment

## Newsletter Winter 2016/7

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### **FROM THE CHAIR**

Having sat on the committee for the last 5 years I was elected to chair NCRUG at the October AGM. My first duty as chair was to thank the outgoing incumbent, Janet Briggs, for her tireless tenacity over the 8 years she chaired the group and note the numerous accomplishments achieved over that time. The Briggs team of Janet and Philip still play an active role in keeping Frodsham station immaculately presented and a community asset we can all feel proud of.

Although we're not quite on the home straight yet, the Halton Curve re-opening is due for completion within 2 years so is well within grasp. This success does not diminish the relevance of NCRUG in any way whatsoever, on the contrary; extreme vigilance is required to ensure the necessary regulatory and planning processes are met by the stated deadlines and that the final outcome is a project that meets the full needs of the communities it will serve.

NCRUG is heavily involved in other important projects too; we are currently consultees representing local needs and lobbying hard for an improved customer experience in the lead up to new franchise arrangements and we are active stakeholders in the establishment of a local Community Rail Partnership (CRP). The CRP is a vehicle whereby a broad range of organisations with an interest in improved rail services can get feet under the same table at the same time and promote community involvement in the railway through the stations, lobby for improved services and work collaboratively to identify solutions.

An example of the type of campaign a CRP could support is a decent, useable service from Helsby to Ellesmere Port, and ultimately on to Hooton – with stops on the way that would take people where they want to go at times they want to be there.

None of this should diminish the other 'grass roots' work NCRUG performs at your local stations, be it Runcorn East, Frodsham or Helsby. The lovingly kept gardens, community art work and neat and tidy appearance are invariably the work of local volunteers. There's never been a better time to come down and see what we do, and please do get a friend to sign up as a NCRUG member.

**Mark Warren**

## **CHESHIRE BEST KEPT STATIONS AWARDS**

The event took place at the Grange Theatre, Hartford, Northwich on 10<sup>th</sup> January and was well attended by local volunteers, railway personnel and dignitaries from across the county. Mark Barker, Chairman of Cheshire Best Kept Stations, presided and the guest speaker was Professor Paul Salvason. The High Sherriff of Cheshire was also in attendance.

There were 16 categories and NCRUG were successful in the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Award for the event at Chester Station in the summer.

NCRUG also won the Best Kept Station award for Frodsham station. We continue to be extremely grateful for the work of Janet and Philip Briggs who undertake the work at the station single-handedly. It is a lot of work and Janet and Philip would be most grateful if other volunteers were to come forward to assist in planting the flowers kindly donated by Cheshire West and Chester Council. Many hands make light work!

This is an appropriate time to sincerely thank all our station volunteers who make our stations more welcoming to the many passengers who use them. It is occasions like this when volunteers can be rewarded for their tireless efforts to make our stations bright and cheerful for the local community and all those who visit them whether alighting or just passing through.

## **CWG**

### **NATIONAL RAILFUTURE AWARDS**

NCRUG were awarded a Commendation for the "Best Social Media" in recognition of their contribution to rail campaigning at the RailFuture - 'Heart of the railway' conference in Birmingham on Saturday 12th November.

The award was accepted by John Hobbs, a Committee Member and Ex-Chairman, who produced the video, and Cedric Green, Secretary of NCRUG.

The video was directed by Saskia Dooley and funding for the project was provided by ACoRP and the North Cheshire Rail Users' Group. Northern provided the facilities.

John Hobbs thanked ACoRP for their help in funding the video which otherwise could not have been produced and Saskia, a recently graduated media student, for her input and commitment to making it a success.

This was the first time NCRUG had put in an entry to the national RailFuture awards.

## **JH**

### **HALTON CURVE**

All is going to plan at present and we expect to see on the ground activity taking place in the Summer with the work being completed in time for the first scheduled service over the line beginning with the December 2018 timetable. Detailed design work continues to progress well and as per programme and on-site survey work will be taking place from January onwards as well as advanced preparatory works ahead of a formal start on-site. This will determine the final specification, ie will it be single lead junctions, single track, with or without a loop, double track, passive provision for a station at Birchwood etc ?

It is likely that there will be elements of work on-site on and around the curve from this month. This work is a mixture of on-site investigation works as part of the on-going design and preparatory works for both Halton Curve and the Weaver to Wavertree upgrade. The main area of focus will be around Frodsham Embankment which is situated immediately after Frodsham Junction near Clifton Road, Runcorn. There will also be works such as cable trough installation etc. Formally the scheme proper will start in the Summer but there will be work going on throughout the first half of the year.

With regard to the operator there is a lot of work being done with Welsh Government and DfT on securing the future operator. The current status has not changed in that Merseytravel are looking

to secure an operator who provides the best fit in terms of both the initial Liverpool – Chester service, but also the wider ambitions for onward extension into Wales.

Merseytravel will monitor the forthcoming major work to be carried out at Lime Street station and hope there are no delays in completing this work so that the new Liverpool/Chester service, via Halton Curve, can meet the December 2018 target.

Looking ahead to when a service between Liverpool and Chester runs over the Curve, we believe the whole dynamics of the North Cheshire/South Wirral rail scene will change and that the need for a decent service on the Hooton/Helsby line will become even more obvious and have beneficial effects upon the business case and Benefits to Cost ratio, (BCR).

The Halton Curve will bring, for example, Liverpool Airport within easy reach of many areas currently having to face the uncertainties of using the Runcorn/Widnes road bridge. We are all aware of the huge delays and mayhem which is not infrequently caused by a minor incident on the bridge or its tributary roads; not what is wanted if catching a flight from Liverpool Airport !! The new Mersey Gateway bridge will, of course, ease the pressure in the short term but experience shows that new roads generate more traffic in the long term and congestion rebuilds itself – witness the M56 which suffers badly at most times of day. In addition both road bridges will be tolled, (an exception being for local residents using the Silver Jubilee bridge).

A frequent and reliable rail service from north Cheshire and South Wirral will offer an alternative for staff and passengers travelling from and to the Airport and many other Liverpool City Region destinations. Employment, education, tourism and business will all benefit the local economy and also contribute to the Northern Powerhouse initiative which is already underway.

## **CWG**

### **NORTH CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP**

This is an exciting new initiative in which NCRUG are keenly participating. The DfT is fully committed to the concept of Community Rail and are building it into franchise specifications and making funding available through TOC's. So the North Cheshire CRP has the advantage of £15,000 of initial funding through the Northern franchise operated by Arriva Trains North. In the past CRP's have started from scratch and had to seek funding before any further steps could be taken.

Community Rail, put simply, is about linking the community to its railway. Recent discussions have identified that there is scope for such a partnership working with the community, educating them about the railway and other forms of public transport with improved rail services as a core aspiration. Four priorities have been suggested:

- a) Incentivising modal shift
- b) Connecting communities
- c) Optimising the customer experience
- d) Community involvement with public transport

The Group was extremely pleased to hear that the University of Chester is interested in possibly hosting the community rail partnership. We hope that their involvement is confirmed when more details of the responsibilities are put to them.

An outline presentation is being prepared which will be used as a tool for promoting and involving interested organisations, particularly major employers like Encirc Glass and Peel Energy.

The geographical area and rail routes to be included have been discussed. Initially it was felt that the CRP should focus on a manageable area like Ellesmere Port to Helsby, Chester to Warrington Bank Quay and, in due course, routes over the Halton Curve to Liverpool and from Hooton to Helsby. A future option would be to extend the CRP over a wider area to include Crewe.

Readers may chuckle to themselves at seeing Ellesmere Port/Helsby as being included in the area and think 'that's fine - but don't we need a useable service on the line first?' The answer, of course, is 'yes'. This is a typical chicken and egg situation and we would hope that the development of a CRP will enable a stronger case to be assembled for providing a decent service

on the line. It would be much easier to promote the line if a decent service ran on it now, but we have to work with what we have got and hope that leads to a better service in the future.

We will keep readers posted on developments and, in the meantime, we would welcome your comments and thoughts about developing this important initiative.

**CWG**

### **MERSEYRAIL'S NEW ROLLING STOCK**

On December 16<sup>th</sup> it was announced that Liverpool City Region Combined Authority had given the go-ahead for a £460m project to replace the existing Merseyrail suburban EMU fleet to come into service in 2020.

The contract has been placed with the Swiss manufacturer, Stadler, and is for the supply of a fleet of 52 trainsets to replace the current 59 trainsets. The first set is due for delivery mid 2019 for several months of testing ahead of the rest of the fleet being delivered towards the end of 2020. The 65 m long four-car sets will have the same number of seats as the existing three car sets, but will be 4 m longer with wide through gangways to provide increased standing space thereby increasing total capacity from 303 to 486 passengers. It can be deduced from these details that the new carriages, within each trainset, will be shorter than the existing carriages. Presumably this new specification will be more suitable for negotiating the tight radius of the loop line thereby reducing track and wheel wear. It will also enable a better fit with curved platforms.

There will be a mix of airline and facing seats and more space for bicycles, pushchairs and people with reduced mobility. We do not know if seats will align with windows but will be extremely disappointed if they do not even accepting that a considerable part of journeys will be in tunnels. Not all of us wish to have our heads into Ipads etc.

The train body will be designed specifically for the Merseyrail network with lower floors and a sliding step to allow near level access. The design will take account of the Long Term Rail Strategy which means provision will be made to retro fit pantographs to allow services to be extended to Skelmersdale, Warrington and Wrexham.

At 99 tonnes the new stock will be lighter than the 105 tonnes of the current stock. This together with regenerative braking is expected to reduce energy consumption by 20%. Options for energy storage are being considered.

The stock will be Driver Only Operation, (DOO), so it is to be hoped the current Union/Southern dispute does not raise its ugly head again. The fleet renewal programme also includes power supply, track and station improvements and refurbishment of the Kirkdale and Birkenhead North depots. The station improvements together with the train's lower floors and sliding steps will aid the introduction of DOO. In addition the doors will be illuminated red, amber and green inside and out to show when they are opening and closing and when it is safe to board and alight. Hopefully, these measures will satisfy ASLEF and the RMT.

**CWG**

### **LIVERPOOL SOUTH PARKWAY/LIVERPOOL JOHN LENNON AIRPORT LINK**

With a starting date for services over the Halton Curve in 2018 we are turning our attention to the weakest link in the chain for accessing Liverpool Airport, by rail, from north Cheshire, South Wirral and, in due course, Wrexham and the North Wales Coast. We refer to the 3.21 km, (2 miles), as the crow flies, between Liverpool South Parkway, (LSP), and the Airport Terminal. This weakest link, of course, affects all people using LSP to access the Airport, both passengers and staff not just those from our area of interest.

The Airport is growing and the Airport's Long Term Passenger Forecast, (April 2016), shows a figure of 5,615,000 for 2019 which, if achieved will be an increase of 40% over 2014. The shift in the value of the pound may adversely affect this forecast for out-going passengers but, on the other hand, the pound's drop in value represents a considerable saving for overseas visitors. This is particularly attractive to tourists on limited budgets and with the preponderance of Budget Airlines using Liverpool This should auger well for the region's tourist trade, including the North

Wales Coast and Snowdonia attractions which are currently not well served but which will be when the Halton Curve is opened. However, the weak link between the Airport and LSP presents a barrier to developing this market.

It is also noted that Leeds/Bradford Airport and Luton Airport are taking positive steps to improve their linkages to the rail network. Luton is planning a light rail system for the 1.3 mile link between the local railway station and the Terminal which is costed at £200m and which it is envisaged will help expand capacity to 18 million passengers a year by 2020. Current capacity is 14 million.

Based on Liverpool's current capacity it would be hard to justify such expenditure. However, LJLA has climbed to 4<sup>th</sup> best Airport, judged against 18 other comparable airports, for customer satisfaction whilst at the airport. With a fast and frequent dedicated link to LSP no doubt this excellent position could be further improved thereby encouraging more passengers to use the airport.

Other, less expensive, non-road, solutions should be examined for improving the link. For our part we have suggested an 'on demand' Personal Rapid Transport system both to Merseytravel/LJLA and in our submission to the Transport Select Committee's Enquiry into Surface Transport to Airports in October 2015. We give a short extract from this submission, as follows:-

*"Another solution would be an 'on demand' Personal Rapid Transport system similar to the one operating at Heathrow Airport between Terminal 5 and the Business Parking for T5. This is a distance of 3.8 km, (2.35 miles), and takes 5 minutes with an average waiting time for a vehicle of 10/15 seconds but with 80% passengers having no waiting time at all. If this technology was installed at LSP the equivalent journey time would be 3.3 minutes. This system is flexible and can run at ground level or elevated or a mixture of both. It should be feasible to construct at an elevated level and in a direct straight line between LSP and the Airport."*

Whilst a cost has not been put on such a scheme we understand that the Heathrow system was approximately a fifth of the £200m cost suggested for the Luton scheme. Furthermore, private funding may be available if the local retail park and hotels were plugged into the system. Due to the flexibility of the system this could be done without compromising the journey time between LSP and the Airport.

Finally, the Airport is about to update its 30 year Master Plan, to which we contributed in September 2006. We shall be contributing to this update along the lines outlined above.

## **CWG**

### **ALSTOM'S TRANSPORT & TECHNOLOGY CENTRE**

Construction of the above is underway in Widnes on a 30 acre site close to Halebank Road and the 3MG site on the south side of the West Coast Main Line. The site will be developed in two phases with phase 1 covering 28,000 squ.mtrs. with rail sidings, lorry access, service yards, substations and associated engineering operations.

Phase 2 will cover a further 7,000 squ. mtrs. for a service yard and 16,000 squ. mtrs. for a further extension.

The cost is £19.5 million and it is estimated that 400 to 600 jobs will be created. The Centre is to support Alstom UK operations in relation to strengthening their involvement in the UK rail market with warehousing, component manufacture, repair and modernisation operations for Inter-City, Regional and Metro trains. No doubt they have eyes on the Pendolino fleet refurbishment and HS2 in the future.

We understand phase 1 will open later this year.

Whilst most of the jobs will be filled locally we wonder if the nearby former Ditton Junction station could be re-born especially with the Halton Curve opening? We heard a rumour that Halton Borough Council is interested in the re-opening of Ditton Junction station.

## **CWG**

## **ELECTRIFICATION PROBLEMS AND ROLLING STOCK SHORTAGE**

The Great Western electrification which has seen delays and postponement of wiring to Oxford, some of the Thames Valley branches and Bristol, will have repercussions well beyond the Thames Valley and the South West. Rolling stock cascades will not now occur around London; this rolling stock, was due to replace other vehicles at Bristol. In turn these Bristol vehicles, would move to the South West releasing other DMU's for use in the North.

As a result the programmed timetable changes and improvements in the area of Manchester/Liverpool cannot now occur; these have been postponed from December 2017 until May 2018 or even later.

It would also appear that the electrifications to the east of Manchester to Rochdale and Stalybridge have also been delayed. The power supply to the Manchester to Blackpool electrification scheme cannot therefore be supplied from a projected new supply at Stalybridge. The power will therefore be provided by existing connections at Weaver Junction; this will be a critical point for supply as it is some way away from the route it will be powering! Any failure will effect trains critically over a wide area.

The provision of additional platforms at Manchester Piccadilly has also hit problems and without capacity here additional trains over the new Ordsall Curve will be constrained.

The electrification to Windermere now also appears in jeopardy and plans are afoot to provide four Class 319's with either diesel engines or battery packs to operate the service in view of the dire shortage of DMU's.

In further news affecting rolling stock it appears that there is a plan to utilize Class 442 electric units, which formerly ran from Waterloo to Bournemouth, on trains between Manchester and Cardiff and possibly Holyhead. These would have to be loco hauled. Apparently work is being undertaken to assess whether they can be operated with available locomotives.

Unfortunately some or all of this may affect the availability of stock for services over Halton Curve which are due to start in 2018.

**JH**

### **ARRIVA TRAINS WALES - CLUB 55 OFFER**

This offer is available for those aged 55 or over. With effect from 3<sup>rd</sup> January Club 55 tickets are £26 return from any station on the Arriva Trains Wales network to any other station on the Arriva Trains Wales network. Senior or Disabled Persons' Railcard holders get a further £1 off this fare. The £26 return fare applies on every day of the week including Fridays.

This is a walk-on offer and tickets can be bought on the day. A return to Swansea enables outward travel via the Central Wales line and return travel via Cardiff and Hereford. Break of journey is allowed. The ticket cannot be used before 0930 on Monday to Friday but this restriction does not apply on Saturdays or Sundays.

Travel is not permitted to/from or via Cardiff on Saturday 11th February due to a major sporting event that day. The last day for sale and outward travel is Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February. The return journey must take place within 8 days.

All return travel must be completed by 4<sup>th</sup> March 2017. There is a £2.50 add-on for Northern services. On the Mid Cheshire line, this is from Knutsford and stations to Stockport. The add-on for London Midland (from stations on the Liverpool-Crewe line) is £6. More details can be found at: <https://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/55/Buy/>.

**AM**

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**Website:** Visit our website at [www.NCRUG.ORG.UK](http://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).

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**URGENT REMINDER - 2016 SUBSCRIPTIONS**

A number of NCRUG members who were fully paid-up for last year {2015} have not yet paid their 2016 subscriptions. If you wish to continue your membership, please complete the form below and return as indicated. Your support is always much appreciated.

All subscriptions will be acknowledged by E-mail or by letter.

Name:-----

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I /We enclose a cheque, payable to NCRUG.

Annual Subscription :- £6-00

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