



Monitoring Rail Services &
the Travelling Environment

Newsletter Spring 2016

FROM THE CHAIR

The restoration of the Halton Curve has come another step closer this month with the announcement that the final business case had been approved by the Liverpool City Combined Authority. Services had been steadily reduced and closure threatened since the 1960's until we were left with the one-way summer Saturdays only parliamentary service which still exists today.

North Cheshire Rail Users' Group was formed in 1990 to try and prevent closure and finally after more than 25 years of campaigning, we are seeing light at the end of the tunnel! We have knocked at many doors during this time and have sometimes been scorned and laughed at if we mentioned Halton Curve! There were times when we thought the line was a lost cause but hopefully, some of us will be on the first train to Liverpool sometime in 2018.

With so much engineering work going on in the area, it is not surprising that there is considerable disruption to services particularly at weekends. Unfortunately, Arriva Trains Wales don't seem able to visualise the situation for waiting passengers on far flung stations on the North Cheshire line. We have flagged up the problem with ATW and asked that CIS should tell waiting passengers that there is a bus replacement service and refer them to the bus times on the notice boards. However, last Sunday the CIS suggested that passengers for Manchester should take the bus to Chester and board a train for Manchester there!

It doesn't have to be like that. One Saturday recently, we travelled on the line between Manchester Victoria and Rochdale using the bus replacement service. At each station, there were at least two officials guiding passengers to the right bus and checking at each station to ensure that no intending passengers were left stranded on the platforms. What we need is an industry wide code of practice to ensure that rail companies supply relevant information and look after their interests before and during their journeys.

If you have any interesting travel experiences over the Summer please let us know so that they can be included in the next newsletter.

Happy travelling!

Janet Briggs

HALTON CURVE UP-DATE

The date of Friday 15th April, 2016 will go down in NCRUG's history as a major milestone in their campaign to get the Halton curve re-instated. This date was the day when the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority approved the Full Business Case for the Halton curve major scheme. The scheme, has been developed and lead by Merseytravel with the involvement of other stakeholders as part of a programme of Local Growth Fund schemes.

Prior to seeking this approval the Full Business Case had been assessed by The Transport Advisory Group and the Local Enterprise Partnership Board who also recommended approval for additional funding of £5.67m from the Local Growth Fund. The Benefit to cost ratio is 1.9 which is assessed as 'medium value for money'. The initially proposed service will be 1 train per hour in each direction between Liverpool and Chester. Further onward services into Wales, (Chester to Wrexham and North Wales Coast), will be considered at a later date subject to capacity issues on those two lines being resolved.

The extra £5.67m has occurred for several reasons including:-

- Omission of re-railing the curve

- Omission of required Overhead Line Equipment at Halton Junction

- Omission of Network Rail Fee and Industry Risk Funds

- Assumptions on the level of savings driven by delivery with Weaver Junction/Wavertree scheme and the changing nature of that scheme

- Inflation

We can only assume these omissions and assumptions are just some of the reasons why Network Rail have been the subject of investigations by Hendy, Bowe and Shaw on the instructions of the Secretary of State, Patrick McLoughlin. We also wonder where Optimum Bias comes into this. Had it been applied at the usual starting rate of 60% then the extra amount subsequently requested would have been more than covered?

However, this is academic now and the main thing is that Halton curve moves into GRIP, (Guide to Rail Investment Projects), stage 4 'Single Option selection' which is targeted to start in July and complete in December 2016. GRIP 5 'Detailed design', (January/May 2017), GRIP 6 'Implementation' and full completion May 2018. The start of services over the line is scheduled for December 2018.

Importantly, the scheme has to be delivered to coincide with the up-grade of the West Coast Main Line between Weaver Junction and Wavertree as this will afford a saving of at least £2m. This saving has been taken into account in the above costs.

So by the end of this year, and hopefully sooner, we will learn the full specification of the scheme which will lead to more detailed service planning and enable us to focus on making the travelling public aware of their new travel opportunities which a re-opened Halton curve will provide.

Finally, this progress on the Halton curve brings added impetus to our two other projects, namely a decent service on the Hooton/Helsby line and improved linkages between Liverpool South Parkway and Liverpool John Lennon Airport. We believe the business cases for both these schemes will be strengthened when the Halton curve is fully operational.

We hope to have further good news for members and supporters in our Autumn Newsletter.

CWG

PUBLIC TRANSPORT – THE STATE OF PLAY

Things have never seemed better than today's climate towards up-dating our creaking Victorian infrastructure, particularly railways. After years of under investment there is a realisation that prosperity and growth are under-pinned by an efficient transport system for both people and goods and that our current network, particularly in the north, is no longer fit for purpose and has to be renewed and expanded. It has served us well in the past but now is the time for change and that is what is happening.

A big step forward was the recent setting up of Rail North which incorporates 29 local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Network Rail. Shortly afterwards Transport for the North, (TfN) was set up to oversee and control all transport modes in the north of England in much the same way as Transport for London and Transport Scotland – both of which have been extremely successful in improving public transport in their respective areas. A newly set-up Transport Wales will also have devolved powers and, hopefully, work with Transport for the North in the interests of both and to promote growth in their respective areas.

After a two year period of working together between the Department for Transport, (DfT), and Rail North the latter will come under the umbrella of Transport for the North and the DfT will drop out leaving full devolution of transport decision making and implementation solely in the hands of the north. We can all appreciate that local issues are best resolved by the people who are closest to those issues not remote organisations several hundred miles away.

The new Northern and Trans-Pennine franchises are set to bring about a sea change in both service quality, through the acquisition of new and refurbished rolling stock, and expansion of services and introduction of new direct services between towns and cities not previously connected. In our case there will be a Chester to Leeds service in 2018 going some way towards restoring the Chester/Hull service of long ago. NCRUG are working with other parties to establish a decent service on the Ellesmere Port, (or better still Hooton), to Helsby and beyond line. Whilst nothing definite has been decided there is a growing consensus that this issue needs to be addressed. A Community Rail Partnership is under discussion for this line but, of course, the full benefits of such an operation require there to be a usable service on the line. This is work in progress and we hope that Rail North and Arriva Trains North will appreciate the potential of this short section of line in helping the local economy and employment opportunities, particularly when the Halton curve comes into use, (as per previous report on Halton curve).

The Wales & Borders franchise is due for re-letting and to come into force in 2018. During this time it seems that devolution of rail matters will have been devolved to the Welsh Government. NCRUG have been particularly concerned about the political implications of this new arrangement as currently the 'Borders' part of this franchise has been the most profitable and effectively subsidises those services operating solely in Wales. We have been assured by various parties that whatever transpires no services will be truncated at border points which, in our case, means that through services between Manchester and Crewe to Llandudno and onwards will be maintained. This also applies to Birmingham International services. It would be a disastrous backward step if passengers had to change trains at Chester or Shrewsbury in order to complete their journeys. Nevertheless, we will continue to monitor this situation as the re-franchising process continues.

In the present positive climate it is tempting to think that some closed lines in the north west could be re-opened. With the new river berth at Gladstone dock due to open imminently huge quantities of containers from China and the Far East will be landed at Liverpool. Currently there are very limited opportunities to put this freight onto rail for onward delivery as the infrastructure is inadequate. Paths have to be slotted in between timetabled passenger traffic thus pushing freight into tortuous routes and/or spells in waiting loops which are both time consuming and costly. Until more freight routes can be opened across the Pennines there will be a vast number of extra HGV movements. **CWG**

A TRIP INTO DREAMLAND OR MAYBE REAL LAND??

In the present favourable political climate, and following on from the previous article, a number of possible schemes in the North West present themselves as having merit for consideration. They would each contribute towards expanding the economy and reducing pollution and congestion on our road network.

Here are some suggestions:-

- 1) Western Link to Manchester Airport from the Mid-Cheshire Line
- 2) Passenger service on the Northwich/Sandbach route with a re-opened station at Middlewich and a new station at Gadbrook Park to serve the industrial estate
- 3) Improved passenger service on Ellesmere Port/Helsby line with extensions to Hooton and beyond Helsby plus a new station at Thornton adjacent to Chester University campus
- 4) Re-open Woodhead route for passengers and freight, (originally built to Berne gauge)
- 5) Re-open Colne/Skipton for passengers and freight
- 6) Add chord at Hellifield to permit freight onto Settle/Leeds line towards Leeds
- 7) Re-open Penrith/Keswick to prevent the latter being strangled by cars
- 8) Re-open Burscough Curves to connect Southport with Preston and Ormskirk
- 9) Re-open St James station, Liverpool and rename it 'Baltic Triangle'
- 10) New station for Liverpool Waters with connection to the national network using the Waterloo and Victoria tunnels
- 11) New station at Deeside Park with park & ride adjacent to A648

It did not take long to rattle off those aspirations and there are many more which, in the scheme of things, would not take vast amounts of capital and which would relieve pressure on the existing network and assist growth throughout the north west.

Perhaps readers would like to add to this list? The Editor will be pleased to hear from you if you feel strongly enough about any enhancement or re-opening of lines and/or stations for either passenger or freight services. Just email: cw.green@talktalk.net with your text and we will consider for our next edition.

CWG

RECOMMENDED READING

I stumbled across this book the other day, "Chester to Warrington via Frodsham" - by Vic Mitchell & Keith Smith and published by Middleton Press. ISBN 978-1-908174-40-6.

The book covers the area of interest of the NCRUG; in other words our line and the Halton Curve. It features maps, gradient profiles, tickets, a brief historical survey and some timetable examples.

The book which is an illustrated narrative starts at Chester and travels via all the stations to Warrington. An interesting example is the track layout at Frodsham Junction showing the complete Junction, which was removed to save £50k in 1989 and has resulted in the expected expenditure to reinstate the line of £18m!

There is a wide selection of photographs ranging from an "Armstrong - Standard Goods" to a modern Class 66 but sadly no GWR locomotives on the line between Chester and Warrington or any taken on Halton Curve.

However it is an excellent record of our line and I can recommend it, as an addition to you library.

JH

THE JOYS OF PEAK TIME COMMUTING

I had an appointment in Manchester today, 25th April, so I arrived in good time at Warrington (Central) for the 09.19 "East Midlands" service to Manchester and onwards to Norwich. It got later and later on the CIS board; when it appeared six minutes late, as a two car set instead of a four car set, it was already full and with standing passengers. Many passengers tried to board which delayed departure for a further five minutes; there was standing space on it but passengers standing in the aisles made no effort to move up! There were probably around 260 persons on the two car train! Consequently many passengers, including me, were left behind. On "Real Time Trains" it was recorded over half an hour late into Norwich. I was forced on to the following semi fast, arriving at my destination late.

The return journey was not much better. I went for the 17.09 TPE train to Liverpool (via Warrington) , but it was cancelled at 17.30 on arrival at Oxford Road. All passengers were detrained there and this six car train ran empty to Liverpool! This resulted in much overcrowding on the next service, the 17.41 East Midlands service. This had four cars onto which were crammed probably 700 people! The joys of travel at Peak Times.

JH

TPE CLASS 68 LOCO-HAULED SETS - INTERESTING TIMES

The 13 x 5 car CAF loco-hauled sets acquired by TPE and financed by Beacon Rail, will be hauled by DRS Class 68's. They will give increased capacity and have more interior room and will be much quieter with no big diesel below your seat. Fast – some say the Class 68 is much better than the class 67 in this respect.

It is my contention, says John Ryan, that the sets, having been through all the usual processes applicable to new vehicles, by say early 2019, will be allocated to the Liverpool Lime Street, Earlestown or Newton-le-Willows, Manchester Victoria, Huddersfield, Leeds, York and Newcastle service running hourly 7 days a week. They could also operate the Liverpool to Scarborough service and possibly also Liverpool to Middlesbrough ? Some services are definite and others subject to confirmation.

It has already been announced that the Liverpool/Newcastle service will be extended, again hourly, to Edinburgh and the Scarborough will continue, as now, as a 7days a week hourly service.

It is not clear which services will call at Earlestown and Newton-le-Willows but it is assumed it will be alternate rather than both on the same service. Again nothing has been confirmed.

The outcome ?

A 2 trains per hour loco-hauled service with 5 cars, (expandable?), to York calling at just principle stations but including Earlestown and Newton-le-Willows.

What's in it for NCRUG and its supporters ?

These new services will be very popular. The current largely 3 car Class 185's now struggle seat wise at peak times and that includes Sundays. But will the existing Chester, Newton-le-Willows, Piccadilly service, operated by Arriva Trains Wales, connect with one or both of the new TPE services from Liverpool ?

The future 'Northern Connect' service from Chester to Manchester Victoria, Halifax, Bradford Interchange and Leeds could also connect but it is not clear if this service will call at Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn East. Maybe only at peak time ? Should NCRUG press for this service to call at our local stations ? Either way it is a cast iron certainty that these new services will increase useage of our line.

So, in the months to come, it is considered that this will be one of the chief moves in our re-franchising contributions to ATW ! **JR**

News in Brief

Runcorn East: A number of trees and shrubs have been cut down to improve the visibility and safety at the station.

A Community based art scheme, to be applied to the waiting shelters, is being progressed.

Helsby and Frodsham: Chester West and Chester Council will again be providing bedding plants for local stations. This year the theme will be red, white and blue in honour of the Queen's 90th birthday.

Station helpers: All three of our local stations are in need of more helpers to keep the platforms and gardens looking good. Help with putting in summer bedding plants would be much appreciated in the coming months

Frodsham Town Council is currently holding a number of consultation meetings regarding parking in the town with one meeting devoted to issues around the station.

Dog walks: A group of dog owners recently assembled at the 'Paws and Claws' shop on Frodsham station for a 'doggie' walk. Paws and Claws provided refreshments on their return including special treats for the dogs. Frodsham Town Council organised the walk as a contribution to the Frodsham annual festival of walks.

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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).

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