



Newsletter

Winter 2019

FROM THE CHAIR

The transition from Arriva Trains Wales to Transport for Wales (TfW) in October hasn't been as smooth as we had hoped; unscheduled maintenance requirements in combination with the autumn leaf fall brought significant disruption to schedules on the North Cheshire and Wrexham-Bidston lines. Although these issues are now resolved we await the introduction of new rolling stock to provide extra resilience to the TfW schedules and provide the cascaded rolling stock necessary for Halton Curve services in May. TfW are embarking on full station surveys in advance of the Station Improvement Programme that forms part of the franchise agreement and NCRUG has been invited to provide our own observations in advance. Needless to say, our feedback so far has been thorough. On the subject of new rolling stock; some concerns have been expressed over the configuration of the new units to replace the existing 'inter-city' Class 158 and 175 units, particularly in respect to the 'suburban commuter' type layout. There are possible implications for disabled users but additionally cyclists and those with baggage. NCRUG is monitoring this development closely.



The new Northern 'Connect' service to Leeds is detailed below in Cedric's report. NCRUG is delighted at this development, especially the offer of a through service from Ellesmere Port but the lack of service stops at Frodsham and Helsby is disappointing. This new service allows direct connectivity from Chester, Helsby and Frodsham to Manchester Victoria without the necessity of changing trains however the 2 minute change at Victoria, (on the 22.13 departure from Chester), to connect with the Leeds service is unfeasible in my view, especially given the delays experienced at the Ordsall Chord bottleneck. It could be argued a connection at Victoria is only possible by sacrificing stops at Frodsham, Helsby and Runcorn East yet every service will stop at Earlestown and Newton le Willows – communities already well served by connections to both Manchester Victoria and Piccadilly.

In terms of Halton Curve services, these are still ostensibly penned in to commence on May 19th in conjunction with the new timetable. NCRUG will celebrate the commencement of services with full details yet to be announced although thanks to generous donations from TfW and local councils expect commemorative material on the day, a cake and display boards with information on the history of the North Cheshire Line and Halton Curve. NCRUG is working with Cheshire West & Chester Council to see if a history trail could be incorporated with the display of the old Frodsham Junction semaphore signals at Castle Park. These semaphores were rescued from scrapping by Councillors Andrew Dawson and Lynn Riley with the generous assistance of Network Rail.

Finally; team Briggs pulls it off again and Frodsham wins 'Best kept Gardens' award at the Cheshire Best Kept Stations award in February. This award was won despite Janet's ongoing mobility issues and compliments the many awards won at our stations over the last 13 years. A full list of winners is posted below. **Mark Warren**



Recent driver training on the Halton Curve – a step closer to May 19th.

(Photo Chris Ellams)

NORTHERN 'CONNECT' SERVICE BETWEEN CHESTER AND LEEDS

In winning the franchise Northern Rail planned to introduce a number of new services across the north of England to improve connectivity between conurbations. These services will be branded 'Connect' and will be semi fast. One such proposed service is from Chester to West Yorkshire and through to Leeds.

This service will start on 19th May 2019 and will operate on weekdays and, with slightly altered timings, also on Saturdays. There will be no Sunday service.

Whilst, we have been told, a decision has been made about which rolling stock will operate the service, initially the intended stock may have to be substituted depending upon availability in May.

We are grateful to Northern for providing us with the timings of this service.

One train per day, (dep. 07.15), will start at Ellesmere Port, not Chester, (weekdays only), calling at Stanlow & Thornton, Ince & Elton and Helsby before running semi fast to Bradford, (arr.09.18) and Leeds, (arr. 09.43), via the Calder Valley route.

In the Leeds direction 5 trains per day will stop at Helsby, (at 06.26, 07.29, 08.30, 18.34 & 20.29), 3 at Frodsham, (at 06.31, 08.35, 20.34), and 5 at Runcorn East, (at 06.36, 08.40, 18.42, 20.39 & 22.30).

An evening train will depart Ellesmere Port at 18.23 calling all stations to Manchester Victoria, (arr. 19.28), except Frodsham and Eccles. There is an 8 minute connection at Manchester Victoria, (dep. 19.36), to Leeds, (arr. 21.05).

These 'Connect' services will be hourly, although not quite clockface, throughout the day starting with the 06.17 from Chester and ending with the 22.13 to Manchester Victoria, (arr. 23.17). If this train runs to time and platforms at Victoria are favourable, the sprightly passenger may consider a sprint to catch the 23.19 departure for Leeds, (arr. 00.46) !

In reverse, from Leeds, the 15.38 departure from Leeds goes to Ellesmere Port, not Chester, (arr. 18.09) and calls at Runcorn East, (arr. 17.48), Frodsham, (arr. 17.53) & Helsby, (arr. 17.57) followed by Ince & Elton, (arr. 18.00), Stanlow & Thornton, (arr.18.03) and Ellesmere Port, (arr. 18.09).

The first departure from Leeds is at 05.39, (arr. Chester 08.09) and the last at 18.39, (arr. Chester 21.07).

There is NO Sunday service.

We had hoped to attach the full timetable but time prohibits for this edition.

CWG

WORLD WAR ONE CENTENARY

To mark the final year of the World War One centenary, The Royal British Legion invited the public to take part in a movement to say 'Thank You' to the First World War generation who served, sacrificed, rebuilt and changed the nation. In support of the 'Thank You' movement they offered for donation a variety of silhouettes to symbolise the communities that took part in WW1. They shaped the nation as we know it today.

The silhouettes are near life-size and can be fixed to a wall or attached to an upright post in public or private spaces.

The silhouettes were displayed across the country by businesses, local authorities and individuals as a reminder of the sacrifices made during the First World War.

The silhouettes have at their base the words 'Lest we Forget' but any business or community group can buy and sponsor a silhouette and have its name incorporated in the base wording, as an act of Remembrance and supporting the valuable work of The Royal British Legion.

The silhouettes were on display till the end of last year and North Cheshire Rail Users Group are incredibly proud and honoured to have unveiled one at Runcorn East Railway Station in the garden next to the booking office.

IW



Class158 undergoing transformation to TfW livery. (Photo Charles Allen)

CHESHIRE BEST KEPT STATION AWARDS – 2018

Once again the Frodsham station garden team of Janet and Philip Briggs won the 'Best Kept Gardens' award for us. This win is made all the more significant when one considers that Janet has spent much of the year suffering a painful tendon condition which subsequently has required surgery. So congratulations to Janet and Philip for their hard work and for winning this prestigious award for the Group.

We should mention that all our stations are desperately in need of more volunteers to carry on the work of the existing teams. Anyone with an hour or two to spare and who would like to get involved in our work at stations, should get in touch with any member of the committee or leave a message on our website.

The full list of winners, is :-

World War 1 Centenary Award – Winner – Romiley. Highly Commended - Crewe, Hattersley and Reddish South

Roberts Bakery Award – For Most improved Station - Ellesmere Port

Art Project Award - Heaton Chapel

Northern Youth Challenge Award – Goostrey

ACoRP Community Award - Stockport

Merseyrail in Bloom Award – Winner - Rose Hill. Highly Commended - Sandbach

Best Kept Gardens Award – Winner – Frodsham. Highly Commended - Greenbank

Best Staffed Station - Knutsford

Travelwatch North West Award – for Large Stations – Warrington Bank Quay

Halton and Warrington Award – Padgate

Wirral Award – Hoylake

TfGM Award – Marple

Cheshire East Award – Winner – Handforth. Highly Commended – Chelford

Cheshire West and Chester Award – Northwich

Cheshire Best Kept Station - Alsager

IW

CHESTER / RUNCORN / LIVERPOOL SOUTH PARKWAY / LIVERPOOL LIME STREET SERVICE

We are disappointed not to have received any details of this service from Transport for Wales. However, we have managed to piece together the full proposed timetable using the National Rail and Transport for Wales websites, (neither site gave full details but fortunately items missed from one were available on the other). Not an ideal situation and certainly time consuming for the Editor.

To summarise. It is an hourly service in both directions, but not clockface. The first departure from Chester is 06.07 arriving LSP at 0644 and Lime Street at 0701. This train is too late for 80% of morning flights out of Liverpool Airport.

The first departure from Lime Street is the 07.16 arriving Chester at 0805.

There is no 18 xx departure from Chester or its return from Lime Street at 19 xx. Not good for late commuters or leisure travellers.

The last departure from Chester is at 22.30 arriving LSP at 23.05 and Lime Street at 23.20. The return from Lime Street is at 23.23 arriving LSP at 23.34 and Chester at 00.01. No problems there.

All trains stop at Helsby, Frodsham, Runcorn Mainline and Liverpool South Parkway in both directions.

Journey time varies between 47 and 54 minutes except for the 20.30 from Chester which for some reason takes 60 minutes.

The fare is listed as £11.50 single between Chester and Liverpool Lime Street and is exactly the same from Chester to Liverpool South Parkway. The single bus fare between LSP and LJLA is £2.00 giving a cost of £25 for a return journey to the airport.

From the above you will gather that NCRUG are disappointed about some aspects of the timetable and also the fare. We are hoping to have a meeting with the Head of Marketing of Transport for Wales and the new incumbent at TFW's Wrexham office, Lee Robinson. Liverpool airport have agreed to host such a meeting which, if it comes off, will enable us to stress the importance of getting the product package right in terms of tapping into the latent demand for public transport access to flights and other potential users, at a lower fare than currently listed.

CWG

CORWEN CENTRAL REVIEW JANUARY 2019

As of January work on the Corwen Central project still has some way to go before a date for the opening of the new terminus in 2019 can be declared, although the end of this demanding task may be in sight for the volunteer work force.

The island platform, as infilled around the western end, now has the foundations and base for a future waiting room and toilets with the drainage pipework in place. This is an essential need to allow for the eventual paving of the entire area and the foundations for the canopy columns are also being progressed, plus the need for the access subway to have a chairlift installed.

Work is now focused on the infamous Gap in the railway embankment, long seen as the big obstruction on the track bed and the last challenge to be overcome in completing the project.

Originally bulldozed through to provide alternative access to the Water Treatment plant, the gap was further eroded in 2013 by contractors for the Corwen Flood Relief Scheme and has since provided the essential access for the road delivery of materials and structures for the project.

The size of the problem was illustrated when volunteers joined hands across the Gap for a photograph. This shows the 22 yards width and varying depth of the area to be reinstated, along a length of 150 yards. The cubic capacity of the gap will require some 11,000 tonnes of spoil to be brought in and compacted at an estimated cost of £10,000.

The project team is looking for a contractor to deliver the spoil to reinstate the embankment for the connection of the two railheads and the laying of a parallel extended siding.

To help fund this expenditure the Llangollen Railway Trust's Corwen Central Railway Development Project has announced an Appeal for donations towards the cost of this work with nearly 30% raised to date.

A Llangollen Railway spokesman said, "Help with financing this final challenge in completing the Corwen terminus is again sought from supporters.

"Time for tackling the Gap is short and the reward for supporters will be the sight of the train arriving at the new station across the final frontier, something we are all waiting for! "

Donations can be sent to CCRD c/o the Treasurer at 'Dolwen', Bryn Eglwys, Corwen LL21 9LY and will be gratefully acknowledged.

The temporary platform at Dwyrain Corwen East closed as of the 4 November and the dismantling of the scaffold structure is underway after four years in use. Trains terminated at Carrog during the festive season and will continue to do so in early 2019 until an opening date for the new terminus is announced. The station staff have now transferred to the new building erected next to the town's car park in Corwen and it is being internally fitted out as the new ticket office and waiting room in readiness for the Big Day.

Signalbox

The major step forward with the Corwen Central project occurred at the end of October when the signal box cabin was installed on the previously prepared locking room which itself sits on top of the substantial concrete base set in the side of the embankment. In a day long exercise, the former Weston Rhyn cabin, which has sat out the past 27 years in the yard at Carrog, was lifted onto a low-loader and transported the two miles down the A5 road as an outside load. The giant road crane was repositioned onto the embankment at Corwen and lifted the cabin onto to the base where it was secured and subsequently made water proof around the join with the brick base.

Prior to removal a team of volunteers gave the grounded cabin a fresh coat of paint to avoid the complexities of access when it was repositioned at Corwen and internal bracing was inserted to maintain the stability of the structure when the lift took place. As now installed new gutters and rainwater piping have been fitted and a new balcony and stair case has to be made. However, the internal restoration of the box and the installation of a signalling frame will have to wait until after the station opens as a basic terminus and completion of the signalling may be some years off. In the meantime, the signal box presents a notable structure opposite the previously installed water tank as an indication the project is making strides with the station site development.

George Jones - Llangollen Railway Corwen Project

NEWS IN BRIEF

Liverpool South Parkway - All the new signalling equipment is now in place, with new route indicators fitted to the signal gantries.

There is a temporary booking desk at the Parkway. The floor in the original booking office collapsed due to wet rot. The replacement has not yet started.

Garston Dock Branch - One of the tracks has been removed from the Garston Dock branch. This line is very rarely used but does give a route to Edge Hill sidings. It has access from track four at South parkway.

Test trains on Halton curve – Trains have been running over the Halton Curve to Chester. A two car train, in Arriva Wales Trains livery, with Chester on the front indicator, was spotted at LSP at 12 noon.

New Electric Stock – New electric rolling stock has appeared at both Edge Hill Depot, and Allerton. There are at least eight units at each depot.

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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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