

North Cheshire Rail Users' Group



**Monitoring rail services from Chester & Ellesmere Port via
Helsby, Frodsham & Runcorn to Liverpool & Manchester**

Newsletter - March 2013



FROM THE CHAIR

It is obvious from observations on station platforms and on local trains in the north Cheshire area that the number of passengers travelling continues to increase. Peak hour trains frequently leave Chester already full with standing passengers and then pick up further customers along the way with a big exodus at Warrington Bank Quay. Station footfall statistics are based on ticket sales and NCRUG have observed how easy it is to travel to Warrington at a busy time without paying because the conductor is unable to collect all the fares particularly at busy times. This results in lower footfall figures and loss of revenue. As a group we have campaigned over the last ten years for better revenue protection, particularly at Warrington Bank Quay which is operated by Virgin Trains.

At our February committee meeting, we were joined by two senior managers from Arriva Trains Wales who gave us an outline of their findings from recent revenue protection exercises which highlighted considerable ticketless travel. Consequently, ATW will be installing ticket vending machines at Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn East stations and passengers will be expected to purchase tickets before travelling or seek out the conductor on the train. Full details of how the scheme will operate will be published in advance.

Hopefully, conductors will take a firm but sympathetic approach to enforcement as it is very easy to make a mistake. Some people may not understand the system or may have difficulties with ticket machines. Philip and I were caught out last year in Austria when we boarded a very smart train at Vienna only to find out when the conductor came round that our InterRail passes were not valid on that train which was, in fact, being run by Westbahn, a private company. We were told very politely that we had to pay or get off at the next stop! Fortunately, we were able to pick up the ÖBB service to Salzburg, 15 minutes later.

While it is pleasing to see ATW taking the initiative regarding revenue protection on our patch, this still leaves Warrington Bank Quay as the weak link. What a pity that Virgin did not address the issue, by fitting ticket gates, when the entrance hall and booking office were completely refurbished a few years ago. Certainly, a number of NCRUG members raised the matter at the public consultation but to no avail.

Janet Briggs

NEWS IN BRIEF

- **Awards.** At the Cheshire Best Kept Stations awards evening in Northwich on 22nd January 2013, Helsby won the 'Best Kept garden' award and Frodsham took the 'Cheshire West and Chester' award.
- **Helsby Station.** NCRUG recently made a successful bid to Cheshire West and Chester Council (working in partnership with Helsby Parish Council) for £1000 to regenerate the gardens on platform 1 at Helsby station. The first phase of the work should be finished in time for the celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of the Ellesmere Port to Helsby line in July.

- **Helsby station house.** Building work on the old station house at Helsby has been on-going throughout the winter but should be completed shortly. It is hoped that Network Rail will follow up this project by carrying out some work on the old booking office.
- **Frodsham.** Some minor remedial work was carried out on the refurbished station house at Frodsham recently. We understand Network Rail will shortly be moving on to stage 2 of the project at Frodsham by installing heating.
- **Bee friendly.** This year, Frodsham will be celebrating 200 years since the birth of William Charles Cotton, former vicar of Frodsham (1857 - 1879). In addition to being vicar of Frodsham's St Laurence Church, he was a keen apiarist and carried out extensive research on bees from a very young age (founding Oxford's Apiarian Society and becoming founder and President of the British Beekeeping Association). Prior to his move to Frodsham, Cotton wrote numerous books and was involved in the introduction of bees to New Zealand. NCRUG will be contributing to the celebration by re-planting one of the smaller beds on platform 1 with plants and shrubs which attract bees.
- **Train services.** Arriva Trains Wales have informed us that there are no major changes to services in the forthcoming summer timetable period commencing 19th May.

150 YEARS OF RAIL – 1ST JULY 2013 – HELSBY TO HOOTON

2013 is going to be an exciting year – in the same year that we mourn 50 years since the Beeching Report (March 2013) we also celebrate 150 years of rail travel between Helsby Station and Hooton with both Little Sutton and Ellesmere Port Station buildings reaching their 150 year anniversaries on Monday 1st July 2013.

150 years ago when the line opened, the local press reported that people celebrated with a “monster picnic” however we are trying for a slightly different event. To mark the occasion we hope to have a **Special Train** running between Hooton and Helsby which will then end up in Liverpool South Parkway having crossed the Halton Curve with the option of vintage bus travel back to celebrate station open afternoons at Helsby, Little Sutton and Ellesmere Port.

We hope to encourage as many people as possible to get involved and visit their station and travel along the Line. We hope to produce commemorative mugs and bookmarks with other ideas being discussed.

If you have any ideas about celebrating 150 years of rail travel and would like to get involved, please contact Sally Buttifant, senior transport officer at Cheshire West & Chester Council on 01244 976788 or sally.buttifant@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Any interesting photos or articles about the Line and its stations would be most appreciated.

We have a provisional date for the celebrations of **Saturday 6th July** so put that in your diary and we will confirm as soon as we hear from Northern Rail regarding the **Special Train**.

Ellesmere Port Station

We are planning another busy year for the station – we started to think about attracting butterflies and bees to our garden last year and planted a lavender hedge, we are continuing that theme this year by adding marjoram, pyracantha and buddleia. We have also purchased a water butt to collect rain water for watering the plants.

Last year we were just a few marks off reaching level 5 in the 'It's Your Neighbourhood, North West in Bloom' competition so this year we are determined to reach that coveted “Outstanding” level 5!

Work has started on bringing the unused side of the station up to standard so that the nearby Station Cafe can move in – it will be fantastic to be able to enjoy tea and a bacon butty on the station! We also hope to have a room for community meetings which will be a real asset.

Merseyrail are also installing secure cycle lockers and will be offering cycle hire from the station. For further information contact Sally Buttifant, (contact details above).

SB

REGENERATING THE GARDENS AT HELSBY

NCRUG has recently received a substantial grant from through Helsby Parish Council to regenerate the gardens at Helsby Station. Clearing work is in progress on the large bed on platform 1 which will be transformed in time for the 150th anniversary of Helsby station and the Helsby to Ellesmere Port line.

There had been a station at Helsby for some years before that, but Helsby Station was rebuilt and turned into a Junction in 1863 to accommodate the Helsby to Hooton Line. To celebrate the occasion and leave a lasting reminder for future generations who visit the Station, The North Cheshire Rail Users Group are creating a new garden on the eastern side of platform 1.

Helsby Station to date has probably won more awards than any other station in England for its tidy well-kept gardens. This is all down to a dedicated band of volunteers who turn up in all weathers to make the station a more inviting and safer place for passengers waiting for their trains. North Cheshire Rail User' Group were, in fact, one of the first groups to adopt a station in the area, a trend which has now spread nationwide

The garden will be designed to complement the station buildings which are currently being restored to their former glory by Network Rail. The new garden will be fresh modern and vibrant and make the station a more interesting place for passengers while waiting for their trains. It will also give a good impression of the station for commuters just passing through on the train. Patrick Swan former head gardener at Arley hall has kindly agreed to help design the new garden which will be enjoyed by many future generations.

The project will include a commemorative Welsh slate plaque as a lasting reminder of the anniversary. The plaque is being prepared by Llechwedd Slate Caverns, of Blaenau Ffestiniog, which is particularly appropriate as records show that the original slate for the roof of the station house came from the Llechwedd mine.

The work is being funded by a grant from Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) working in partnership with Helsby Parish Council; this allows money from a discretionary fund to be allocated to local community and voluntary groups for projects which will benefit local people.

IW. JB.

FENCING AT FRODSHAM STATION

Railway Heritage Trust has granted an award of £771 to NCRUG. This is 50% of the cost of replacing a 10 metre section of wood and wire fencing erected in about 1970 when the original wall fell down. The fence is still standing but is unsightly and has been pushed out of line by a tree resulting in a run down image in a very prominent location next to the borough car park, especially now that the station house has been beautifully restored.

During the restoration work on the house last year, Network Rail surveyed the railings which form part of the curtilage of the listed building and agreed to renovate them as part of the project. This work took place in the autumn with excellent results. The new section of fence will be a near match to the existing traditional fencing and the work will be undertaken by the same contractor, Joe Preston & Son of Widnes. NCRUG will find the remainder of the money needed from a generous bequest from the late Phil Edwards' family following his death in November.

NCRUG established an excellent relationship with the Network Rail surveyors working on the restoration project at Frodsham and their guidance regarding our own small contribution has been most helpful. Preliminary work will start immediately and the new railings should be in place on platform 2 in the next few weeks.

JB

HALTON CURVE (CLARC) UP-DATE

We have been rather quiet on this subject in recent Newsletters, initially because, regrettably there was little to report, and latterly because, although work has been going on behind the scenes, there has been little tangible progress to report. This remains the situation but we wish to assure members and supporters that our work rate has been stepped up in recent months due to our association with an Australian transport consultancy, Gutteridge Haskins & Davey Ltd., (GHD), who have shown considerable interest in the Halton curve re-instatement.

NCRUG's involvement with GHD has mainly centred around providing historical information about the project and introducing them to the stakeholders, LEP's, MP's and others who are interested. In this regard a number of high level interviews have been conducted which have proved to be extremely informative. However, whilst all this is good news up to a point, the big question of funding, or lack of it, still stands firmly as a barrier. GHD are hopeful that their past experience will enable this obstacle to be overcome.

Now that they have a good understanding about the project, and having studied past reports and studies, they are currently working on a business case as a starting point for really taking this project forward. Readers may now be thinking 'we have been here before'. However, our close working with GHD does make us more confident that they may be able to make things happen and lift the project out of the mire in which it has been stuck for a number of years.

Our conversations with stakeholders lead us to believe that with the Northern Hub, electrification and HS2 on the horizon, Halton curve re-instatement only has a limited window of opportunity otherwise it could slip out of the frame forever.

Another development which may impact favourably on the re-instatement is the re-signalling of the West Coast Main Line between Weaver Junction and Wavertree Junction which will be included in Control Period 5 (2014/2019). This could benefit Halton curve as a sizeable part of the cost of re-instatement could be moved into CP5 as a result of re-signalling Halton Junction. Re-signalling at Frodsham Junction and Halton Junction is the single biggest cost within Halton curve re-instatement. So if the Halton Junction cost shifted to CP5 then Halton curve re-instatement cost comes down making it a more attractive proposition to funders.

NCRUG will continue to keep the pressure on to bring this long awaited project to a successful conclusion.

CWG

LIVERPOOL'S RIVERSIDE STATION

Some readers may remember this station which was situated alongside the landing stage where all the big transatlantic and other liners embarked and disembarked their passengers. The station had three platforms and was meticulously maintained by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, now part of Peel Holdings. It had hanging baskets, red painted buffers and was kept scrupulously clean and litter free. It was only a matter of a few yards from the ships' gangways and the Custom's Shed. A really impressive first impression of the city of Liverpool for those arriving from overseas.

After leaving the station the line proceeded for a short distance through the dock area before veering right and into the Waterloo Tunnel, followed by the longer Victoria Tunnel before emerging into daylight adjacent to Edge Hill Station. From here trains joined the main network for more distant destinations.

Despite all these good points the station was underused and when Liverpool lost its liner trade it finally became redundant and went the way of many lines and stations in the 1960/70's. It was last used in 1971 by a train bringing troops for Belfast. Today there is no trace of the station which has been replaced by the shiny new office blocks on what is now Princes Parade.

Liverpool recently won the right to have cruises start and finish from its brand new Cruise Terminal, much to the chagrin of Southampton, as well as being a stopping off port for day visits. This Cruise Terminal is adjacent to where the Riverside Station used to be. Coupled with this development is the £5.5b plan to develop the derelict dock area from Princes Dock to Clarence Dock with a mix of business, leisure and housing on a massive scale. What are the public transport aspirations which will be required for this huge area of 'new' Liverpool?

Well! – the Waterloo and Victoria Tunnels, now referred to as just 'Waterloo Tunnel', are still intact and capable of accommodating double tracks. Whether they can also accommodate overhead electric catenary is not known by the writer. A survey was completed about 8 years ago which showed that the tunnels were capable of being re-instated but nothing further was done at the time. However, maybe we are approaching the time when consideration could be given to re-opening these tunnels and building a new, state of the art, railway station. Such a station at the heart of the new development would serve as a direct connection to the rail network and also provide a seamless connection to the Cruise Terminal – something Southampton cannot offer. In this regard the writer can personally testify to the efficiency of Southampton when arriving by road and Liverpool will need to do something special in order to compete. Rail gives them this opportunity.

Dare we say 'watch this space'?

CWG

"THE SUBTERRANEAN RAILWAY" - CHRISTIAN WOLMAR

Book review. Published by Atlantic books in paperback £9.99.

This London based NCRUG member tends to associate tube travel with seemingly interminable waits for the train (Piccadilly line, Rayners Lane branch, since you ask). 2013, however, as the 150th anniversary of the London Underground provides a perfect reason for all to pick up Christian Wolmar's history of the founding and development of today's tube network. Indeed for anyone interested in the wider social and economic contribution of railways, this will constitute essential reading. The book clearly sets out what an asset probably recognised worldwide, the London Underground network is, even if it is underappreciated by Londoners themselves!

The book, explores several interrelated themes, the personalities associated with the founding and development for the tube network which we recognise today. Secondly, the geographical development of the network and the catalyst for rapid socio-economic changes and benefits. The book also explores the development of the present London Transport organisation under the chapter "The perfect organisation?" and the role played by the London underground in two world wars. Another theme is the sometimes comical effect of semi-regulated competition in the network particularly in the development of the Metropolitan and District Line railway companies.

Contrary to what the reader would expect, the founding father of underground railways in London was actually a public servant, Charles Pearson, City of London solicitor (1839 to 1862) who in persuaded the then City Corporation to invest significant money and land assets in the formative Metropolitan Railway company (the earliest example of the necessity of public investment in the railway infrastructure?). From that point until the formation of London Transport, private sector entrepreneurs dominate the story, including the bitter rivalry between Sir Edward Watkin and James Staats Forbes who ran respectively the Metropolitan and District Railway Companies.

This rivalry, as well as hampering the development of the current Circle line, led to a number of absurd situations including both companies operating their own ticket offices at 'joint' stations and selling their own tickets (which of course were not transferable) and were only valid depending on whether you were travelling clockwise or anticlockwise around the loop and on which train (the last bit

sounds familiar!). There was even a dispute about which sidings could be used by which company. This reviewer's favourite story was an example cited from 1884 of the District line company parking a locomotive and train and chaining and padlocking it there to enforce its track access rights. Within a couple of days and I quote "the Metropolitan sent three engines to pull away the train and a tug-of-war ensued in which the chained train came off the victor"!

Subsequently the larger-than-life character presented to readers in the form of Charles Tyson Yerkes the American financier and creator of the Underground Electric Railways Company of London Ltd (UERL) is billed by Wolmar as "the dodgy American"! UERL were the prime movers in the development of the deep level tube network including the Piccadilly, Bakerloo and Northern lines. The complexity of financing these developments was only matched by the later disastrous public private partnership initiative launched at the end of the 1990s. The point that the book makes very clearly is that with the capital investment required, public-sector investment would again prove to be essential; UERL on its own being a disaster for shareholders (although Yerkes himself did rather well out of it). It was mainly the need for this public investment that ultimately led to the creation of a London Passenger Transport Board (London Transport) under the Labour government's Transport Minister Herbert Morrison in 1933.

The Underground, of course, created the London we know today including the rapid development of suburbs, for example, the well-known 'Metroland' transforming green field sites and creating longer distance commuting, made possible by fast and frequent train services. This reviewer's own local station when living at home was Sudbury Town. The book contains a photo of the Charles Holden designed station (now a listed building) as it was when it opened in July 1931. As Wolmar says, these underground stations were often the first substantial buildings in the districts they were intended to serve, quickly creating large communities around them; the wider social benefits of railway investment.

Readers will know Christian Wolmar as a regular writer and broadcaster on current railway matters so whilst 'The Subterranean Railway' works very well as an engaging history of London Underground, Wolmar does not miss any opportunity to draw parallels with our current system of privatisation/franchising and the lessons learned from the past with the overriding need for state intervention and investment.

An excellent read.

Malcolm Davies

LLANGOLLEN RAILWAY TRUST – CARROG TO CORWEN EXTENSION

The railway has been carrying out essential winter maintenance on the existing track over the last few months and this coupled with the landslip which occurred at Glyndyfrdwy resulted in closure of the track west of that point, preventing access by train to the site. This has stopped further tracklaying from taking place but a resumption is planned for the latter part of March. This will bring the project to the attention of the passing public, improving awareness of the work.

One culvert, 25D, approx. 0.5 km east of Corwen has been replaced. Work is programmed to commence in March undertaking the first stage of the refurbishment of the only overbridge. This will involve fitting a waterproof membrane and replacing a road surface. This work is subject to the conditions of a Bat Disturbance licence. Enabling works improving the alternative access for the landowner have been completed to allow closure of the bridge whilst the work is taking place.

Further tree clearance has taken place adjacent to the temporary platform site to avoid the Bird Nesting Season minimising any possible delays in refurbishing the adjacent bridge.

Approval of a Flood relief scheme being undertaken by Denbighshire County Council in Corwen will enable the design for the platform to be finalised. The Denbighshire Scheme will involve replacing a culvert across the trackbed by the proposed platform.

The railway is continuing to fundraise to meet the outstanding costs. A number of grant opportunities are being explored to assist with raising the finance needed to complete the scheme. As an example of the costs involved, the ballast requirements to Corwen, amount to £42k.

John Briggs, Project Manager

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

Visit our website: NCRUG@ORG.UK to leave your comments, favourable or otherwise!

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REMINDER - 2013 SUBSCRIPTIONS.

A number of NCRUG members who were fully paid-up for last year {2012} have not yet paid their 2013 subscriptions. If you wish to continue your membership, please complete the form below and return as indicated. Your support is much appreciated.

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