

North Cheshire Rail Users' Group



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

Newsletter Summer 2014



FROM THE CHAIR

Since the Customer Information Screens, (CIS), were installed along our local line between Chester and Warrington Bank Quay, the quality of the information provided has steadily improved with the expected arrival time usually being automatically shown.

However, where it does fall down is the patchy information about bus replacement services during engineering work even when this is planned work. Sometimes, passengers are told in advance via the CIS, sometimes they are not. Posters often don't appear until the day before the disruption and passengers need to check all the scattered posters on the platform to be sure of getting the information and it shouldn't be necessary to check the internet before every local journey.

Returning from Manchester one Saturday, we discovered that Arriva Trains Wales' trains to Chester were being diverted via the Mid-Cheshire line from approximately mid-day. The information system had not shown this information earlier in the day. As we did not want to endure a two hour bus journey from Manchester to Frodsham, we opted to take a train to Warrington Central and pick up the bus from Warrington Bank Quay. No doubt it is difficult for staff sitting in Cardiff to visualise the situation in far off North Cheshire but passengers certainly need accurate and timely information on their stations when starting their journeys.

I was surprised to find my comments about Frodsham footfall quoted in 'Rail' issue 744. This set me thinking about what the footfall would be if the Halton Curve is eventually restored allowing local people to travel directly and quickly to Liverpool. In addition to opening up job opportunities, it would provide easy daily travel to four universities and numerous colleges. With two Premier League football teams supporters would swell the ranks of passengers at weekends along with race goers travelling to Aintree and Chester. NCRUG has never given up its campaign to see the Halton Curve restored. Could the second Mersey road bridge, with the expectation of tolls on both bridges, swing the equation in favour of a full re-opening?

Local people would then be grumbling about not being able to park their cars in Frodsham because of the number of commuters; and parking charges would inevitably follow!

Janet Briggs

FIRST WORKSHOP AT MURDISHAW COMMUNITY CENTRE

Participants enjoyed the first course at the Murdishaw Community Centre on Monday 10th March 2014, when those present received instruction in Bat Box Construction together with stories of bat roosts and the type of bats to be found in and around Runcorn. Plenty of tea was also available.

Paul Quigley, our lecturer from Norton Priory, showed us how to put the boxes together and some heavy nailing was done especially by the ladies present at least one of whom confessed to never having used a hammer in anger before. The constructed boxes will be erected around the station and the adjacent woodland which is tended by the Mersey Forest Trust

Paul informed us how many bats can live in the boxes and how the male bats and female bats split up and form separate communities with the female bats looking after the nurseries. He expects several

species of bats to live in the vicinity and in an endeavour to identify them he demonstrated two types of bat detectors. He explained that each species of bats operates at a different frequency, (just like radio stations), and they do not therefore interfere with each others' hunting habitat. The audible output of the detectors was adjusted for human hearing, in order that we could hear any bat squeaks. However, as it was not a bat time of day the input was made by Paul snapping his fingers. It is amazing that there is a market for such items as they seemed very specialised to me.

Claire Austin from Liverpool John Moores University also attended to brief us on how we may benefit from the activities and to undertake a survey of our well being. Following on from the hectic knocking in the workshop we went for a guided walk in the adjacent woodland and Runcorn East station to spot suitable locations and take advantage of the beautiful spring day. This also enabled Paul to assess the environment around the station and to see the work undertaken by the NCRUG.

At the station a fine display of daffodils and crocus evidenced the work we do. Paul quickly spotted a Wren skittering about while overhead a buzzard was displaying to its mate, a sight I have never witnessed before. On the prepared bed on the Warrington bound platform a tawny mining bee was seen and a little later a hover fly was seen basking in the warmth on the newly flowering yellow crocus.

A pair of blue tits were seen inspecting the nest boxes near the public overbridge and with the current lack of leaves on the trees the nest boxes could easily be located around the station. We hope to add more following the handiwork of the course participants.

An initial four courses were held at Murdishaw and these will be followed by a further batch in late September through to October. We have plenty of room for more bird nest box builders on the course which will include some ceramic work so please come along and enjoy yourselves.

JH

ENJOY FREE RETURN TRAVEL ON THE MERSEYRAIL NETWORK FREE TICKET GIVEAWAY FOR CHESHIRE WEST RESIDENTS!

Terms & Conditions

- A rail travel voucher entitles up to 4 passengers (adult or child) to make one return journey from any station on the Merseyrail network free of charge.
- The Merseyrail network covers the Northern line from Southport, Ormskirk, Kirkby and Hunts Cross and the Wirral line from New Brighton, West Kirby, Ellesmere Port and Chester.
- The rail travel voucher is only valid on **Sunday 29th June**, during Merseyrail's operating hours.
- Travel will not be permitted without a printed rail travel voucher. Passengers must keep the printed rail travel voucher and be able to present it upon request at any point during their journey.
- Rail travel vouchers are non-transferable; one of the passengers travelling using a rail travel voucher must be the person who registered for it.
- All passengers travelling with a rail travel voucher must travel together throughout their journey.
- At any point during their journey, the registered passenger must be able to produce officially recognised ID (i.e. photo ID card, passport, driving licence).
- Rail travel vouchers must be surrendered if requested by a member of Merseyrail staff.
- Rail travel vouchers are not exchangeable for cash.

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To apply for free travel on **Sunday 29th June** on the Merseyrail network (Northern & Wirral lines only) for up to 4 people - adults or children – email sally.buttifant@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk giving your name, email address and start and end station for your journey.

SB

ELECTRIFICATION PROGRESS - RAPID CHANGES UNDERWAY

Members travelling on our local trains to Manchester via the "Chat Moss" line will be aware that the route between Newton-le Willows and Manchester is now fully electrified and carrying scheduled electric services. Work is in hand to finish the electrification between Earlestown and Liverpool with

poles & gantries appearing, ready to hang the wires. A huge operation is under way to quadruple this line between Huyton & Roby. This will provide a fast junction at Huyton between the electric Liverpool to Manchester line and the branch at Huyton to Wigan which is also seeing poles & gantries appearing rapidly for electrification. Huyton & Roby stations are being converted back from two to four platform stations. Is this another example of a 1960's "economy" being reversed?

PB

HALTON CURVE – MERSEY DEE LINK UPDATE FROM MERSEYTRAVEL

Following on from last month's update, the reinstatement of the Halton Curve continues to make progress.

The demand study commissioned by Merseytravel and the Welsh Government is underway and is examining the financial and economic case for new rail services using the Halton Curve to transform connectivity between North Wales / Chester and Liverpool / John Lennon Airport. It will also review the case for a new rail station at Beechwood. As part of this it is evaluating a range of options to identify the potential service patterns and assess the revenue impacts from the new services and estimate the likely operating costs. Service options not being taken forward at this stage are services to Crewe, Shrewsbury / Cardiff. The work will also take into account freight impacts and the line's possible role as a diversionary route in its business case as well as the WCML timetable, the impact of Northern Hub, re-signalling Lime Street station and the Wrexham – Chester track doubling. The demand study work is being undertaken by AECOM and the final report is due in July.

The Halton Curve has gained further valuable support from partners as the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership has included a bid for the Halton Curve's capital costs within the Strategic Economic Plan for the Liverpool City Region, with a complementary bid also being put forward by the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership, recognising its cross boundary benefits. A decision from Government on the "Growth Deal" funding packages for the Strategic Economic Plans should be known in July. It should be noted that the funding from the Growth Deal package would only cover the capital costs, meaning that there will still be costs associated with the revenue costs of new services on the line. This means further support from partners on both sides of the border will be required in this respect.

SC

HALTON CURVE TRIP – CHESTER TO LIVERPOOL SOUTH PARKWAY, (LSP), & LLANGOLLEN HERITAGE RAILWAY DMU GALA

Once again Northern Rail have arranged for their 0753 departure from Chester on Saturday 21st June to continue on to LSP with stops at Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn Mainline, arriving LSP at 0825. This now seems to have become an annual event which has always been well supported and which helps to keep the re-instatement project on the agenda of the main stakeholders, (see separate update report from Merseytravel above).

Unfortunately, the vintage Crosville Bus which, in the past, has been available to take passengers back to Chester, is having a major interior refurbishment and is not, therefore, able to offer a service this time round.

The train timings are, as follows:-

	<u>Arrive</u>	<u>Depart</u>
Chester		0753
Helsby		0802
Frodsham		0806
Runcorn	0816	0817
L'pool Sth Parkway	0825	

We do not take bookings for this trip. Please purchase your ticket at Chester station, on the day, or in advance, if you wish, but there are no reservations and seats will be on a first come first served basis.

On this same Saturday the Llangollen Heritage Railway Trust are having their DMU Gala day which will feature Daisy the Metro Cammell unit and many other interesting trains from the past. The line

has been extended and passengers can now travel as far as Bonwm, just east of Corwen. A good day is envisaged for all rail enthusiasts and families.

Further details for the LHR event are available at:

<http://www.llangollenrailcars.com/Galas/2014/index.htm>.

For those wishing to partake of both events we give rail/bus timings, as follows:-

	<u>Arrive</u>	<u>Depart</u>
L'pool Sth Parkway	0825.....	0859
L'pool Lime Street	0910.....	0928
Chester	1011.....	1019
Ruabon	1042.....	1048 <i>GHA Bus Service No.5</i>
<i>Llangollen</i>	<i>1104</i>	

Italics indicate a bus service which runs every 15 minutes from Wrexham to Llangollen, via Ruabon railway station with one per hour extended to Corwen, (ie 1103 from Ruabon railway station and arriving Corwen at 1139).

This is a great opportunity to attend two attractive events on the same day linking the present with the past and drawing attention to the future when a re-instated Halton curve will allow the journey between LSP and Ruabon to be completed in just 55 minutes including stops at all five intermediate stations.

We look forward to welcoming you on the day and thank you, in advance, for your valued support.

CWG

SOME THOUGHTS ON HS2

On the assumption that HS2 will go ahead readers may wish to contribute their thoughts on what is desirable and achievable for the service which will run on it from the North. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the Rail Industry and the UK to create a world class piece of transport infrastructure which will lead the world and bring into play all the talent and innovative expertise which this country possesses and will, no doubt, engage with some of the leading engineers, architects and planners throughout the world.

Here are some service suggestions:-

- 1) Could the rail industry devise a means for carrying out customs, immigration and security on the train, during the journey, rather than before the journey starts thereby saving time and adding a competitive edge over air travel? Security, particularly, will be a difficult nut to crack.
- 2) Would an overnight sleeper service be attractive by saving time and hotel expenses?
- 3) Bearing in mind minimum 4 hour journey times for through services to the near Continent, should the catering on board revert to something like the Pullman services of old?
- 4) Should services be run on an 'Open access', franchise or managed basis by the private sector?

On the further, but even less definite, assumption that HS2 will run to Liverpool as well as Manchester and Leeds, what advantages would this bring to the city? See our Spring Newsletter and the article by the '20 Miles More' campaign.

Please email your comments to:- cw.green@talktalk.net. We will summarise the replies in a future Newsletter.

CWG

CORWEN EXTENSION PROJECT REVIEW – May 2014

Useful media headlines resulted from the arrival of the railhead at the Dwyrain Corwen East station site in April and local enthusiasm for the arrival of trains in 2014 is renewed. However there remains much to do and it would be unwise to speculate on an opening date at this point, although train services to Corwen in the summer remains an objective.

Corwen station site - The installation of the platform and access ramp at the Phase 1 temporary station requires the hiring in of expertise for the task and the Llangollen firm of Davies Bros have been appointed to undertake this work. Materials stored at the Llangollen Railway Carriage & Wagon works will be taken by rail through to Corwen and the erection work will start later in May. With an estimated six weeks work for the construction of the platform, it may be available for fitting out by early July.

Work on the Corwen Flood Alleviation scheme is now completed and the contractors have vacated the work site. In the course of restoring the area the surface on the over spill car park, on the approach to the station site, has received a new coat of asphalt, including the track up to the end of the existing railway embankment. This work is a notable improvement to the area.

Due for attention is the pedestrian route from the town's car park through the Corwen Common area when a top coat is applied to the footpath. Other enhancements to this area to make it attractive to visitors are planned, including the provision of an all-weather route in the area now restored by the contractors. Meanwhile there is much still to do to arrange for the basic facilities to be provided at the public access point to the station site.

In order to prepare train staff for the operation of trains to Corwen, a visit by members of the Traffic Department was arranged on 8 May. In the course of an escorted walk from the station site into town, the party gained an appreciation of the access arrangements for those arriving by train or visiting by car/bus. A conducted tour of the town centre provided an awareness of what Corwen has to offer in terms of shops, refreshment facilities and places of interest. Further visits by other customer facing volunteers and Llangollen Railway staff are to be arranged.

Track - The need for top ballasting of the new track remains a priority. Unfortunately there is a scarcity of the required grade of recycled ballast and resumption of deliveries from Crewe to Carrog is awaited. The calculated need is for 1,500 tonnes of stone requiring delivery by 55 lorry loads, at an estimated cost of £27,000. The start of ballasting is anticipated in late May and, if the section west of over bridge 28A can be completed during June, the hiring of a tamper machine in July will see the track work completed.

In the meantime, the extension has been the subject of a detailed in-house inspection to produce a list of items requiring specific attention to track and infrastructure. The list of 'snags' is being worked through by the project team but some of the heavier work requires the services of the 12 ton crane, once a repair to it has been effected. One very visible addition to the railway scene is the installation of a fixed distant signal on the section east of bridge 28A as a sure sign the train will be coming.

Passenger Survey - In the course of the Easter and the May Bank Holiday weekends a Corwen Awareness survey was conducted at the Exhibition coach in Llangollen station. This revealed a great deal of interest in the project and eager anticipation for its completion. A high number of responses confirming the use of the Corwen terminus for a visit to the Llangollen Railway were recorded. The availability of convenient car parking was welcomed, as well as the easier accessibility from a different road network and nearness to home, or place of holiday accommodation, in the North Wales sector.

The results point to a need for a major marketing and promotional effort in North Wales once a date for the opening of train services to Corwen can be accurately determined.

Prospects - Llangollen Railway Trust Chairman, Neil Evans, said. "We are working hard on the final aspects of the project and trust all will come to fruition in time for trains to operate to Corwen during the summer period. A date will be announced directly we are confident that the extension and facilities are complete and have passed an inspection."

George Jones

NEWS IN BRIEF

Timetable changes: There are no major changes to the Arriva Trains Wales timetable this summer

Halton Curve Train: The Saturday only service, operated by Northern Rail which runs for the summer period only will run from 24th May until 6th September, leaving Chester at 07.53 and arriving at Runcorn (main line) at 08.14. Details of this year's 'one off' amended service stopping at Helsby and Frodsham and continuing to Liverpool South Parkway on Saturday 21st June, are given elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Station adoption conference: Seven members of NCRUG attended the Arriva Trains Wales, northern area station adoption conference in Chester on 29th April. We were shown two interesting presentations: one relating to the problems caused to the Cambrian Coast line by the winter storms and the other showing the many events at stations along the Llandudno to Blaenau Ffestiniog Line for its 150th anniversary.

Grant: North Cheshire Rail Users' Group was awarded £100 following a presentation at the Frodsham Grants Show organised by Cheshire West and Chester Council. We will be putting this towards some new plants to replace old shrubs which were damaged during the installation of the new fencing.

Helsby Island Platform: Railway Heritage Trust have approached NCRUG with the suggestion that the small buildings on the island platform at Helsby could be restored and handed over to the group for community use. Andy Savage, executive director met with members recently to examine the condition of the two buildings linked by an archway. The part already used by NCRUG as a storage area for gardening equipment is in reasonable condition. However, removal of boards blocking the doorway of the other room showed a considerable amount of damage had occurred during the years of neglect.

Helsby hump: Members were surprised but very pleased when they discovered that the promised hump at Helsby would involve actually raising part of the platform rather than the usual pre-fabricated 'Harrington Hump'. No-one in the group knew about the change of plans until work started! Great care was taken with the design and the sandstone facing blends in perfectly with the original design. We have no idea why Network Rail had a change of heart regarding the installation but are delighted that they did.

JB

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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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