

North Cheshire Rail Users' Group



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

Newsletter Autumn 2015



FROM THE CHAIR

In recent months, John Hobbs has taken over the post as webmaster of our new website. Like many of us, he felt that he didn't have the right computer skills for the job but with help and advice from John Hulme, he has become very enthusiastic and certainly has an eye for detail when it comes to rail matters. It's taken some time to bring this project to fruition so please explore the website and let us have any comments and suggestions.

On Monday, 10th August we travelled to Llandudno to meet up with family members who were on holiday in Betws y Coed. On our return, we were caught up in the problems resulting from the lorry fire on the M56 near to Helsby Station which meant that trains were not running through to Manchester via Helsby and Frodsham so we were stranded in Chester. With both the M56 motorway and the A56 road closed, Helsby and Frodsham were completely isolated. The magic hour for the resumption of services at 19.00 hrs. came and went until it was shown as no services until 23.00! We gave up at this point and negotiated with a taxi driver to take us to Frodsham via Delamere. We could have taken a train along the mid Cheshire line to Delamere but we would have been left in an isolated spot and organising a taxi to take us to Frodsham might not have been easy. This was a completely unforeseen scenario but Arriva Trains Wales need to work out contingency plans for a similar occurrence.

In June, we spent a two week holiday in Austria, travelling by train to and from Frodsham Station. I find it very interesting to compare how things are done in other countries. In particular, two observations come to mind. 1) We travelled in Austria, Switzerland, Germany and briefly through Lichtenstein on three consecutive days without any sort of ticket or travel document check. 2) At Zell am See in the Austrian Tyrol, we came across a group of about six teenagers sitting on a track pulling up weeds from the track bed with their bare hands (only one was wearing gloves) and placing them in buckets! We don't know if they were volunteers or, possibly, young offenders carrying out community service. As far as we could tell, this was an unused track and they were wearing 'hi vis vests' but there was only minimal supervision. It just shows how different things can be in other countries.

Let us have your thoughts for the next newsletter

Janet Briggs

NCRUG ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - WEDNESDAY 21ST OCTOBER 2015

Ben Davies, Stakeholder Manager for Arriva Trains Wales, will be our Guest Speaker when he will update us on current matters and, hopefully, give us a glimpse into the future. We will also be showing a video of the July trip on the Halton Curve which has been produced by Saskia Dooley and includes shots from the cab as well as external shots of the train on the curve. Saskia will say a few words about the video. It is a 'first' for NCRUG and will prove a useful tool for future use.

Speakers give up their own time to attend our meetings and we hope as many members, and non-members, as possible will attend to help make the evening a success.

Full details of the AGM are attached.

CWG

HELSEBY STATION REPORT

It has been a very busy time for us over the past months. During the peak growing season we have great difficulty keeping the gardens tidy with the small number of regular volunteers at the station. Fortunately, things are beginning to slow down so we can catch up on garden maintenance and tidy up the gardens for the Autumn.

Our usual supply of geraniums has been received from Cheshire West & Chester Council which we are pleased about in the current economic climate. These have been planted out in the gardens and pots.

Unfortunately, we have recently suffered some anti social behaviour when curry sauce was thrown over station fittings and waiting shelter. It was very difficult for the Arriva Trains Wales maintenance team, assisted by station volunteers, to clean off. This was reported to the Police and fortunately has not been repeated.

Lastly, I would like to appeal for new volunteers to help at the station. We are at the station on Friday mornings from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm and new volunteers would be very welcome.

WE

RUNCORN EAST GARDEN 2015

The Memorial Garden at Runcorn East adjacent to the Booking office has, once again, been nominated for the Neighbourhood Award Section of "Britain in Bloom" Competition by the Royal Horticultural Society. Halton Borough Council have also been successful as they have developed a Community Garden at Murdishaw Community Centre.

A party of volunteers from Murdishaw Community Centre and Runcorn East Station will attend the celebration in Southport on the 29th October and we are pleased to advise that Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) are sponsoring the volunteers from Runcorn East.

JH

HALTON CURVE PROGRESS REPORT

Here is the latest from Merseytravel.

In terms of an update for members of NCRUG, the scheme development is progressing with outline design about to commence. The next major milestone is the submission of the Full Business Case which we had anticipated to submit during the Summer. However, to ensure that the business case represents the best possible value for the scheme and all parties involved, this has been delayed slightly to allow the scheme to be developed further. This being said we are still very much progressing the scheme with a view to the Curve becoming operational in 2018 as originally intended.

It is really a case of a lot of work going on in the background at this stage which is crucial to moving the scheme forward. I will keep you posted on future developments and please feel free to contact me, at Merseytravel, if you require any further updates for you or your members.

TR/CWG

....AND MORE ON HALTON CURVE

One of members reported, as follows:-

At 7.15 this morning, 1st September, I was travelling from Runcorn to Frodsham when I saw a Freightliner class 66 with a short ballast train heading onto the Halton Curve. When I came back from Frodsham at 7.30, it was stopped at the signal on the curve. I wonder if it was waiting for clearance to go to Halton junction or whether it had been put on the curve to allow the 7.25 Manchester train to pass?

Another of our members followed up with this:-

Thank you for this observation, I went on to "Real Time trains" to find out what it was!
Result!

05.45 Ballast Crewe - Chester to Frodsham Junct. (07.15)

14.21 Frodsham Junct - Halton Junct (14.26) - Ditton - Crewe

So they must have dropped some ballast on Halton Curve!!

....AND YET MORE

Major engineering work is taking place on Halton curve. Contractors "Murphy" are clearing undergrowth and laying drainage pipes on the north side of the line parallel with the Runcorn Express Way. The work site can be seen from the footbridge over the Expressway.

Our Member Will Ellams spotted a Class 66 heading onto the curve at 7.15 am on Tuesday the 1st September. This, after investigation, was found to be a ballast working from Basford Hall (Crewe) to Frodsham Junction, the train returned empty to Crewe via Ditton.

Further workings occurred on the 2/3rd September with another apparently next week. Two excavators are also working on site. This is really good news, in that major infrastructure working is occurring, ahead of work to reopen the line for regular bi-directional passenger trains, and does show that there is serious intent to proceed at all levels of the railway management.

The very latest we have heard on this is that the current activity relates to site investigation to firm up on cost estimates. However, this does not explain the large stockpile of ballast and the site depot set up by Murphys where the Expressway crosses the curve, with a notice stating 'Busy rebuilding your railway'.

Further news will be posted on our website as, and when, we hear anything.

WE/RF/JH

VISIT TO LONG MARSTON TO SEE VIVARAIL "D" TRAIN CONVERSIONS

NCRUG were fortunate to procure a place to visit the Long Marston development site "Vivarail" occupy at Long Marston on the 24th September. I went with a sceptical eye regarding these vehicles as ex London Transport District Line cast offs.

"Vivarail" have completed one demonstrator vehicle which can run under its own power on the test circuit at Long Marston. The party of visitors were met by Adrian Shooter and his team and were all

able to ride on the vehicle and complete three circuits of the test track. Others present included local authorities, the vehicles engine manufacturer and train operating companies,(TOC's), and the Railway Heritage Trust, (RHT).

I was impressed with the interior ambience of the vehicle and the low noise levels during acceleration and even at the top speed available (50 kph - 30 mph), on the test circuit, were impressive. The ride on the test circuit which includes some difficult twists, curves and points together with continuous welded rail, (CWR), was very good. The end structure of the vehicles has been altered to provide added protection to the driver's area which will also benefit passengers.

Two other vehicles were seen under modification and the innovative methods of engine replacement was seen. An engine removal time of ten minutes was claimed which makes these units friendly for maintenance purposes. This is achieved by the inclusion of friction lugs in the engine frames thereby avoiding the need for bolts to secure the engines in their frames. Various dummy seating layouts were demonstrated separately out of a vehicle. However, no toilet cubicle was seen.

It seems these units will be tested on the main line this winter and with a TOC during the coming year. My only remaining concern will be the ride quality on the main line at 100 kph (62mph) and this remains to be sampled.

I look forward to riding on a Class 230, sometime in the next 2 years. I think we will all be pleasantly surprised and these vehicles may well see the "Pacers" off which we will all be glad to see go!

JH

NCRUG – VIDEO – HALTON CURVE PROJECT SPONSORED BY ACoRP

This may seem an obscure way to start this story but there you go! I was fortunate to visit Stuttgart in May and my German friends indulged me with some fine sights in Schwabia where a Class 52.80 2-10-0 and a Class 64 2-6-2T spent a weekend pounding up and down a rather steep hill to a town called Weizheim. We also saw five other steam locomotives working including one on the narrow gauge and a Class 01.10 Pacific under repair at Crailsheim.

My return flight was delayed by some technical problem and on joining the aircraft I found myself sitting next to a young lady who had been visiting her beau in Stuttgart. Flight costs were a rather economic £30 from each way from Manchester. It transpired she had just finished a Media Studies degree course and was looking for some subjects to feature in establishing her credentials as a "Videographer".

Halton Curve, I though might make a suitable subject for such a project and so it was to be! We discussed the topic at length and exchanged details and arranged to meet the following week.

I waxed lyrical about the subject of Halton Curve to Saskia having been a well known bore on the subject for 25 years! I advised her that we had no money but she may like to consider the project as an excellent vehicle to make further contacts who may like to make even further videos! However, I said I would try and source some funds somewhere in order to proceed.

I turned to ACoRP, the Association of Community Rail Partnerships, for advice and they were able to make a grant with matched funding within two days of the request! The project now looked like it could have some legs and I advised the NCRUG Committee and Saskia what I thought we could achieve. Saskia soon had ideas of her own to take it forward while I spent a day looking for suitable vantage points to video the "Parliamentary Train" – the 07.53 Chester to Runcorn(Main Line) summer dated train.

Fortunately we had been planning our annual trip over the Halton Curve and through the kind offices of Northern Trains and our Secretary Cedric Green this was scheduled to take place on the 4th July. We were able to combine this with our filming schedule and Saskia visited the line side, and the stations which the train passes through and filmed our Members at work before hand; while also filming in the Parliamentary Train on the day and subsequently.

On the day we set up a shooting programme, with the camera team, and our Committee Members and were also able to interview Graham Evans MP who was kind enough to speak on camera.

Over an hour of recordings were undertaken and Saskia was able to meld the interviews and lineside shots into a video(digital) - 7 minutes in length; this was delivered to us at the beginning of August. Some technical problems with equipment have blighted us during August but we are now adding some finishing touches to the production which we will present to our Members at our AGM in October.

JH

LIVERPOOL SOUTH PARKWAY – THE AIRPORT STATION??

Each time I visit Liverpool South Parkway, (LSP), I am impressed even though it is always rather quiet because I am there during 'off peak' periods. However, I am told it functions well during the peak hours and is becoming increasingly popular as an interchange due to the number of rail services which now stop there. Northern Rail extended some of their Liverpool Lime Street service to Blackpool to originate/terminate at LSP thereby relieving platform pressure at Lime Street as well as providing a direct service from south Liverpool to Wigan, Preston and Blackpool. As all Manchester and Birmingham services already stop at LSP it provides plenty of opportunities to travel within the North West and even further afield in some instances without having to make a connection.

However, services to local areas in north Cheshire, the North Wales coast, Chester, Wrexham and beyond, are sadly non-existent due to the Halton curve being restricted to south/north workings only. This, of course, prevents a usable passenger service being introduced. As regular Readers will know this issue is currently being addressed, (see progress report above). It is hoped that a service between Chester and Lime Street, via LSP, can be established by 2018 after many decades of being a virtually disused part of the network. Assuming this service is successful, as NCRUG and many others fervently believe, then additional services from Liverpool Lime Street and LSP to the North Wales coast, Wrexham and the Marches will follow.

The city of Liverpool, North Wales, Snowdonia and the Borderlands towns of Shrewsbury, Ludlow and others, are already tourist areas. The potential to grow this part of their economies will be greatly enhanced by taking advantage of the plethora of budget airline flights providing low cost services into Liverpool Airport. Short visits from Continental tourists to our local attractions become much more feasible and attractive if easy public transport journeys can be made from the Airport Terminal/LSP direct to, for instance, Llandudno, Betws-y-Coed or Church Stretton. Conversely, short breaks to the Continent also become much more appealing for Brits wanting to enjoy the delights of the near Continent. It is a win/win situation.

However, even with the opening of the Halton curve, there is still a major weakness in the chain which needs to be addressed in order to realise the full potential of this lucrative market. That weakness is the short, (maybe a little more than 1 mile), distance between LSP and Liverpool John Lennon Airport. Even in off peak periods this short journey currently takes 15/20 minutes on a normal service bus which involves local stops, several sets of traffic lights and a route which is not the shortest. It is subject to all the uncertainties of urban traffic flows which can occur at any time and without notice. Originally there was a dedicated bus link but this was withdrawn a number of years ago. Passengers/tourists arriving with luggage are far from impressed with such an abysmal service. To make matters worse there is no taxi rank at LSP so phone calls have to be made in order to summon one. All time consuming even though 'apps' are now available to enable arrangements to be made before arrival at LSP. However, this all adds to the workload of busy travellers.

Despite the short distance involved the 21st Century solution to this problem will involve considerable expense and neither the Airport nor Merseytravel seems keen to take up this challenge. In the meantime the industrial land between the Airport and LSP is being developed thereby reducing the options available for solving this issue.

Funding for the north has recently been announced specifically for developing tourism. It would be good if some of this funding were to be made available for constructing a dedicated, non-road, link between the Airport and LSP.

If anyone has used the most successful 'on demand' Personal Rapid Transport system linking Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 to Business Parking for T5 they will have experienced a Pod system which takes them 3.8 kilometers, (= 2.35 miles), in 5 minutes and with an average waiting time for a vehicle of 10/15 seconds and with 80% of passengers having no wait at all. A little facetiously a thought comes into my head – Heathrow is in the South East – is this why we haven't got a similar system up here, or is the small matter of £several million an obstacle, (I'm sure it is)? To be kinder, maybe we haven't got round to it yet; maybe a demand study is just around the corner?

However, the first step is for the 'powers that be' to recognize that there is a problem and that its satisfactory solution will hugely benefit the local and regional economies by enabling tourist organisations to offer much more comfortable, straightforward and shorter journey times to their local attractions. It's all about convenience these days and making it as easy as possible for travellers to reach their destinations.

Of course, the above suggested solution would also benefit all users of the Airport, including staff, as well as being more environmentally friendly than a road based system. It goes without saying that business travellers would also benefit if these improvements came to fruition.

We note the Government Transport Select Committee is working on a 'ground access to airports' report and NCRUG will be submitting an abridged version of the above for consideration by the committee. We would be interested in receiving Readers' views on this topic.

CWG

LOCOMOTIVE HAULED TRAINS

For many, these trains are the ideal way to travel and some find a day out in a "Proper train" quite relaxing. We are fortunate that on the Chester to Warrington line we are now usually able to enjoy this method of transport every day.

The present resurgence of loco hauled services started with the Holyhead to Cardiff known as "Gerald" to aficionados and this train is special because it features a meal service at tables in the Dining/Kitchen coach.

We then had the addition of three train pairs on the Holyhead/Llandudno – Manchester/Crewe axis which started in December 2014.

In May a further set of services between Preston/Barrow and Carlisle was converted to locomotive haulage. In each case this action has been taken to provide additional capacity for peak hour traffic flows and exemplifies the shortage of rolling stock across the country. The additional funding in all cases has been provided by the Government, (Welsh or English).

There are also services operated by "Scot-rail" around the Fife Circle from Edinburgh in Peak hours and in addition many services from Birmingham (Moor Street)/Kidderminster to London Marylebone are also loco hauled.

The trains in our locality are :-

05.33 Holyhead – Cardiff 09.59 SSX
17.16 Cardiff – Holyhead 21.45 SSX
07:11 Crewe – Chester 07:30 SSX
07:38 Chester – Manchester Piccadilly 08:51 SSX
09:50 Manchester Piccadilly – Holyhead 12:36 SSX
13:01 Holyhead – Manchester Piccadilly 15:51 SSX
16:50 Manchester Piccadilly – Llandudno 19:03 SSX
19:34 Llandudno - Crewe 21:06 SSX
05.45 Barrow – Carlisle 08.33 SSX
08.41 Carlisle – Barrow 11.32 SSX
11.38 Barrow - Carlisle 14.28 SSX

14.34 Carlisle – Barrow 17.22 SSX
17.30 Barrow – Carlisle 20.31 SSX
05.15 Carlisle – Barrow – Preston 09.35 SSX
10.04 Preston – Barrow 11.33 SSX
14.37 Barrow – Carlisle 17.28 SSX
17.37 Carlisle – Barrow 20.29 SSX

Saturdays

05.15 Carlisle – Barrow 08.04 SO
08.45 Barrow - Carlisle 11.35 SO
11.56 Carlisle – Lancaster 16.08 SO
17.31 Lancaster – Barrow 18.40 SO
05.46 Barrow – Carlisle 08.33 SO
08.42 Carlisle – Barrow 11.30 SO
11.38 Barrow – Carlisle 14.24 SO
14.33 Carlisle – Barrow 17.23 SO
17.32 Barrow – Carlisle 20.29 SO

SSX – Saturdays and Sundays Excepted

SO – Saturdays Only.

The cheapest way to enjoy the Cumbrian trains on offer is with a “Cumbrian Round Robin ” for £29.50 or £19.45 with a railcard and return via the West Coast Main line to Lancaster directly. Of course you also need a ticket to Lancaster.

JH

NEWS IN BRIEF

‘Paws and Claws’, a well established independent business selling high quality natural pet foods & accessories has moved from its current premises in Main Street, Frodsham into unit 2 at Frodsham station in September.

Indulgence Furniture: A new business selling handmade wooden furniture is currently being fitted out at Helsby Station and will be opening shortly.

Runcorn East: John Hobbs and Ian Whitley have planted out the small garden adjacent to the booking office at the station.

Helsby: The long abandoned goods sidings area in the triangle at the west end of Helsby station has been ablaze with wild flowers during the spring and summer months.

Rockfall at Frodsham: Remedial work has recommenced on the sandstone cutting on the south side of the station following a partial collapse which occurred in 2012.

ACoRP awards: Frodsham has been shortlisted in the ‘Best Kept station large floral display’ category in the 2015 community rail awards.

Helsby footbridge: Basic repairs have been made on the wooden side panel on the top of the bridge leading down onto Platform 4 after youths kicked a hole in it.

Anti-social behaviour: NCRUG members are working with British Transport Police and Cheshire Police regarding sporadic outbreaks of unacceptable behaviour at our local stations.

Helsby signal box: 1) A new toilet waste tank incorporating a large pump and protruding outlet has been installed in the signal box at Helsby. We are currently investigating whether or not the outlet is a health and safety hazard and additionally whether the installation is acceptable as it is adjacent to listed buildings.

Helsby signal box: 2) In investigating the above, I have been informed by Railway Heritage Trust that the signal box is now a listed building in its own right

Halton curve: On 4th July, we made (now annual) trip round the Halton curve to Liverpool South Parkway. Local MP. Graham Evans, who secured funding for the restoration of the curve joined the train at Frodsham together with local borough and town councillors.

Merseyrail : Specification of new rolling stock is reported is progressing with dual voltage being considered. This would enable current services to be extended over a wider area.

JB

NCRUG – FUTURE MEETINGS AT FRODSHAM COMMUNITY CENTRE

Tuesday,	13 th October	2015	Pre AGM committee meeting.
Wednesday,	21 st October	2015	Annual General Meeting – all welcome.
Tuesday,	17 th November	2015	Committee meeting
Tuesday,	15 th December	2015	Informal committee meeting
Tuesday,	19 th January	2016	Committee meeting
Tuesday,	16 th February	2016	Committee meeting
Tuesday,	15 th March	2016	Committee meeting
Tuesday,	19 th April	2016	Committee meeting
Tuesday,	17 th May	2016	Committee meeting
Tuesday,	21 st June	2016	Committee meeting
Tuesday,	19 th July	2016	Committee meeting
Tuesday,	16 th August	2016	Committee meeting

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).

North Cheshire Rail Users' Group

monitoring rail services and the travelling environment

from Chester & Ellesmere Port

via Helsby, Frodsham & Runcorn

to Liverpool & Manchester



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

at

Frodsham Community Centre

Fluin Lane, Frodsham

on

Wednesday, 21 st October at 19.00 hrs

Guest Speakers: Ben Davies & Michael Vaughan

of Arriva Trains Wales

Then a short introduction by Saskia Dooley and a showing of video of July 2015's trip on the Halton Curve

Followed by 2015 AGM business meeting

Non members are welcome to attend

Thank you for your continued support

Light refreshments will be available