



Monitoring Rail Services &
the Travelling Environment

Newsletter Winter 2018

FROM THE CHAIR

Entering the New Year NCRUG has assessed it's strategic objectives for the following 12 months and beyond...

With the expectation of the Halton Curve being fully operational again at the end of this year there is recognition of the additional strain this will put on existing station facilities, added to which the installation of ticket machines means travellers already tend to arrive at the platform earlier than they would have if purchasing on board.

NCRUG will be lobbying for improvements at a local level to station infrastructure to cater for the expected increased number of rail users. At the time of writing it was noted the proposed scale of car parking charges for both Helsby and Frodsham have been announced by Cheshire West and Chester Council. Whilst the necessity of moderating competing demands for a finite parking resource must be acknowledged, there is still no sign of increasing capacity to cope with the increased demand. Parking charges at stations dis-incentivise modal shift from car-train, all when a key junction in Frodsham is already designated as a formal Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) as a result of vehicle emissions – one of only 3 Borough wide.

Overcrowding is cited as a frequent issue for travellers, especially on the Manchester Piccadilly line. A shortage of rolling stock has seen 2-car units used at times of the day when there is demand for more space. NCRUG has met with the potential future franchisees for this service and flagged overcrowding up as a major issue. Although there is a general shortage of suitable rolling stock due to retirement of older equipment combined with lack of the anticipated cascade from the now stalled electrification programme, we continue to push for effective stop-gap measures to bridge the lead in time for new stock procurement. NCRUG will continue to work for both the needs of the local rail user as well as lobby for strategic improvements regionally.

NCRUG is on Social Media! Follow us on Facebook; there are regular news items posted relevant to our area; Halton Curve updates, disruption news, but also other snippets of interest and of course Social Media also offers the opportunity for direct feedback. NCRUG is reaching to a wider audience

and by just following us and the work of the group you can help. Committee meeting dates are posted on the website www.ncrug.org.uk and all guests will be extended a warm welcome.

Finally, I must reflect on our recent success at the Cheshire Best Kept Station Awards where Frodsham came through as overall winner. In no small part thanks to the hard work of the Briggs team and other station volunteers, the award was a fabulous way to kick off 2018. If you think you can help out at our stations please contact the volunteer co-ordinator; volunteering@ncrug.org.uk.

Mark Warren

CHESHIRE BEST KEPT STATION AWARDS (CBKSA)

Six NCRUG members attended this most enjoyable event held at the Grange Theatre, Hartford, on 23rd January. Mark Barker, who chairs the CBKSA organising committee, was the Master of Ceremonies and the guest speaker was Jools Townsend the Chief Executive of ACoRP.

A record total of 17 awards were awarded and a total of nineteen local Mayors were in attendance. This event has grown substantially since it was launched by John Hulme, BEM, 15 years ago. John alluded to this in a short speech which he made at the end of the presentations.

John Hobbs, founder member of NCRUG, sat on the CBKSA committee until his untimely death last September and, in recognition of his work for the committee, NCRUG and the East Lancashire Railway, a new award was created - the 'John Hobbs Award' for 'enthusiasm'. A highly appropriate theme reflecting John's personality and his relentless work ethic.

The awards seemed to be going mostly to the east of the county, (although Neston were successful at their first attempt). Then the final award, which was the 'Winner – Cheshire Best Kept Station' was announced as being Frodsham. We were and are delighted. Committee members Janet and Philip Briggs work very hard on Frodsham station and it is down to them that we won this award. Unfortunately, Janet and Philip were unable to attend but there was no shortage of NCRUG members willing to step up to the podium to receive the award.

It is appropriate here to thank Janet and Philip for all their efforts on the station. They could do with some help in the future so we put out a plea for volunteers. Interested parties please contact any member of the committee listed at the end of this newsletter or the Volunteer Co-ordinator mentioned by Mark, above. 'Every little helps', not just Tesco but NCRUG – volunteering for just an hour a week or a month can make a tremendous difference so do, please, consider helping in this way. You will be very welcome and it will be a rewarding experience.

CWG

HALTON CURVE NEWS

Work continues and is on schedule. Frodsham Junction Crossover has been completed and the signalling is being done this month, (February). Halton Junction Crossover will follow in April and the signalling in early May. Finally, Halton Junction OHLE will go up in late May 2018 to complete the engineering work.

NCRUG have learned from the Department for Transport that the Halton Curve service will fall into the Wales & Borders franchise. With the service commencing in December this year and the new franchise due to commence in October, the TOC could be any one of three bidders. The bidding process is currently in progress but the winner will not be announced until the summer. So we have to wait to see which TOC will be operating the service. We do know it will not be the existing TOC, (Arriva Trains Wales), because they have pulled out of the bidding process.

As an aside, we should mention that the Invitation to Tender, (ITT), document has not been issued by the Welsh Government/Transport for Wales which, to the best of our knowledge, is the first time such information has been withheld; we thought it was a statutory requirement. However, the Welsh Government/TfW have named the document 'Invitation to submit Final Tenders', (ITSFT) instead of

ITT so maybe that is their way of circumventing a statutory requirement? On the other hand we understand that the franchise is not as prescriptive as the norm and, therefore, there may be less need to issue an ITT/ITSFT.

NCRUG have now moved their attentions to finding out what the fares will be and to campaign that they be made competitive with the Merseyrail Chester/Liverpool service. We are mindful of the big disincentive on the Borderlands Line for journeys towards Liverpool due to the disparity of fares on their line compared with Merseyrail.

We are also trying to find out which rolling stock will be used. The national rolling stock position is not good and it is unclear as to what will be available for the service. We had hoped the Class 319 Flex, (re-designated Class 769) which is being converted at Brush, Loughborough, would be available but we understand it is running way behind schedule. This rolling stock will be able to run under the wires, on third rail and on diesel so it would have performed well on the climb out of Lime Street to Halton Junction where the diesel could complete the journey. We also hope that at least two units will operate the service which must be robust from the outset in order to avoid delays and cancellations which would, obviously, be detrimental to growing the new service.

Heaven forbid that there is a last minute derogation allowing Pacers to continue for another year or so or that the Halton Curve service be delayed; we think both these are most unlikely as they are far too politically sensitive.

Finally, we are in discussion with Merseytravel concerning publicity for the service. NCRUG have put forward several ideas including a steam loco for a week at normal fares, (as Tornado on the Settle to Carlisle line last year) and a celebrity to formally open the service plus, of course, media announcements, leaflets, posters etc.

CWG

.....and here is the latest progress report from Merseytravel on the Halton Curve

and NOTE WEEKEND LINE CLOSURES (shown in bold type)

NEXT STAGE OF HALTON CURVE UPGRADE GETS UNDERWAY NEXT WEEKEND

*Work continues on the 1.5 miles of rail track near Frodsham, known as the 'Halton Curve' next weekend, **Saturday 10th – Sunday 11th February and Saturday 17th – Sunday 18th February.***

Network Rail's Team Orange will be renewing track, recovering old signals and commissioning new colour-light signals and associated signalling equipment in the Frodsham area. A new modern signalling panel will be installed inside Frodsham signal box in place of the traditional mechanical levers which have been used to control train movements on the Chester-Warrington line and the Halton Curve since the 1900's!

A more modern, advanced system will mean more reliable train services for passengers for generations to come.

Vital upgrades to track will enable a new hourly service, in both directions, between Liverpool and Chester. The services, proposed to start running from December 2018, will generate 250,000 new trips, boosting the economy by £100m.

The Merseytravel scheme, due to cost a maximum £18.75m, is being funded through the Government's Growth Deal and the Liverpool City Region. It is being developed by the Liverpool City Region, (including Halton Council), Cheshire West & Chester Council, the Welsh Government and a consortium of the six county authorities in North Wales.

It is part of the £340m investment in the Liverpool City Region and sits within Network Rail's Great North Rail Project – a multi-billion pound investment plan to transform train travel across the North.

Passengers travelling between Chester and Manchester are advised to check on: www.nationalrail.co.uk before they travel. Train services between Chester and Manchester, via

Warrington, will be diverted with Rail Replacement Bus Services running between Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn East.

There will be no trains serving Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn East over these weekends. Check journey plans on-line before travelling and allow extra time for the journey.

MERSEYTRAVEL

PORT OF LIVERPOOL

The £400mn investment, by Peel Ports, in the newly constructed Deep River Berth at Seaforth is now completed and ready to receive the largest container ships in the world. Up till now only Felixstowe and Southampton could fulfil this role. This investment by Peel has the potential to double the number of containers passing through the port. Currently two thirds of shipments into Felixstowe and Southampton are destined for the Midlands and the North of England.

Coupled with the widening of the Panama Canal, to accommodate these huge vessels, journey times to and from the Far East will be substantially reduced and Liverpool should be an attractive entry and exit port for the ever expanding worldwide container trade and the increasing need for 'just in time' deliveries.

However, to compete with Felixstowe and Southampton will not be easy. Liverpool has to break into an existing market which means, even if the market expands as expected, taking business away from the two long established ports in the south. Network Rail are already working with Felixstowe to improve rail links through to Nuneaton and the WCML. Southampton's rail electrification scheme up to the midlands is on hold but the line still exists and is in daily use for freight. Another hurdle for Liverpool is that Felixstowe Port is owned by the Hutchinson Group of [China](#). Shipowners also prefer to have minimum ports of call to reduce costs; so one port of call for the whole of the UK would be preferable to them.

At present Liverpool only has half the product to offer, namely the River Berth. The other important half is that of moving the containers to and from the Port of Liverpool within the U.K. The largest container ship will have 18,000 TEU's, (20ft Equivalent Units), on board which presents a huge logistical problem for our road system. The main road connecting the port to the Motorway network is Dunning's Bridge Road, (A5036). This road is already heavily congested and will not be able to cope with an increase in HGV's once the new berth is operating.

As a rail user group we are, of course, advocating that this extra capacity be accommodated on the rail network. However, it transpires that this is unlikely because there is a serious shortage of paths across the Pennines. To illustrate this point readers may be aware that currently biomass trains from the Port to Drax Power Station in Selby, Yorkshire, have to take a circuitous route of 99 miles because the more direct route of 70 miles is not available on the intensely used passenger routes between Manchester and Leeds.

Once the trains have climbed from the Port, hauled by a Class 59, they arrive at Tuebrook Sidings adjacent to Edge Hill station where the loco unhooks and enters a short distance into the mainly disused Victoria/Waterloo tunnel. A Class 66 loco takes the train to Drax whilst the 59 returns to the docks for the next load. The Class 59 is more suitable for negotiating heavy loads up the steep gradient from the docks. The 66's route is to Warrington, via Earlestown, then across to Northwich via Hartford Junction on through Altrincham to Stockport before traversing the east side of Manchester to Rochdale and the Calder Valley line to Wakefield, Knottingley and Drax.

Transport for the North are working on this issue but solutions would appear to be in the longer term because they will necessitate new infrastructure and HS3, (now referred to as Northern Powerhouse Rail).

However, there are other options worth considering as medium term solutions. One would be the re-building of the link between Colne and Skipton which has the advantage of going through the Aire Gap where gradients are gentle. There would be capacity issues through Leeds station which could be avoided if the 5 mile section of line between Menston through Otley to Arthington was re-instated to give direct access to the Harrogate to York Line. Long term the £500m Leeds Station revamp scheme should take account of freight trains needing to pass or avoid going through the station.

A second medium term solution would be to put in an east/south curve from the Clitheroe to Hellifield Line to enable freight trains to traverse the Aire Gap to Skipton and beyond. This would be a longer route than Colne/Skipton but could be implemented much quicker although still presenting difficulties through Leeds station.

In the meantime Highways England have proposed building an entirely new dual carriageway road from the Port to the Motorway network at Switch Island rather than up-grade Dunning's Bridge Road. It is planned to go right through the middle of the Rimrose Country Park which is a haven for local folk and canal enthusiasts; the Leeds/Liverpool canal runs through the park. On the basis of cost Highways England are not prepared to consider a tunnel much to the disgust of local residents who point to the £6bn being proposed for the 3 mile long East London tunnel under the Thames. It's the North/South divide again and displays a wonton disregard for the environment in the north.

So there you have it – the Deep Water berth has been on the radar for at least 10 years but we are only now considering the implications of this huge increase in traffic through the Port. It should have been part of the plan from the beginning. As a country we are not good at infrastructure but, hopefully, things will get better – they certainly need to.

CWG

LLANGOLLEN RAILWAY – EXTENSION TO CORWEN CENTRAL STATION

The Corwen Central project team has concluded that, within its available resources, in 2018 the aim will be to complete the island platform for the new terminus. First the base of the water tower at the Carrog end of the site will be built, followed by the wall for platform 1. The infilling of the island platform area will likely occupy the summer months, requiring 10,000 tonnes of spoil to be brought in levelled and compacted ready for paving. After that the loop line and connection to the points for siding and main line will be completed during the late summer. This will leave the challenge of infilling the gap in the embankment caused by the Welsh Water Company's access, now resolved by their new road, and connection through the existing railhead for the autumn/winter.

The consequence is that a first passenger train to Corwen Central is likely to be in early 2019 and Dwyrain Corwen East temporary platform will remain in use during 2018. However, it is intended it will be closed and dismantled in October 2018, as part of the engineering work needed to connect through to the terminal station. Completion of the initial phase of the project will provide basic terminal facilities adjacent to the town centre and car park aimed at attracting more passengers from the North West Wales tourist market.

As ever, all this is dependant upon resources – manpower, materials and finance – all of which remain a challenge.

George Jones

NEWS IN BRIEF

ATW Club 55 - for those aged 55 and over restarted on Sunday 7 January, and will run until Saturday 3 March. The price is £27 return with a £1 discount for railcard holders. Tickets cannot be used before 09:30 Monday to Friday. There are no weekend restrictions. Return travel must be within 8 days and all return travel must be completed by 10th March 2018. The ticket can be purchased on the day of travel and break of journey is allowed.

West & Wales Strategic Rail Prospectus – NCRUG will be represented at a House of Commons event on the 26th February for the launch, by Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling, of this initiative. The Prospectus has been formulated by leaders from the public and private sectors in Cheshire, North Wales and Warrington, with support from Transport for the North and the City Regions of Liverpool and Manchester.

North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership – A Community Rail Officer has been appointed and will commence her duties from Monday 26th February. The CRP is being managed by the University of Chester and NCRUG will have input.

Liverpool City Region RUG'S/Associations - This group continues to have a morning meeting, quarterly, at Merseytravel offices, to discuss mutual issues and aspirations and is followed by an afternoon session with the Chairman of Merseytravel and his deputy and the Head of Rail Operations. The group, excluding the Ormskirk, Preston & Southport Travellers' Association, also meets with Cheshire West & Chester Council and Growth Track 360 on a quarterly basis. Here are some of the issues which the group keep on the radar of the stakeholders:-

- 1) Ellesmere Port, (Hooton), to Helsby and beyond – service enhancement
- 2) Chester to Liverpool Lime Street, via Halton Curve – service extensions
- 3) Manchester Airport – Western Link
- 4) Mid Cheshire Link, (Northwich to Crewe), with new stations at Gadbrook Park & Middlewich
- 5) Mold Junction to Penyfordd – re-instatment
- 6) Port of Liverpool – rail freight – paths across Pennines – Canada dock tunnel re-opened?
- 7) Port of Liverpool – road freight – Rimrose Valley tunnel
- 8) Liverpool John Lennon Airport to Liverpool South Parkway dedicated Link
- 9) New station at Deeside Parkway
- 10) Improvements at Shotton – high and low level connections
- 11) More trains stopping at Shotton Low Level with better connections to N Wales Main Line
- 12) Chester Station capacity constraints – track re-alignment – new platform(s)
- 13) Rossett to Wrexham re-doubling
- 14) Liverpool Waters development – passive provision for railway station using existing tunnels
- 15) More trains stopping at Eccles – for west Manchester destinations

=====

Contacts:-

	<u>PHONE</u>	<u>EMAIL</u>
Chairman: Mark Warren	07979 513205	chair@ncrug.org.uk
Vice Chairman: Martin Patrick	0151 4201910	martinpatrick@btconnect.com
Secretary: Cedric Green	0151 6258017	cw.green@talktalk.net
Membership: Bob Florence	01928 731209	r.florence45@btinternet.com
Newsletter: Cedric Green	0151 6258017	cw.green@talktalk.net
LSP contact: Mike Taylor	0151 4272288	mikeporg@btinternet.com
British Transport Police:	0800 405040	

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).

=====