



Newsletter

Winter 2020-'21

FROM THE CHAIR

Timetabling now and the future

Last month saw the introduction of another temporary timetable, implemented on 25th January, in order to arrest industry losses as a result of greatly reduced demand. The main changes for the North Cheshire Line being reduced Transport for Wales (TfW) off-peak frequency to Manchester (2 hourly) in addition to the previous reductions to Liverpool Lime St (also now 2 hourly). Northern have also reduced services (see below) and all services terminate at Chester as before.

The restoration of 'normal' services in our area has a great deal of uncertainty to it. Transport for the North (TfN) together with Network Rail are currently running a consultation on all services into Manchester, the results of which could have far reaching consequences for future services.

Essentially stemming from the non-delivery of long promised infrastructure upgrades to the Castlefield Corridor in Manchester, re-timetabling is viewed as the only short-term solution for when services return to some sort of normalcy. This consultation shouldn't be dismissed as merely a sticking plaster though; there is clear signalling that the old days of train operators bidding for the 'lolly scramble' of network access on an individual basis are gone. This is clear attempt at a holistic regional view taking account of the needs of all communities irrespective of the branding on the local train.

There are several options being proposed, all of which result in reduction of frequency through this notorious pinch point, either by way of re-routing or a simple paring back of services. All 3 options involve a level of pain for the region and some directly to the North Cheshire Line through Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn East, though there are also some opportunities presented within. Looking at the implications for us, in turn...

Option A:

Current TfW services to Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport run through to Stalybridge via Victoria.

Option B:

No significant change for us; Manchester Piccadilly and Airport services are maintained at roughly pre-pandemic frequency although there are service reductions elsewhere in the network which put other communities at a disadvantage.

Option C:

The most extreme of the 3 options proposed (also, on paper, providing the greatest reduction of delays) involves the current TfW services to Manchester Piccadilly being re-routed at Chester and using the Mid-Cheshire line to Manchester on a semi-fast basis. Under this option, current Chester – Leeds services would run at ½ hourly intervals (by Northern) via Manchester Victoria. The proposed stopping pattern with this service would include

Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn East therefore those stations would have ½ hourly services to Leeds but with the loss of direct services to Piccadilly and the airport. No mention has been made of Ellesmere Port.

What do the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) think? At a recent meeting with TfW concern was expressed (by TfW) over the ability to run hourly services over the Mid-Cheshire Line in conjunction with the full Northern service, along with limitations of single track line from Mouldsworth to Mickle Trafford. Closer inspection of this point by committee member (and ex-railwayman) John Ryan has largely allayed the fears over Mid-Cheshire Line capacity – that is assuming hourly rather than half-hourly Northern services on that line. I suspect the prime concern of TfW's is they would stand to lose what must surely be (in normal times) one of their most profitable routes. NCRUG also raised the concern over the loss of the popular service providing direct access to North Wales and were assured that TfW would endeavour to run Lime St – Llandudno services on an hourly basis in 2022, but without a firm commitment at this stage while the consultation outputs are pending. An interesting twist with Option C is the future management of our local stations; currently this is performed by TfW who as an organisation still don't recognise the North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership. Northern, who already provide the bulk of the funding for the partnership, might be more proactive in promoting the stations and various destinations along the line – though such arrangements are for the future.

Responses to the consultation from rail user groups have been called for, and NCRUG will be furnishing one in due course. I'm mindful that Option C presents the greatest options including 3 trains an hour from Chester to Frodsham in each direction and the opportunity for direct services to Leeds without changes at Victoria not to mention improved frequency for Runcorn East. A half hourly service would mean connection times at Newton le Willows for Manchester Piccadilly and Airport would be minimal. The views of individual members would be welcome, please email chair@ncrug.org.uk. John Ryan has produced an impressive hand written 12 page report providing a deep insight into the 3 options proposed, I hope to have the salient points digitalised and available to view on the website in the near future.

The post-pandemic landscape is difficult to predict. The rate of shift back to rail will depend on whatever message the government wishes to send on public transport usage at the time, but notwithstanding that, it is expected there will be an increased demand for airport services and leisure routes along with a flattening demand for peak hour commuter services in the short term. Longer term much will depend on the future structure of the fare system, size of government subsidies to the industry, cost of motoring vs home working etc etc. In short, a permanent reduction in services based on unknown future demand would be questionable.

Whilst overall NCRUG accepts the need to reduce demand on the Castlefield Corridor, the underlying suspicion is that temporary timetable changes will become a permanent feature, and funds previously committed for promised upgrades will be used to support other postponed (but much needed) schemes elsewhere. It's my observation that long term deferral of schemes invariably leads to eye watering cost blow outs and a heavily pared back result with the final outcome being no particular scheme is ever completed as originally envisaged. Tomorrow's jam is thinly spread.

Community Rail Partnership (CRP)

The North Cheshire CRP, of which NCRUG sits on the management board, met on 25th January. Northern provided a brief update; they are now on their Lockdown 3 timetable with Chester – Leeds services reduced to 2 hourly on average, and reduced 'local' services to Ellesmere Port from Helsby only. The last of the Class 195 rolling stock has been delivered (195133) and all Class 156 units have now been refurbished. The final re-furbered class 150's and 158 units are due soon. Friday 27th November 2020 goes down in history as the last Pacer journey for Northern when unit 142004 served Kirby – Manchester Victoria. Perhaps there are a select few who will miss these quirky and somewhat eccentric features of a previous era? Northern are also embarking on a number of initiatives including some re-branding and a 'Mobility Scooter scheme' that includes Warrington Bank Quay, Frodsham and Chester. Presumably this compatibility only applies to Class 195 units.

From Avanti West Coast: Timetable changes to 4 trains an hour will extend until end of March 2021.

At Warrington Bank Quay:

- Real time bus screens to be installed in the next 12 months.
- Plans have been drawn for automatic ticket gates and electric vehicle charge points.
- Proposals have been submitted for cycle parking.

Network Rail also provided a brief update at the meeting; not surprisingly on time performance has reached levels not previously experienced, though footfall at Manchester Piccadilly has fallen by some 80% from 2019 levels.

The CRP Chair, Garfield Southall, will also be chairing the Sustainable Transport Task Force. This task force is a project created by the local council (CWaC), and although very much in its infancy will work to support the various sustainable transport initiatives in the borough including rail, bus, cycling and walking in our area, this directly compliments the work of the CRP. NCRUG looks forward to being able to contribute to the work of both organisations with local knowledge and evidence as needed.

NCRUG Volunteering

Although TfW has embargoed any volunteer work at our stations for the time being, NCRUG is constantly looking out for new volunteers to help keep our stations at an award-winning standard. Assuming the restrictions are lifted later in Spring, I expect there will be quite some work required to clear out the overgrowth by then. The Frodsham Youth Association has recently made contact with NCRUG querying whether station activity could contribute to the 'volunteer work' component of the Duke of Edinburgh program the Youth Association currently supports. Such an arrangement would be a 'win win' for all involved.

Secretary Position

As mentioned in the last NCRUG newsletter our secretary, Ced Green, has after many years of dedicated work for the group announced his intention to step down from the position. The role of NCRUG secretary, although important, is not an onerous job and in-depth knowledge of the rail industry is not a pre-requisite. If any member should be interested in this role, please email chair@ncrug.org.uk.

Attached Articles

Attached below is a Llangollen Heritage Railway update from George Jones detailing progress at Corwen and the recent flooding damage inflicted by Storm Christoph.

Also, below an account of a 2002 journey on the 'Parliamentary' over the Halton Curve by Don Rowland, a member of the London North West Railway Society and reproduced with the kind permission of the Society. Many thanks to Dr Patrick Milroy for finding this. Should any members wish to contribute an article or account of interest for future newsletters please email them to the above address.

MW



The shape of things to come? Northern Class 195 passes through Frodsham en-route to Leeds.

Corwen Central News



This time last year, Storm Ciara decided to call by and lash the west coast with high winds and waves. The Dee Valley was not entirely free of its influence and suffered from heavy rainfall, sleet and the usual local flooding.



Ciara's gift to Llanrwst last year Photo : BBC News - Wales

This year, Storm Christoph stopped by resulting in record high river levels in many parts of Wales, including the Dee and the



Tremerchion and Trefnant road bridge washed away over the River Clwyd Photo : BBC News - Wales

Clwyd along with a thick blanket of snow across the mountains. Thankfully most of the main roads remained open.



Storm Christoph makes himself felt across the Clwydian Range Photo : RM

With temperatures fluctuating from about -5C to +9C much of the low level snow did not remain in place very long. Unfortunately, the Corwen Station Site has had to remain shut due to a combination of flooding across the car parks and CoVid regulations.

Elsewhere on the railway, very small teams of volunteers have been busy with essential maintenance tasks, operating in accordance with both ORR and Welsh Government Regulations.

Corwen Central News

Although full scale work on the Station site has been temporarily halted, this hasn't prevented "off-site" work from continuing. Within the last month or so the Signal Plan for Corwen led by Huw Parker has been approved by the appropriate departments – Permanent Way, Signal and Telegraph, Signalling, Traction and Operations by a combination of e-mailed documents and "Zoom" meetings - 21st century technology assisting progress of the Heritage Railway!!

Elevated position

On the last day prior to the "Lockdown" Peter Robson, Douglas and Phil Hebson spent the day building up the scaffold so work could take place on the roof of signal box porch.



Repairs to the SB porch roof. Scaffold later removed to allow for the fitting of the stairs

Photo : PH

The roof was successfully repaired including some replacement slates. Measurements were

taken to help restore the guttering, which has now been fitted.



New set of stairs fitted to the SB. New gutters added around the porch roof

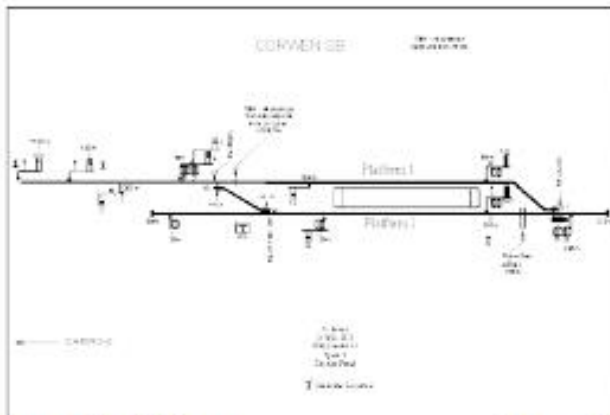
Photo : PR

The scaffolding was removed to allow the steps to be installed. These were delivered on Thursday 28th of January and were installed in their place by the makers. Some handrail needs to be added to complete the work.

Signalling the Future

The operational departments met via Zoom during the last month to agree the Signal Plan for the Corwen area. The plan sets out the style and placement of signals so that trains can be brought safely in and out of Corwen Station and rail vehicles can be moved to and from the UP siding.

Corwen Central News



Corwen Signal diagram

Source : HJP

The placing of signals is dependent upon the approved line speed and the “hazards” to be protected along the route such as points and crossovers and the entry to the station platforms. Signals need to cater for the receipt of trains from the Down direction (West from Carrog) and the dispatch of trains in the Up direction (East towards Carrog).



Bracket signals (CN3,4) and shunt signals (CN 5,6) at the approach to Platforms 1 and 2

Source : HJP

Readers must appreciate that the acceptance of the Signal Plan doesn't mean that signals will suddenly appear at Corwen. The signals will be introduced when time and finance permit and is very much a “slow burn” part of the Project. Once again computer technology has allowed for the production of virtual signal sighting/siting photographs – proposed signals being super imposed on photographs of the current station layout and station approaches.



Up Starter signal, (CN 22) platform 1

Source : HJP

Adjustments to the sighting/siting of signals – from a train driver's point of view – can be easily made and then resubmitted for final approval.

Lever Frame

To ensure that the Signal Plan becomes fully operational, the signals will require some means of moving them. Tradition dictates that this is achieved by levers pulling wires attached to the signals and rods attached to points. To this end, the

Corwen Central News

Project has obtained a suitable ex GWR lever frame, complete with levers.



Dorchester Junction Signal Box - left to Dorchester West, right to Dorchester South and Waterloo

Photo : edit - from an original photo by Mick House

It was originally at Dorchester Jnct Signal Box, which closed in 1986. It originally had 36 operational levers reduced to 30 prior to closure. It is described as a GWR Horizontal Tappet frame which has been in store at South Devon Railway as a kit of parts until it recently became available for purchase.

It had been moved to Caldicot, near Newport, Gwent from whence it was delivered to Llangollen Loco Yard on Saturday January 30th. As is the case with these things, the frame's components will be checked over and refurbished ready for onward movement to Corwen Signal Box. - but again – not for quite a while yet.

The funding for this has been via a short appeal, details of which can be found in the Funding section.



Signal frame components



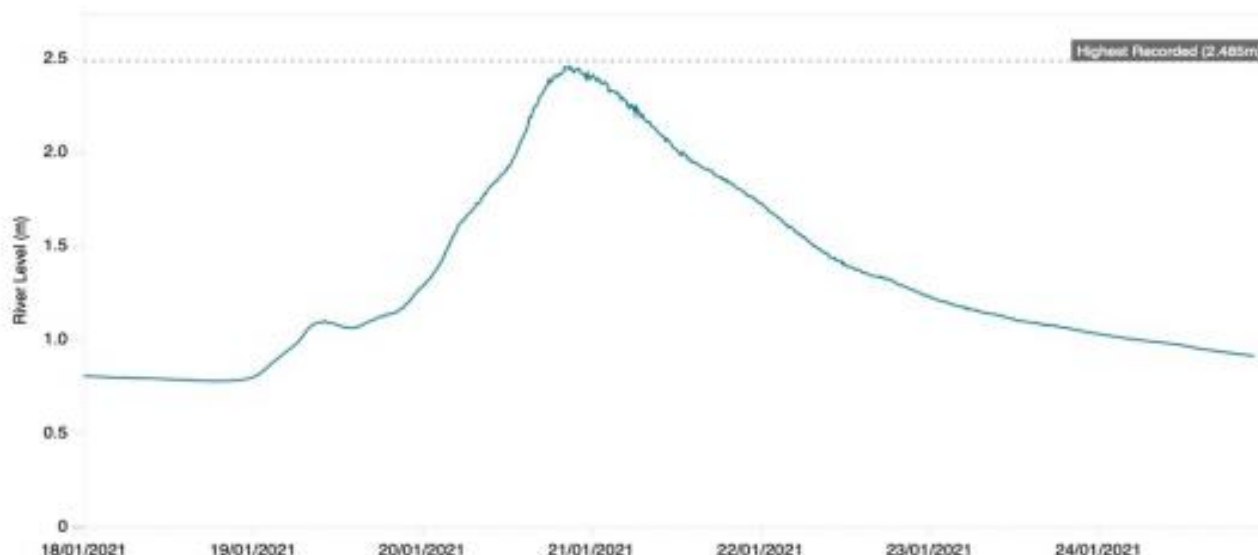
ready for collection

Almost afloat

As mentioned above, Storm Christoph left its mark on the Dee Valley, by producing some of the highest water levels recorded on the Dee in recent history. With the Corwen area and the ticket office site in particular prone to flooding, retired hydrologist and member of the Corwen Project management team, Peter Neve thought it prudent to check up on the site and especially the state of the ticket office which is situated on the western side of Corwen Common.

Before he set off, accompanied by Corwen Stationmaster, joining in a separate vehicle, Peter obtained a hydrograph for the River Dee based on data from the hydrometric monitoring station operated by Natural Resources Wales. The annotated graph shows the approximate river level recorded in 2019 when the flood water, at its peak, came to within 250 mm of the floor of the ticket office. The mid-month peak was about 200-225 mm above the 2019 level, and as a consequence there was the possibility that the floor of the new ticket office would be inundated.

Corwen Central News



Hydrograph for the River Dee at Corwen

Peter and Wayne were pleased to report that the flood water did not ingress the building but preliminary assessment suggested that the water came to within 25 mm of the floor – rather too close for comfort!! That said, the flooding on the river Dee was some of the most exceptional of all time.



Looking east from the ticket office showing flooding of the garden and the Common (in the far distance) and materials afloat
Photo : PN

A severe flood warning was issued for the Lower Dee – something that has not happened in a very long time (if at all). Former colleagues of Peter at NRW are analysing the available data and will calculate a Return Period (frequency) for this latest event. It may well turn out to be a 1 in 100 year event, but the way things are going with the world's climate this may not be the case!!

The only real damage that was found was to the Paddock area, where some of the wooden timbers forming the raised flower bed had floated away, along with materials stored underneath the building.

A pathway that Peter was constructing on the north side of the building was also impacted and will have to be relayed. Peter marked what he perceived to be the highest level reached by the flood water around the ticket office and will in due course determine accurately using surveying equipment, how much “headroom” there actually was. Peter notes that this information may come in useful when determining the design of a permanent ticket office!

Corwen Central News

Funding and Lucky Numbers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
<i>Lucky Numbers</i>									
<i>This month's winning number is 18</i>									

The First winner of the Corwen Station Project Raffle for 2021 is **Derek Foster, with Number 18**. Many congratulations go to Derek on his win, along with many thanks for his continued support of the Project.

The Project's Treasurer, Paul Bailey writes : "All the proceeds from this raffle will be going to the On Platform Station Canopy. With the raffle now fully subscribed for this year and with most members having paid up front for the whole year this has meant that over £2,500 for the Canopy Appeal has already been raised and with other donations has now reached £8,000.

Huw Parker recently sourced a Lever Frame for the Corwen East Signal Box (see report above) for £2950 plus Transport. Following an Appeal via Facebook at the start of 2021 to fund this, I am pleased to report that thanks to several generous donations from our members and supporters this target has been achieved in just 2 weeks!! Thank you to everyone that donated. We have now purchased the Lever Frame and it will be delivered to Llangollen Loco Yard on Saturday January 30th.

I previously asked for sponsors for 4 lanterns @ £200 each for the Lampposts on Platform 2 at Llangollen which have been without lanterns and not working for several years now. In actual fact 5 people came forward to sponsor the lanterns which is good news as we intend putting up a further lamppost (we have a spare one at Llangollen) near the water column further down this Platform. This 5th Lantern has now been purchased and awaits delivery.

Finally Our Dee Bridge/ Berwyn Tunnel Appeal has raised over £30,000 which is fantastic and gratifying achievement which will allow us to get the necessary repairs done once we are out of Lockdown and will also provide us with over £10,000 surplus to put in a Track Maintenance Fund for future track repairs.

With so much care and support out there we have no option but to bring our railway back to life and to safeguard its future"

For donations to the Corwen Project (including the raffle) - Please make cheques payable to CCRD (Corwen Central Railway Development)

For donations to the Dee Bridge Appeal - Please make cheques payable to The Llangollen Railway Trust Ltd

For donations to LRGWLG Tube Appeal - Please make cheques payable to LRGWLG




All cheques and enquiries to Paul Bailey at the following address

Mr Paul Bailey, Dolwen, Bryneghwys, Corwen, Denbighshire LL21 9LY

You can Telephone Paul on 01490 450271 if you wish to pay other than by Cheque.

MY VERY OWN TRAIN

Don Rowland

One of the advantages of advancing years is that one has had opportunities denied to younger folk. In my case I was able to travel over many parts of the former LNWR system which are now lifted. Even so there are some lines over which I never travelled. The Heads of the Valleys line, for example, from Abergavenny to Merthyr. There was a superb farewell rail tour behind a Coal Tank  and a Super D  but at the time I was an impecunious student living far away in Scotland and it was out of the question. On the credit side though it has got to the stage nowadays that there are very few remaining bits of the LNWR over which I have not made a train trip. The Amlwch branch from Gaerwen is one and the old Oxford to Bletchley line between Bicester and Claydon L&NE Junction is another. But so far as I am aware if it is a former LNWR, or LNWR Joint line, and it is still open to passenger traffic then I have been over it at least once, often many, many times. 

West Midlands PTE caused a flutter a few years back when they re-opened first Walsall to Hednesford and then Hednesford to Rugeley Trent Valley to regular passenger services but both were soon attended to: I got two (for me) 'new' bits of line and my record was once again intact. Then, in May 2001 disaster struck. The villain of the piece this time was not Centro but First North Western. I was scanning through Table 81 of the

new summer timetable, Manchester and Crewe to North Wales when I noticed a little footnote: **j**; Runcorn Main Line. This proved to apply to a single train, the 15.33, Mondays to Saturdays, Chester to Runcorn, due Runcorn 16.00. And sure enough, if you look at the 2001-2002 System Map supplied with the timetable the connection from Frodsham Junction to Halton Junction is shown as having a limited service in one direction only. A move like that just could not go unchallenged.

So it was that a rather wet Saturday afternoon in August found me on Chester station searching the timetable posters in vain for the phantom 15.33. An enquiry of the booking clerk as to whether the said 15.33 would be running today produced the somewhat enigmatic response that he wasn't sure and I should ask the station manager. This latter gentleman was more positive. Yes, he had a unit but until the crew turned up from Liverpool he didn't know if it would run. At that stage it has to be admitted that with an odd duty like that, on a Saturday afternoon at the start of the football season things did not look good.

About 3pm a rather dodgy-sounding 150-22 arrived in Chester's number 5 platform and was quickly vacated by the crew with the engines left running. Then at about 15.15 a Merseyrail electric arrived in Platform 7 and a North West Trains crew made their way along the platform to take over the unit. We had a



unit, we had a crew, the screens and the station announcer came to life and the 15.33 was running. Right on time we were away; a two-car unit, driver, conductor and one fare-paying passenger – me, first stop Runcorn (j). Frodsham Junction was ready for us as was Halton Junction and soon all passengers were being advised that the next stop would be Runcorn where this train would terminate and we should make sure we had all our possessions with us. Just before 15.53, and more than seven minutes early, we arrived at Runcorn (j) and it was all over. 📹

For the moment then my record remains intact. Unless, that is, someone from Thames Trains reads this and decides to extend the Bicester service to Milton Keynes or the new Wales franchise decides to run a Bangor to Amlwch service. If they do, I plan to be there. For their sakes I sincerely hope I'm not the only one. Oh!, and just in case you are thinking of taking the above trip yourself, well, it is still shown on the current timetable map but there is no 15.33, or any other direct Runcorn train for that matter, in the winter 2001–2002 Table 81.

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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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