

# Rail North West



Manchester Piccadilly ticket office staffed by Avanti West Coast staff. Photo Arthur Thomson

## Ticket Office Closures

There is widespread dismay at the proposals to close virtually all ticket offices and redeploy staff to platform based “journey makers” or “customer ambassadors,” who’s job will be to assist passengers in using Ticket Vending Machines (TVM’s), providing travel advice, and helping passengers who may need assistance. These proposals have been put forward by all train operators serving the North West except Merseyrail and Transport for Wales, the former having its own station management contract for all its managed stations and the latter has no plans at present to reduce/change station staffing.

It’s noted that the hours of duty for these new roles are less than the previous ticket office opening hours for virtually all stations, and although some of the larger stations have separate platform staff, this would clearly mean less availability of service for those requiring more complex journey information and/or tickets.

Also because different operators run stations (e.g. Avanti West Coast running Stockport, Macclesfield, Wigan, Preston etc) each has come up with different plans as to what they will close and this has resulted in some bizarre outcomes, with Manchester Piccadilly (managed by Avanti West Coast) closing while Manchester Victoria (managed by Northern) remains open and similarly Preston (also managed by Avanti West Coast) would close while Blackpool North (also managed by Northern) remains open. Another side effect is that on the Manchester - Glossop line, Glossop station ticket office would be the only one that remains open.

These proposals are open to consultations conducted separately for each train operator and Railfuture is planning to respond to each, aiming to have a consistent view on all.

It’s not clear from the detail how these proposals can achieve the stated aim of cutting costs by simply redeploying staff,

except perhaps for the possibly marginal effect of cuts to staffing hours.

Railfuture will also be asking questions about accessibility to travel for those with different needs, an analysis shows that the “digitally excluded or disadvantaged” groups (i.e.

those who can’t or find it very difficult to use TVM’s, online or mobile smartphone methods of ticket purchase) are a higher proportion of the population in the North than in South. These group categories are; over 55, disabled or those in social class D/E.



A class 158 bound for Leeds awaits departure from Salford Crescent. Its thought that by re-aligning the track to the right could create space for a third platform. Photo Arthur Thomson

## Salford Crescent Gets Platform 3 But No Platforms 15/16 for Piccadilly

In May, the Government announced £72 million of funding for rail improvements in the North West, but that was allied with the removal of planning applications for nearly decade old plans to add platforms to Piccadilly station to improve capacity there.

The cash will add a third platform at Salford Crescent, track improvement works and new turnback tracks east of Manchester Victoria and near Salford Central.

The money should also improve access at Victoria with “additional platform entrances and exits.”

At Manchester Victoria Station, Rail Minister Huw Merriman revealed the latest of four infrastructure upgrades to improve

day-to-day journeys for passengers across the region while supporting productivity and economic growth.

Transport Secretary Mark Harper also emphasised that this infrastructure investment in Manchester will help to transform journeys across the north not just in Manchester.

The funding is a follow on from £84 million provided for the new timetable launch in December 2022, which was principally spent extending platforms for longer electric trains with more seats to better serve passengers.

He noted, “delays across central Manchester have already decreased by 40% compared to 2019/20 levels, which exceeds initial expectations.”

“Today’s announcement is the latest step in transforming services over the next decade through the Manchester Task Force – a cross industry body, including representatives of: Network Rail, Transport for Greater Manchester, Transport for the North and local train operators.”

This work is planned together with ongoing electrification projects and the Trans-Pennine route upgrade and should enable an enhanced timetable from the middle of the decade and the introduction of future HS2 services into the city.

Network Rail’s Tim Shoveller said, “Today’s announcement is really positive, allowing us to get on with fixing the infrastructure around central Manchester so we can run trains more reliably.”

“The rail industry has come together to work on these proposals, building into a

long-term vision that will get the best for our passengers and freight users alike.”

He also said the revised plans for Manchester Oxford Road station would be put out for consultation to residents and businesses later in the year. This is thought to include plans for two through platforms and two west facing bays to replace the existing five platforms.

As mentioned earlier, Network Rail withdrew a previous planning application for rail infrastructure work in the city, plans which involved adding two new through platforms at Manchester Piccadilly (labelled platforms 15/16) and additional lines between there and Deansgate which the government no longer thinks will provide value for money.

Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham also welcomed the plans.

***Frustrated with rail travel or want to see better services? Want to do something about it?***

***Join Railfuture’s North West Branch Committee and get your views across to industry and government.***

***We are in need of new voices from our members to help in making the case for rail, contact the chair, vice chair or secretary at [northwest@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:northwest@railfuture.org.uk) (combined mailbox) or individually as noted on the back cover of this newsletter. We meet 4/5 times a year in person and use emails etc. to keep up to date the rest of the time. Help us to help all travellers.***



TfW Class 230 at Wrexham General on its first day of operation on the Wrexham – Bidston line. Picture Arthur Thomson

## Welsh Government Responds to WBRUA After Public Statement

Following the Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users' Association (WBRUA) issuing a public statement which said that Transport for Wales service on the Wrexham – Bidston (Borderlands) line was unacceptable in many ways (detailed further below), the Welsh Government has committed TfW to a series of improvements on the line, these are;

- Resolving outstanding technical issues with the new Class 230 trains
- Dedicating the Class 230 fleet to the Borderlands Line
- Working with drivers, guards, and maintenance staff to operate the new Class 230 stock to their full capability.
- Improving information services for passengers
- The availability of ticket purchase options
- The management of Rail Replacement Bus Services, which they pledge to keep to a minimum, as they do not suit the line and the local road network.

Once the hourly service is running to time, they will introduce the promised second hourly limited stop service which, with the existing hourly service, will offer half hourly

services and accommodate freight services on the Line.

WBRUA has in the last six months seen the poorest delivery of a rail service on its line in the memory of its Chairman & Secretary, both of whom are very well-acquainted with the line. The level of service, including communications, has been so bad that the WBRUA wrote a statement to politicians and transport business leaders in the Spring, setting out a wide range of concerns, supported by objective evidence. More recently, the statement was adopted and expanded to cover the concerns of all Rail User Groups in North-West England and North Wales affected by Transport for Wales' train services. Circulation has gone wider, and has received cross-party support. The Open Letter can be found on the WBRUA website and Railfuture also offered their full support.

The group explained why they have decided to, metaphorically, ask for "the book to be thrown" at TfW? The background to the Letter has been a succession of broken promises and failures to deliver a reasonable

train service, even allowing for the obstacle of Covid. WBRUA's view is that no other operator, save possibly Trans Pennine Express, has fallen so far short of its promises and responsibilities. Passengers on the Wrexham-Bidston line have seen delays and cancellations (well outside PPM) become the norm except on Sundays where the schedule has been eased by not running an hourly frequency. Communications around these issues have been woeful. Trains that have lost time progressively during the day are "skip-stopped" without notice, leading to passengers waiting at intermediate stations watching the "cancelled" train cruising through their station carrying passengers.

Much of this can be read in the Open Letter but looking at the Class 230 battery/diesel hybrid units dedicated to the Wrexham-Bidston line in particular, the first unit, 230006, arrived at Wrexham nearly 3 years ago, after testing on the Cotswold Line close to the manufacturers (Vivarail at Long Marston). These units were to have been the bright future of the Wrexham-Bidston line up to the time when through-running from Liverpool becomes possible. They were to enable a half-hourly frequency to be implemented. Even allowing for Covid, their introduction into passenger service has been painfully slow, the first fare-paying passengers boarding 230010 on 3rd April. But they had finally arrived, raising our very reasonable expectations with a power/weight ratio far better than the incumbent Class 150s, more powered axles with which to tackle the gradients and slippery rails south of Shotton and regenerative braking.

The units have won praise for their roomy interiors and quietness. Furthermore, on Day-1 leaving Shotton the unit accelerated from 0-40mph (the line speed at that point) in just 47secs, up a 1:53 incline, fully justifying the claims made about the units' performance. Yet, months on from their introduction has been no day when a Class 230 has completed its daily diagram within 5

minutes of booked time. On the occasions when all the booked services during the day were operated, the units have completed their last journeys well outside PPM, in many cases having been turned short at Wrexham General to avoid being later still. On several occasions the trains became so late that decisions were made to skip a significant number of stops to restore some of the lost time, effectively cancelling those trains for several passengers without the cancellation being officially reported. The trains' inability to keep time has been compounded by frequent mechanical failures in service, these failures continuing after the WBRUA were assured by TfW that they were confident they had dealt with the causes of the failures (the majority of them electrical). Radiators have been blocked by pollen, and we now wait to see whether reliability improves as the pollen season ends. However, it should be noted there have already been four unit failures of the Class 230's this month up to 12<sup>th</sup> July,

A blame culture prevailed between TfW and Vivarail, with the WBRUA striving to establish the truth behind this dreadful service. Just as worrying has been the response from the operator that the units require a different driving technique than the Class 150s and drivers are still getting used to the power and braking characteristics. Early in the training regime, that would have been fair comment, but after months in service WBRUA thinks it is no longer acceptable. On 20th April TfW delivered a presentation to the local RUGs, and in response to a question from the WBRUA admitted that "initiatives such as amended acceleration instructions were yet to be implemented". WBRUA finds that explanation for such dire timekeeping baffling – it might well explain why a new and more powerful train is initially only marginally faster from point to point than its aged predecessor, but it surely cannot be justification for the train operating more slowly! Over two months on from that meeting, the schedule is still not being met.

For their part, leaders within the WBRUA are carefully monitoring punctuality and reliability, including the detailing of end-to-end performance against the schedule, dwell times at stations (not currently proving to be a significant issue) and the skipping of certain stops that do not appear as cancellations. They are pushing for the

introduction of Class 197 units to facilitate the promised 30-minute frequency and for far better communications to the public. At the same time, they are engaging with those recipients of the Open Letter who have offered their active support. The diary is well-filled at the Association, but regrettably for the wrong reasons.

## **Rail Minister: Trans-Pennine electrification 'In full' and HS2 to Manchester**

Rail Business UK reported Transport Minister Huw Merriman, saying "We are committed to do the Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade, electrifying that line all the way over to York. £9bn to £11bn worth of spend **and that's the platform for us to deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail,**" during a visit to Manchester Victoria on May 25<sup>th</sup>.

Further questions suggesting that the Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade may be scaled back in response to funding constraints were rejected by Transport Minister Huw Merriman.

He insisted that rumours that electrification through the core section between Stalybridge and Huddersfield was being cancelled or postponed were not correct.

'I can tell you that nothing's been put in front of my desk that tells me otherwise', he said. '

This assurance was echoed by Managing Director of Network Rail's North West & Central Region Tim Shoveller, who added 'the reality is that you can see the government is still trying to invest in rail; look at the money that's been taken out of road schemes, for example.

'The Department for Transport and Treasury want to make these big schemes happen, but at the same time, they want to be sure that we're delivering the schemes effectively and efficiently. It's important that every option is considered and that we're really clear what is being built before we start. Personally, I'm

sure that the wires will go all the way from Manchester to Leeds.'

Northern Trains Performance & Planning Director Rob Warnes told Rail Business UK 'Northern is supposed to get the local services remapped and I am being asked, as part of my rolling stock strategy from DfT, to buy extra electric trains to do those local Manchester, Huddersfield, Leeds, York services. I'm not going to buy electric trains if they're not going to run and if it's not going to be wired.'

Warnes did caution that there may be some voices calling for a scaling back of the project and, given a previous decision to leave the section unwired before it was reversed, insisted that any future similar proposals must be challenged.

'The Treasury may bring in some consultants who will come up with some wacky ideas, but the aim is to have an electric Trans Pennine Route', he said. 'It's the only way you're going to get those extra freight trains across the route and that won't happen unless they're hauled electrically. There's also no point doing all the W12 gauging for freight if it's not going to happen.

'I'm sure people are dabbling, but we've got to see them off this time, because we didn't do a good enough job last time.'

During his visit, Merriman also insisted that HS2 will be delivered all the way through to

Manchester and that the timescale for it to reach the city is unchanged.

He told reporters 'We're talking about the tens of billions that we're investing in delivering HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail, so there's no scaling back in HS2 when it comes to Manchester; the delivery date remains in place. In terms of the section from the Midlands up to Crewe, that's rebased by two years but that has no impact on our delivery date for Manchester. We will deliver HS2 all the way to Manchester and we will deliver the faster trains to Leeds as well.'

## **Bee Network to bring PAYG Pilot Rollout To Manchester**

The recently announced devolution deal for Greater Manchester included an announcement about the new "Bee Network" integrated transport across all modes, and plans are being made to rollout pay as you go travel on the railway on six Manchester railway routes before the end of this year. The routes involved are;

Wigan – Victoria, (including a new station at Golborne which it is hoped will open in late 2025);

Stalybridge – Southport.

Glossop – Hadfield – Piccadilly.

Rose Hill – Piccadilly.

Buxton – Piccadilly.

Alderley Edge – Piccadilly.

Campaigners are disappointed that these routes are mostly concentrated at Piccadilly, with only two routes terminating or passing through Manchester Victoria.

This work is being done with Great Britain Railways Transition Team (GBRTT) the DfT and GMCA

The single funding settlement is similar to those in place for Scotland and Wales;

Railfuture North West is concerned that the remarks in bold in the first paragraph above may mean that NPR becomes nothing more than an upgraded main Trans – Pennine route and that the Integrated Rail Plan proposals (which have plans for a brand-new route from Warrington to Marsden, along with upgrades to other parts of the route from Liverpool to Sheffield, Hull and Newcastle -the original NPR routes), have been shelved.

however, this is the first time such a flexible grant has been given to an English region. Greater Manchester has a vision to improve public transport through the Bee Network – an integrated London-style transport system for the city region across bus, Metrolink, rail and cycle hire services.

By 2030, Greater Manchester wants local public transport connectivity to be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing. The devolution deal commits to activity to enable the delivery of full integration of local rail services into the Bee Network by 2030. This includes London-style touch-in/touch-out integrated fares and ticketing across bus, Metrolink and rail and Bee Network co-branding across the public transport network.

A new North West Regional Business Unit and GM Rail Board will enable Greater Manchester Combined Authority to improve local scrutiny of performance and help shape future service integration with the Bee Network.

Plans are also being developed to revitalise central Manchester stations. Greater Manchester Transport Commissioner Vernon Everitt told Modern Railways: 'The deal commits to working with Greater Manchester and various other partners including Network Rail to look at how we might be able to revitalise those stations through commercial redevelopment and bring them up to the sort of standards that the rest of Greater Manchester has been brought up to with new commercial and retail developments.'

The level of involvement of GMCA in the redevelopment of local stations is still to be agreed; a 2017 £400 million proposal to take control of 94 stations with the creation of 'community hubs' and surplus land released for housing and commercial development was rejected by the Government

The deal also gives GMCA the ability to sponsor infrastructure and service enhancements through the Greater Manchester Rail board. Mr Everitt suggested the trailblazer deal 'could act as a template for how GBR can work with other regions across the country

## **Joint Meeting With Yorkshire Branch. Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

Railfuture branches in the North are organising a joint meeting, (provisionally in Halifax), on the afternoon of November 25<sup>th</sup> and have invited Professor Paul Salveson to speak on the subject of Rail Reform. Details of the venue and exact time will be published on the Railfuture website when confirmed. *Possible venue, Halifax United Reform Church, Carlton Terrace, Halifax HX1 2AD, please check website or contact Chair, Vice - Chair or Secretary closer to the time.*

## **Tram Train to Fleetwood**

Paul Maynard, the MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, has received a letter from the Transport Minister, Huw Merriman which reveal details on the plans to re-open the line from Poulton-Le Fylde to Fleetwood using tram-trains.

In his letter to Mr Maynard the Minister said: "The early work has indicated that a tram-train is likely to be the best performing option, helping to maximise connectivity along the Wyre peninsula."

"Services would operate twice hourly from Preston station to Poulton-le-Fylde over the existing heavy rail network, before joining a new light rail link between Poulton-le-Fylde and the Denham Way roundabout on Amounderness Way, calling at up to three new intermediate stops. "From there, the services would continue on the existing Blackpool tram network towards Fleetwood town centre and Fleetwood ferry terminal.

## Mills Hill Station Canopy

Mills Hill station in Manchester on the line between Victoria and Rochdale, is due to get a new shelter to replace the one on the

Rochdale bound platform and its due to be completed by the end of July. Contractors are due to look at broken fencing there too,

### Future branch meetings.

Our next branch committee meeting will be on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September at Glossop Business Centre, The Old Co-Op Building, 11 Railway St, Glossop SK13 7AG. This will be at our usual start time of 1300, but we plan to take a sandwich lunch there at 1200 and our secretary will need numbers wanting lunch by 24<sup>th</sup> August, the basic sandwich lunch is priced at £7.50 each and includes assorted sandwiches with salad garnish, fruit, and assorted cakes. Please contact the secretary if you wish to book lunch.

The following meeting is either on 16<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> November depending on securing a venue and also please note the joint meeting with the Yorkshire branch on 25<sup>th</sup> November noted elsewhere in this bulletin. Further dates/details will be on our website but do please get in touch with your branch committee, Chair, Vice Chair or Secretary (details on the back page) to confirm and if there are any issues you wish to raise.

# LASRUG

Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group  
[www.llmr.co.uk](http://www.llmr.co.uk) [www.lasrug.btck.co.uk](http://www.lasrug.btck.co.uk)

The group was formed in 1989 to support and improve the Lancaster to Skipton railway. This links the towns and cities of West Yorkshire with the city of Lancaster and the seaside resort of Morecambe. It also gives access to the Yorkshire Dales, Forest of Bowland and Furness.

If you would like to help us promote the 'Little North Western' line, please contact our Membership Secretary, Lakeber House, Robin Lane, High Bentham, Lancaster. LA2 7AF.

Membership costs £7-00 annually. You will receive a Newsletter quarterly and we invite a speaker from the Rail Industry to the AGM each September.

## **Rail User Groups within the North West area**

(for those viewing in pdf format, those underlined have embedded links to the group's websites or pages)

- Blackpool and Fylde Rail Users' Association
- Bolton Rail Users Group
- Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group
- Friends of Castleton Station
- Friends of Denton Station
- Friends of Eccles Station
- Friends of Littleborough Stations (Lancashire)
- Friends of Reddish South Station
- Friends of Rose Hill Station
- Friends of St Annes Stations email [brussell\\_2019@outlook.com](mailto:brussell_2019@outlook.com)
- Friends of Settle Carlisle Line
- Furness Line Action Group (FLAG)
- Goyt Valley Rail Users' Association (Stockport)
- Lakes Line Rail User Group (LLRUG)
- Lancaster and Skipton Rail Users' Group (LASRUG)
- Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Association (MCRUA)
- North Cheshire Rail Users' Group (NCRUG)
- Ormskirk, Preston and Southport Travellers Association (OPSTA)
- Ribble Valley Rail
- Skipton-East Lancashire Railway Action Partnership (SELRAP) (reopening campaign)
- Support the Oldham Rochdale Manchester line (STORM)
- Stalybridge to Huddersfield Rail User Group
- Wirral Transport Users' Association (WTUA)
- Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users Association (WBRUA)

## **Blackpool and Fylde Rail Users Association (Incorporating South Fylde Line Users Association)**

Chairman; Paul Nettleton  
8, Balham Avenue,  
Blackpool,  
FY4 3QP

Vice – Malcolm Richardson  
Chairman 135, Branstree Road,  
Blackpool,  
FY4 4SR,



Join us, it's only £3/year, £5 for family membership.

Contact; Membership Secretary, c/o 8, Balham Avenue, Blackpool,  
FY4 3QP. Contact through our Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/BAFRUA> and click on "Sign Up"



### **WIRRAL TRANSPORT USERS ASSOCIATION**

We believe in modern, public transport systems for the Wirral and Merseyside and keep our members up to date with public transport developments

We support the campaign for electrification of the Wrexham Central–Birkenhead–Bidston Line

We support new railway stations at Ledsham, Town Meadow and Deeside industrial Estate

We wish to see more bus/rail and car/rail interchange for the benefit of passengers

We are affiliated to Railfuture, Passenger Focus, Travelwatch North West, Bus users UK & represent Campaign for Better Transport in the area.

We publish a newsletter twice a year and run coach excursions

#### **Why not join us? Join today**

**Annual individual subscription £6.00; Family £8;**

**Corporate Bodies £25.00, representative bodies £12.50**

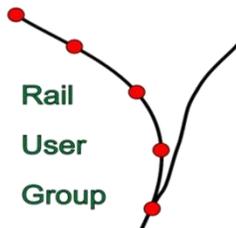
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## Railfuture North West Branch Officers

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<i>Freight Officer</i> (vacant)		
<i>Secretary and Returning Officer</i> Christopher Norton	26 Handsworth Road Blackpool FY1 2RQ	cjnblackpool@btinternet.com 01253 623338

*Rail North West* is the newsletter of the North West branch of Railfuture. Contributions in the form of articles and letters are welcomed. Please send them to Arthur Thomson at arthur.thomson@railfuture.org.uk. Text files e-mailed are particularly welcome. The opinions expressed in *Rail North West* are those of any individual contributors and not necessarily those of Railfuture.

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