

Rail North West



Disused Midge Hall railway station, Lancashire, courtesy Nigel Thompson // Creative Commons BY-SA 2.0

Midge Hall Re-opening?

OPSTA (Ormskirk, Preston & Southport Travellers' Association) has long campaigned for Midge Hall station (closed in 1961) on the line between Preston and Ormskirk to be re-opened and following a response from the Secretary of State for Transport, Heidi Alexander, which indicated that a new station at Midge Hall might be on the horizon, Paul Dickie from OPSTA has drafted the group's proposals with an illustrative timetable and service details, (though an actual timetable may differ).

The SoS's letter included the following, "Regarding Midge Hall, '...we understand

that re-opening the station at MH is a priority for Lancashire County Hall' and 'we recognise the scheme may offer an attractive connection to new housing developments on the old test track and recently approved plans for the new prison at Ulnes Walton'.

The DfT's response makes it clear that the first stage is to get Lancashire County Council (LCC) to make the station a priority in their Transport Plan followed by making the Strategic Outline Business Case to cover investment in signalling, line speed and rolling stock (cont. / p2...).

OPSTA thinks a basic case for re-opening using the existing Northern service can be made, but OPSTA thinks that a better case can be made for wider use of the benefits by transferring the whole line (from Liverpool to Preston via Ormskirk) to the Merseyrail network and operate the line with the recently introduced Class 777 battery-electric units.

The existing service is a 1 tph service from Preston - Ormskirk operated by Class 150 or 156 DMU's, but OPSTA thinks that transferring to the Merseyrail network, extending the present 15-minute service which runs from Hunts Cross to Ormskirk, onwards to Burscough Junction, with alternate trains running a half-hourly service to Preston. Running to Burscough Junction opens up the possibility of re-opening the Burscough South Curve and extending alternate half-hourly services to Southport, though the whole service would need three extra battery/electric Class 777's to operate. A suggested timetable is below.

There are some infrastructure issues to be resolved,

- line speed would probably need to be increased to add sufficient time to make the stop at Midge Hall (although since there is already a signalling token exchange stop there, the schedule would probably only need an additional 30 seconds.)
- a passing loop between Ormskirk and Burscough Junction

Illustrative Timetable: Liverpool - Preston

Hunts Cross	dep	0750	0806	0821	0836
Airport	dep	0740	0744	0754	0809
South Parkway	arr	0751	0801	0812	0827
Liverpool South Parkway	dep	0755	0810	0825	0840
Liverpool Central	dep	0810	0825	0840	0855
Maghull	dep	0831	0846	0901	0916
Ormskirk	arr	0845	0900	0915	0930
	dep	0846	0901	0916	0931
Burscough Junction	dep	0850	0905	0920	0935
Rufford	dep	0855		0925	
Croston	dep	0900		0930	
Farrington Curve Jnc.	pass	0909½		0939½	
Preston	arr	0913		0943	

- the cross over at Farington Curve Junction to the Ormskirk line would have to be doubled and the section of line up the bank to (what was) Moss Lane Junction would need to be doubled at the cost of 1 extra signal
- At Midge Hall, both platform faces from the old station still exist, but the station buildings on the up side are privately owned and the old track bed on the down side has a signal in the middle of its, so it might be better to build from scratch on the south side of the crossing opposite the signalbox.
- Battery charging facilities at Preston

Conclusion: Alongside getting Lancashire County Council to prioritise Midge Hall, OPSTA's plan is to build a solid case to convince them and the Liverpool City Region to extend north of Ormskirk. Part of that is to quantify the travel needs and demand from Edge Hill University and then other sizable campuses e.g. University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) and if possible Maghull Health Park. Another part is to convince authorities that Burscough needs the 15-minute service to Liverpool because of the number of houses built in the last few years and to forecast the future population based on the proposed house building.

To further their aims, OPSTA chair Denis O'Connell has arranged meeting with the LCC rail officer this month (January 2026).

Preston	dep	0807		0837	
Farrington Curve Jnc.	pass	0810½		0840½	
Croston	arr	0820		0850	
Rufford	dep	0825		0855	
Burscough Junction	dep	0830	0845	0900	0915
Ormskirk	arr	0835	0850	0905	0920
	dep	0836	0851	0906	0921
Maghull	dep	0848	0903	0918	0933
Liverpool Central	dep	0913	0928	0943	0958
Liverpool South Parkway	dep	0926	0941	0956	1011
South Parkway	dep	0935	0955	1005	1020
Airport	arr	0954	1014	1023	1038
Preston	arr	0931	0946	1001	1016



Map of proposed rail freight interchange, the Chat Moss rail line runs across the top. Map courtesy Tritax Big Box.

Jersey Firm Submission for Freight Interchange

A Jersey based firm, Tritax Big Box REIC PLC has setup a subsidiary, Intermodal Logistics Park North Ltd to move forward with formal submission of plans for a major freight interchange east of Newton-Le-Willows on land bordering the south side of the Chat Moss line and east of the M6. The plans include a rail connection to the Chat Moss line to bring freight in and out.

Logistics will be the main purpose of the interchange with some 8.2 million square feet of warehousing in total and an overnight lorry park with welfare facilities and HGV fuelling will be provided. In the plans for site energy supply, there is also mention of battery storage for possible future developments.

The plans include reception sidings for 775m long trains with up to 16 trains a day possible and following an earlier non-statutory consultation, the developers have altered the rail terminal layout to maximise the opportunity for rail connected buildings, with a mixture of units.

Objections have been raised by members of the local Leigh Ornithological Society about Highfield Moss Site of Special Scientific Interest, which is north of the Chat Moss railway line and borders the site, and a full Environmental Impact Assessment will have to be submitted with the detailed plans.

Some existing Public Rights of Way will be diverted, and new ones created, including a bridge near the Highfield Moss SSSI to replace an unsafe level crossing and access to Newton Park Farm and nearby houses will be renewed. There will be an onsite public transport hub and new pedestrian and cycle routes will be created, and the site plans would also replace existing level crossings (both classed as high risk) with bridges at Parkside and Highfield Moss as above.

The company concluded a public consultation at the end of last year and will now submit its detailed plans to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration.



A Class 323 in the new "Bee Network" livery at Manchester Piccadilly. Photo courtesy of TfGM

Burnham's Vision for An Integrated Manchester Network

The Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham set out his vision for an integrated rail/bus/tram network across the whole region. Plans include bringing eight key railway routes into the Bee Network, which will mean passenger can use the tap-in and tap out charging system already in use on the tram network and he also emphasised strongly that the network had to be accessible to all, with a call to bring forward timescales for this, and the planning is to have at least 50% of GM stations accessible by 2040.

Starting this year, Manchester Piccadilly - Glossop/Hadfield and Marple along with Manchester Victoria - Stalybridge will be the first to be integrated into the Bee Network, while there will be more evening and overnight services to Manchester Airport added.

In 2027 additional services to Rochdale and Alderley Edge will be introduced, when it's

planned that the routes from Piccadilly to Manchester Airport, Cheadle Hulme and Middlewood will become part of the Bee Network, (services on each route actually go further, each is the limit of integration in Greater Manchester).

There are plans for two new rail stations at Golborne and Cheadle, with work on the former starting this year & opened to join the Bee network from 2028, with routes to Appley Bridge, Wigan North Western, and Rochdale the final ones expected to be part of the integrated network.

From 2030, new stops and routes will be added to the tram network with the extension to Stockport from East Didsbury among the first expected to get spades in the ground, while the plans for tram - trains between Oldham - Rochdale - Heywood - Bury are expected next.

In the longer term, plans are being drawn up for 15-minute services or better /cont...

across all rail routes, while further extensions to the tram network include plans for tram-trains from Stockport and Altrincham to Manchester Airport with the latter's potential for links to the Mid – Cheshire line

The originally planned tram network Airport Western leg is also revived

The next phase would see plans extending the tram from Salford Quays to Salford Crescent railway station, then with tram/train to Wigan via Atherton and Bolton with options to add Leigh to the network, while the longer term would see plans to add Middleton / Northern Gateway and Trafford Waters / Port Salford.

Piccadilly Station February Closure

Network Rail are planning to almost completely close Manchester Piccadilly station from 14th to 22nd February 2026 for major engineering works which will include relaying of crossovers at Ardwick Junction just south of Piccadilly station.

Only platforms 13 and 14 will be in use during that period, and these will be used for terminating services from the north/west direction, which are being mostly limited to Blackpool and Liverpool services because of capacity issues meaning not all trains services can be fitted in to turn around. TPE Scotland services will be turned around at Preston while Northern Barrow/Windermere and TfW Llandudno – Man Airport will be turned at Manchester Oxford Road.

No trains will arrive into Piccadilly from the east or south, so this means no Avanti, Cross Country, EMR, Transport for Wales, TPE or local Northern services. It is planned to allow some freight train movements to Trafford Park using the down slow line, although this will be limited and not likely to be the usual hourly path.

It's expected that some services from the south (Avanti West Coast, Cross Country, TfW and Northern) will turn round at Stockport. Local Sheffield services will be routed and terminate at Guide Bridge along with Glossop/Hadfield trains, while Rose Hill services will have replacement buses to Manchester Victoria. Chester trains will start and terminate at Altrincham.

Euston - Victoria No, Birmingham - Man Airport Yes

The London North Western Railway (LNWR) section of West Midlands Trains are not going forward with previous plans to extend their present Euston – Crewe services north to Manchester Victoria via Warrington Bank Quay and the Chat Moss line, but are now planning to add Manchester Airport to Birmingham via Crewe from the December 2026 timetable change.

This would be an hourly Manchester Airport to Crewe service, calling at Styall and Wilmslow

and continuing from Crewe to Birmingham New Street and would bring direct connectivity between Manchester Airport and Stoke on Trent and Stafford, and then calling at the yet to be opened Willenhall and Darlaston stations and onto Birmingham.

LNWR have submitted their proposals to the Office for Rail and Road for consideration. If approval is granted, LNWR plan to begin running trains from December 2026.

Railfuture North West Facebook Page

Railfuture North West now has a Facebook page where we try and post news and other items about the latest developments. We encourage all members to subscribe and like the page, you can also post anything of relevance yourselves. The page can be found at; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1469070153787148>

Extra Liverpool – London Avanti Service Brings Services to South Parkway at Last

The December 2025 timetable change brought the arrival of a second London train from Liverpool for most of the day, and Avanti are also adding stops at Liverpool South Parkway, bringing regular direct London services to the station for the first time. Avanti have been unable to call at the station previously because the Pendolinos were too long for the platforms, but with the introduction of 7 coach Class 807 Evero's, it's now possible. London trains did

stop at the station during closure for planned engineering works at Lime Street in 2017 where the layout was extensively re-modelled, but this was done using a temporary scaffold extension to one platform.

Avanti have also added a direct return service to London Euston from the Cheshire town of Hartford, departing at 0810, with a return at 1843.

Reddish South and Denton Line

The Friends of Reddish South and Denton were intrigued by the recent Bee Network and Transport for the North meetings, both chaired by Mayor Andy Burnham. In both of these meetings, Mr Burnham mentioned the group's line which runs from Stockport via Reddish South and Denton stations to both Ashton Moss North Junction (with an onward connection to Manchester Victoria) and Guide Bridge on to Stalybridge. Presently there is one return passenger service per week which runs on Saturday morning from Stockport to Stalybridge.

They had heard that their line is coming into TfGM and the North's consciousness at last, although related to proposals for a tram-train service and going only to Ashton, not Manchester Victoria which has been their campaign- long objective.

However, they were told by TfGM in January of 2025, that Tram –train is still a 'concept' and has a long way to go, so to hear Mr Burnham

make a point of remembering the Stockport-Manchester line in two separate meetings made the group wish to pursue this with him again.

Nav Mishra, MP for Stockport, has campaigned for the group in the House of Commons, since he became their MP in 2024, supported by Andrew Gwynne MP for Denton & Gorton. The Group are meeting with both Nav and Andy Burnham in February 2026 to reinforce their aims of heavy rail from Stockport to Manchester Victoria, and, unless as supplementary services, they do not feel that Stockport—Ashton Moss or Stockport – Stalybridge would be anything like as viable.

The groups notes that while the promotion of a Metrolink service has practically the same rationale as The Friends of Reddish South & Denton Stations campaign, so to be able to justify one and not the other (especially one without the £1 billion+ price tag) would seem bizarre.

STOP PRESS! Government Unveils Plans For Renewed Manchester - Birmingham Line and NPR

As this issue went to press, the details of renewed Northern Powerhouse Rail were announced by the Government, to be delivered in phases, starting with upgrades to lines between Leeds, York, Bradford and Sheffield, followed by a new line between Liverpool and Manchester, finally adding better connections between Manchester and Yorkshire cities.

Design etc is costed at £1.1bn. The announcement also said that a new line between Manchester and Birmingham would follow completion of the NPR, which may be some decades away. No funds beyond the design costs have been announced but a central funding cap of £45bn has been set, possibly topped up with local funding.

**Railfuture North West England
Annual General Meeting
Saturday 28th February 2026
Holiday Inn, 85 Talbot Road
Blackpool, FY1 1LL**

Railfuture North West England's Annual General Meeting for 2026 is in the Holiday Inn, Blackpool.

At present we have no guest speaker but if one is confirmed, we will have a 1130 start, lunch at 1230 for 60 minutes with the speaker after lunch and a finish no later than 1530. If there is no speaker, we will keep the same starting timetable but simply finish earlier.

If we are able to confirm a speaker, this will be confirmed by email and on the website or by checking with the Chair, Vice Chair or Secretary, contact on the back page.



The outline agenda will be the normal AGM business to start, we will also have topics that will no doubt prove talking points and do want to hear members thoughts on any issue you wish to raise.

PLEASE NOTE. Those who wish to take lunch, please advise our secretary Chris Norton, cjnblackpool@btinternet.com at least a week in advance, there is a basic menu of mixed sandwiches and chips available for £9.95 per person, please bring cash on the day.

**Nominations for Railfuture North West England
Branch Committee 2026/7**

Nominations are now invited for the 2026/7 branch committee, these can be made using the form below or via post or email, provided the information requested in the form below is included.

Please return to Christopher Norton, either by post or email, address is 26 Handsworth Road, Blackpool, FY1 2RQ, email cjnblackpool@btinternet.com, the closing date is midnight on Sunday February 22nd 2026.

Nominee	Proposer	Seconder	Position (if any)	Standing for Officer only Y/N
A.N. Other 1	A.N. Other 2	A.N. Other 3	(e.g., Secretary)	

Railfuture North West Branch

Accounts for the year ending 31st December 2025

For members' information, please note the accounts for our branch in 2025 below (with 2024's accounts shown on the left for reference). Members also please note that this year is the third where we have a virtual branch account i.e. that the branch has money allocated for us to choose to spend locally but money is held nationally, we simply ask for bills to be paid etc.

Members may note that our newsletter printing and distribution costs have slightly increased this year, this is due to costs of printing the Winter 2023/4 newsletter falling in the previous year (2023) and so making 2024's overall costs look lower, but it's expected that costs will be less in future with a lower cost of printing and fewer members requiring printed copies. Also please note that there was a slight error in the 2024 accounts published a year ago as the expenditure mentioned above was wrongly included in the year's spend, that below is now the correct record.

We have also managed to minimise the cost of meetings by using more free venues.

Income

	2024	2025
	£	£
Opening balance at 1 st January	110.22	171.90 ¹
Funding budget from national funds	700.00	775.00 ²
Total	810.22	946.90

Expenditure

Newsletter printing and distribution	282.07	297.77
Room hires	85.00	71.26
Grant to Travel Watch North West	50.00	0.00
Other expenses	35.25 ³	0.00
Campaign expenditure	186.00 ⁴	0.00
AGM	0.00	185.00
Total expenditure	638.32	554.03
 Closing balance on 31st December each year	 171.90	 392.87 ⁵

Total (expenditure budget plus any unspent balance)

Notes

1. Budget leftover from previous years
2. Budget submission for each year
3. Travel cost for member to attend Branches & Groups Day 2024 in lieu of Chair
4. Joint meeting with Yorkshire branch November 30th 2024
5. Figures are closing balance at 31/12

Future branch meetings.

After our AGM on 28th February 2026, our next branch committee meeting is planned to be on Thursday 16th April 2026 starting at 1300 at a venue to be advised

The following meeting will be on Thursday June 11th 2026, again at venue to be advised at our usual time. 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 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 social media pages)

- Blackpool and Fylde Rail Users' Association
- Bolton Rail Users Group (note link presently not working)
- Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group
- Friends of Castleton Station
- Friends of Denton Station (link not working, see friends of Reddish South)
- 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
- Friends of Settle Carlisle Line
- Furness Line Action Group (FLAG)
- Lakes Line Rail User Group (LLRUG)
- Lancaster, Morecambe Rail & District Rail User Group (no link presently)
- 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

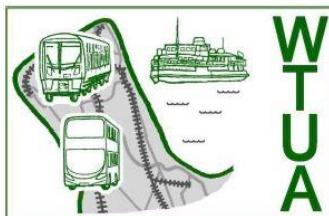
Vice – Chairman Malcolm Richardson
135, Branstree Road,
Blackpool,
FY4 4SR,

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 Wirral, Merseyside and the Chester area. The WTUA has a watching brief over the public transport operations in the Wirral and their connections to the rest of the country. It represents the interests of transport users in the local area and has representation on various transport user groups.



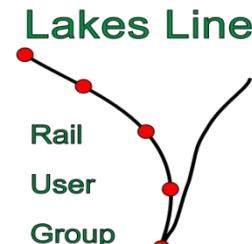
We publish our newsletter once or twice a year. Our AGM includes a talk from an expert on some facet of the transport world. We aim to run coach excursions to heritage railways and other places of transport activity or interest once or twice a year.

For more info, see website- www.wirraltau.org.uk, email wirraltau@gmail.com, or phone Brian Grey on 0151 648 3070.

Annual membership- Individual: £10, Couple at same address: £12. Send for an application form to: Brian Grey, 56 Coombe Road, Irby, Wirral CH61 4US.

THE LAKES LINE RAIL USER GROUP

Formed in 1984 to promote and support Cumbria's only branch line for locals and tourists alike. Travel the lakes line into scenic Lakeland.



Join Today!

Contact: Mr. P Bell 9, Vicars Hill,
Kendal,
Cumbria

Membership: £6.00 Individuals,

£7.00 Family, £13.00 Corporate LA9 5DA

PLEASE NOTE the email addresses below won't correctly copy from the pdf (electronic) edition, this is to prevent spam, you will need to type them in manually.

Railfuture North West Branch Officers

<i>Chairman</i> Trevor Bishop	4 Butterfield Close Cheadle Hulme Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 7AE	trevor.bishop@railfuture.org.uk Tel 0161 485 8426 mobile 07973 725254
<i>Vice Chairman & Treasurer</i> Malcolm Conway	34, Castlestead View, Castlestead Close, Oxenholme, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 7FY	malcolmconway@aol.co.uk Tel 01539 756272 mobile 07956 345130
<i>Freight Officer (vacant)</i>		
<i>Secretary and Returning Officer</i> Christopher Norton	26 Handsworth Road Blackpool FY1 2RQ	cjnblackpool@btinternet.com 01253 623338
<i>Media Officer (vacant)</i>		

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.

www.railfuture.org.uk

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Newsletter of the North West England Branch of Railfuture