

# Rail North West



*A Class 142 at Knutsford station on the Mid Cheshire line taken in 2014. Will the line ever see the promised doubling of services that the passenger footfall numbers suggest would be right. Photo Arthur Thomson*

## Network Rail Delays New Services

The Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association (MCRUA) notes in its latest newsletter that the promised 2 trains per hour on the line between Chester and Manchester has still to materialise, some 18 months after it was due to be introduced in December 2017. They have learned that Network Rail won't allow Northern to run any additional passenger trains on the line due to "increased risk at level crossings," thought to be mostly occupation crossings used by farms.

MCRUA are trying to find out the detail of this strange and surprising claim, but initial information is that tighter safety

standards mean that any change has to be re-assessed and there are no dates yet for any such assessment to take place.

Northern has a contract with the DfT to operate two trains an hour on the Mid Cheshire Line, and hourly trains on Sundays, starting in December 2017. Network Rail is controlled by the DfT so MCRUA thinks it's bizarre and unacceptable that they are preventing Northern from delivering on their contract. Network Rail claims that it is becoming 'passenger-focused'. MCRUA thinks it needs to demonstrate this here and have

raised this issue with local MPs Esther McVey and Mike Amesbury at face-to-face meetings and encouraged members who live along the Mid Cheshire Line to contact their MPs to demand that the promised train service is delivered in full.

Meanwhile they noted a recent significant increase in through fares to Metrolink from the Mid Cheshire line, and have raised the issue with Northern. Through fares from the Mid Cheshire Line to Metrolink stations have existed since Metrolink opened in 1992, although they have never been adequately publicised. The through fares to "Metrolink City" changing at Altrincham onto Metrolink have previously been similar to the fares to

Manchester via Stockport. Indeed, for a time the fare from Knutsford to Metrolink City was less than the fare from Knutsford to Manchester via Stockport. Since the recent fare increase however, the through fares are simply an add-on of the fare to Altrincham and the fare from Altrincham to Metrolink zones 1 to 4. So the fares to Metrolink Zones 1 to 4 (the equivalent of Metrolink City) are now significantly more than the fare to Manchester via Stockport.

From Knutsford the Anytime Return Fare to Metrolink Zones 1 to 4 is now £13.60 whereas the return fare to Manchester Central Zone via Stockport is £10.70, a significant difference.

### Halton Curve Services Begin At Last



*NCRUG members at Chester station await the departure of one of the first of the new Transport for Wales services to Liverpool via the Halton Curve. Photo courtesy Charles Allen, NCRUG.*

The North Cheshire Rail user Group (NCRUG) were celebrating the arrival of services over the Halton Curve with the

May timetable change as Cedric Green writes "The day has arrived when we can travel from Chester, (and occasionally

Wrexham), directly to Liverpool Lime Street via Helsby and Frodsham with connections southwards at Runcorn and to Liverpool John Lennon Airport from Liverpool South Parkway. Three cheers for that – one cheer for each decade of the NCRUG's existence!

As previously advised it is an hourly service, (although not clockface), and will take approximately 38 minutes from Helsby to Lime Street, (24 minutes to LSP) and approximately 34 minutes from Frodsham to Lime Street, (20 minutes to LSP). Journey times vary slightly but apart from the 20.30 Weekday and Saturday departure from Chester which, for some inexplicable reason takes 60 minutes from Chester to Lime Street, they are within the range of 47/51 minutes.”

NCRUG have drawn attention to the fact that an 18xx departure from Chester and it's 19xx return from Lime Street are missing and await to hear from Transport for Wales on this omission. An earlier first train out of Chester is also required to accommodate morning departures from the Airport and again TfW are aware of this and, NCRUG hope, it can be quickly remedied. The Airport demand did play a significant part in building the Business Case for opening the Halton Curve so the service should serve the significant numbers of morning departures from the Airport.

A Sunday service roughly follows the same service pattern as the Monday/Saturday service but the first train out of Chester is at 08.31 and Lime Street at 09.49. There is no Sunday service direct to or from Wrexham.

Fares, as previously mentioned, are competitive and NCRUG expects them to entice people out of their cars and onto the trains not only for environmental

reasons but also to relieve traffic congestion and ease travel across the Runcorn Gap. The Mersey Gateway bridge already helps and NCRUG have never disputed the need for both road and rail improvements across the extremely busy Runcorn Gap to assist the local economy and employment prospects.

The good news continues. The start of services, as outlined above, are only the first step in improving connectivity in the area and beyond. As patronage builds it is intended to extend and/or introduce new services along the North Wales Coast and to Shrewsbury and Cardiff opening up new journey opportunities between Liverpool, Llandudno, Holyhead and South Wales.

A side effect of these new services is the impact they will have on car parking at stations on the route. This is an issue which NCRUG have flagged up to the authorities and hope it will be dealt with quickly. Otherwise, local roads could be clogged up and/or a suppressed demand created for rail services. Improvements have already taken place at Frodsham but much more needs to be done both there and at Helsby. NCRUG has suggested many times that the unused parking available on the Ellesmere Port/Helsby line could provide over 120 spaces but only if there is a useable train service on the line. This is an on-going project for NCRUG.

Meantime NCRUG are celebrating the huge achievement which the opening of the Halton Curve represents and gives them much encouragement for pursuing other projects for improving travel within their area of activity. They have learnt lessons from their efforts so far and are proud of their successes to date – but onward and upward is their motto.

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## Breaking the Century on the Bentham Line



*A newly refurbished train at Bentham Station, Photo courtesy LASRUG*

The new Bentham Line timetable which came into operation on Sunday 19th May brought 12 further services to the route each week and takes the total to 106 trains. These are in addition to new services which were introduced on the line last May.

In summary, there are now eight trains in each direction Monday to Saturday and five each way on Sundays. An additional twelve journeys have been provided, an 11.3% increase, compared to the previous timetable.

The additional trains are the 07:20 Leeds to Lancaster, arriving at 09:13, and returning from Lancaster at 09:41 with an 11:38 arrival in Leeds.

Connections at Carnforth, to and from the Furness Line, have been greatly improved to reflect the increase in the number of passengers travelling between North and West Yorkshire and Cumbrian coast destinations. Residents in the more rural communities on the route are taking advantage of the new services, reflecting both the interest in new journey opportunities and the wish for 'greener' travel options.

Passengers on the line will also see an increase in the number of refurbished and more comfortable trains over the coming months, as the classic 'Pacer' units are withdrawn from service in the North.

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Gerald Townson, chairman of the Bentham Line added, “the new timetable allows more opportunities for work, education and leisure travel along the Bentham Line and beyond with a new range of connections possible at Lancaster and Leeds for journeys throughout the UK.”

One other significant improvement is the last train from Lancaster at 21:30 now makes a connection at Skipton with the last train to Leeds, arriving there at 23:38. Rod Tickner, vice-chairman of the Bentham Line who is based in Keighley said, “this makes the later service very useful for longer days out, for those living in the Aire Valley”.

## **STORM Campaign Against More Service Reductions**

For the past twelve months, the local stations of Castleton and Moston have had their regular half hourly service to Manchester Victoria interrupted by an hour's gap at 1645. Now with the May 2019 timetable they have lost another train out of their regular service, this time at 1345. The reason is that Network Rail is unable to time two particular freight train paths without these gaps being introduced.

Local Rail User Group STORM is disappointed at this which will inevitably lead to loss of traffic. These two freight trains do not seem ever to run every day in the week. Sometimes there are long gaps.

STORM feels that the reason is that none of the three Rail Utilisation Studies adjacent to the central part of the Calder Valley line, Littleborough to Hebden Bridge actually looked at the line, all thinking no doubt that someone else was studying it. Between Rochdale and Manchester there are six passenger trains an hour each way, between Rochdale and Sowerby Bridge there are four scheduled passenger trains an hour each way.

There is only one loop in the up direction which, being at Brewery Junction, is only a mile and a half from Victoria station, and two down loops, one of which is also at Brewery Junction with the second at Castleton, some nine miles further on. All three loops are passed for passenger trains. Trains to and from the Copy Pit line at Todmorden do help in timetabling slow trains among the faster services.

With the expectation that work will eventually start on a Trans Pennine upgrade (the Stanedge line), wholesale diversion of TPE services onto the Calder Valley line will make things very difficult.

Between Manchester and Bradley Wood Junction (where the Calder Valley and Trans Pennine routes diverge) on the down there used to be ten loops, now reduced to two, whilst on the up there were also ten now reduced to one.

STORM thinks wholesale installation of loops with high speed entry and exit turnouts is necessary.

Richard S Greenwood STORM



*45690 Leander at Blackpool North taking the excursion out.*

## Steam under the wires!

Members of Blackpool and Fylde Rail Users Association saw the appearance of steam traction in Blackpool North for the first time for several years on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April.

The charter was organised by the Railway Touring Company, and originated in London and was hauled to the Fylde coast by Class 86 electric loco 86259, *Peter Pan*. Before it arrived in Blackpool, the excursion was joined at Preston by Stanier Jubilee class, number 45690 *Leander* which is one of the collection of steam engines based at Carnforth. The loco was attached to the rear of the train in readiness for a trip along the Preston, Blackburn, Hellfield, Carnforth, Preston circular.

The excursion returned to London, hauled again by the Class 86 electric, which had run light engine to Preston.

It's remarkable to think that Blackpool used to attract 30 or 40 excursion trains every weekend starting at Easter and running through to the end of the Illuminations. Now you're lucky to see two or three a year – how times have changed.



*Electric loco 86259 brings the excursion into Blackpool North*

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## Lakes Line To Be Electrification Case Study

Robert Talbot and Dick Smith from Lakes Line Rail User Group (LLRUG) met with representatives from the Railway Industry Association (RIA) in early May, facilitated by the Westmorland and Lonsdale MP Tim Farron; this was part of their campaign to restore electrification plans for the Line.

During the meeting, the RIA agreed to make the Lakes Line a case study for how you could complete an electrification scheme for between a third to half the cost that that the Department for Transport had originally estimated.

Tim Farron said: "I'm really grateful to the RIA in agreeing to makes the Lakes Line a case study for electrification."

"This gives us every chance that we will be able to present a cheaper version of electrification to Government in order to get them to change their mind."

"There is already a lot of pressure for the Department for Transport to do this from an environmental point of view. If the Government is serious about tackling climate change then it needs to be electrifying lines – especially the



*Tim Farron MP alongside Robert Talbot and Dick Smith from the Lakes Line Rail User Group and Darren Caplan, chief executive of the Railway Industry Association. Photo courtesy Tim Farron website*

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one taking people into Britain's second biggest visitor destination."

Plans to electrify the line were shelved back in 2017 by the Government, due to a lack of available funding according to the National Audit Office.

At a previous Transport for the North event, Robert had noted that Professor McNaughton (Strategic Technical Adviser with HS2) said the cost structure of electrification roughly broke down into thirds; civil engineering (bridges etc), electricity supply and actual overhead wiring, so with the line being not in use for freight and limited to 60mph, the thought is that this could reduce the quoted £1.2m per track kilometre even further.

The major bridge structure on the line is the Staveley by-pass overbridge which, 35 years ago, the LLRUG ensured at the design stage was built with sufficient space for restoration of the second track plus enough space above track/train height to accommodate catenary. When the track was re-laid with Continuously Welded Rail some years ago, it was repositioned in the centre of other bridges with a view to giving the required clearance without the need for further alteration. A Network Rail

survey on the structures noted that the track could be lowered at a couple of bridges, whilst for a couple of others the bedrock meant that there was no option other than to lift the bridge. However, a fixed 'bar' technology (effectively a rail fixed upside down), recently deployed on the electrification of the Paisley Canal route near Glasgow, could be used at these points as this needs less clearance.

Robert Talbot notes that the electricity supply is already sorted in that the wires are already energised through platform 3 at Oxenholme onto the Windermere line branch, plus 50 or so yards beyond, and as its only 10 miles to Windermere, it wouldn't need any additional substations.

Robert further notes that the overhead wiring needn't be at the high end of the specification range with the line speed maximum of 60mph and no freight trains, and also the lineside posts needn't be anything like the high-cost GWR scheme. He thinks that the cost for the Windermere Branch ought to be considerably closer to £1m per mile - £10m in total - down from the quoted £1.2m per track kilometre, and much less than the £30-odd million which Grayling quoted on cancellation of the project two years ago.

## Facebook Poll Comes up Top For SELRAP

SELRAP have conducted a poll on their Facebook page asking people their thoughts on re-opening this line.

90% of the 1,300 who took part supported this. It reached 10,702 people and had 1,395 engagements where users have voted, commented, liked or shared.

More information can be found on SELRAP's Facebook page at;

[facebook.com/reopenskiptontocolne](https://facebook.com/reopenskiptontocolne).

Jane Wood, SELRAP Media Officer

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

### **area Affiliated to Railfuture**

(for those viewing in pdf format, there are embedded links to most groups websites)

- [Blackpool and Fylde Rail Users' Association](#)
  - [Bolton Rail Users Group](#)
  - [Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group](#)
  - [Cumbrian coast Rail Users' Group \(CRUG\)](#)
  - [Friends of Denton Station](#)
  - [Friends of Littleborough Stations \(Lancashire\)](#)
  - [Friends of Reddish South Station](#)
  - [Friends of Rose Hill Station](#)
  - Friends of St Annes Stations email [tonyford19@gmail.com](mailto:tonyford19@gmail.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 \(WBRUA\)](#)
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**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 £1/year, £1.50 for family membership.  
Contact; Membership Secretary, "Hamlet" 2B, Meadow Park,  
Wesham Preston PR4 3DN. Download our online form from:  
<http://www.bafrua.org.uk/> click on "Join Our User Group."

**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.

## Cumbrian coast Rail Users' Group



If you'd like to join a group representing rail users in West Cumbria, and particularly on the Cumbrian Coast line from Carlisle to Barrow, the **Cumbrian coast Rail Users' Group** would welcome your membership.

See [www.crug.org.uk](http://www.crug.org.uk) where you will find all the details about us and how to join. It costs £5 for individuals or £10 for organisations.

We can make a difference, and with your help, our voice will be stronger.



### **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**

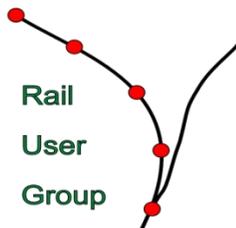
*Send your subscription to our Membership Secretary today and receive a copy of our latest newsletter*

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.**

**Lakes Line**



**Join Today!**

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

Membership: £5.00 Individuals,

£7.00 Family, £13.00 Corporate

LA9 5DA

**PLEASE NOTE the email addresses below wont correctly copy from the pdf edition, this is to prevent spam.**

## 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
<i>Vice Chairman &amp; Treasurer</i> Malcolm Conway	58 Greengate Lane, Kenda, Cumbria LA9 5LL.	malcolm.conway@railfuture.org.uk Tel 01539 725995.
<i>Secretary and Freight Officer</i> Mike Breslin	35, Rudston Road Childwall Liverpool L16 4PG	michael.breslin@railfuture.org.uk Tel 0151 737 1061
<i>Minutes Secretary and Returning Officer</i> Christopher Norton	26 Handsworth Road Blackpool FY1 2RQ	cjnblackpool@btinternet.com 01253 623338

Specific further area contacts are:

East Cheshire: Chris Dale: 01625 428379, E-mail: chris-dale@talktalk.net

*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 or by post via the chairman as above. 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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All other correspondence to 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingsstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND