

Rail North West



One of the new Class 195's which have been late into service. Photo courtesy Northern.

End of Northern In Sight?

Many Local Rail User Groups along with Railfuture North West have been wondering when their members might get the better service promised by Northern (and Trans-Pennine Express) when it took over the franchise in April 2016, and have looked in dismay at the terrible performance both leading up to and since the December 2019 timetable change. Northern has consistently failed to meet even its revised targets and although many of the problems can't be laid wholly at their door, with Network Rail and train manufacturer

CAF also sharing a lot of the blame for failures, many of these problems could have been anticipated and with a good management approach, the impact minimised.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps, has taken the view that Northern's performance is "unacceptable," and wants to see change, though quite why a similar failure of TPE has not caused him similar angst is not clear. However the change that the SoS can do is either

have an Operator of Last Resort (OLR) which is Government owned company running the service, or have a new management contract with Arriva with new conditions to improve the service, but neither of these would be expected to deliver the immediate changes needed for passengers on the front line.

The immediate problems of poor punctuality and much higher cancellations are complex in their resolution, but at the heart its trying to run many more trains across

infrastructure not capable of supporting them, but of course the reason Northern are trying to run more trains is because of franchise commitments, so to abandon these would require Government agreement. The Government may well agree to this but the losers will be passengers and the wider public as Northern will not be able to meet targets to grow passenger usage of the network and the public will not have a viable alternative means of transport as a future choice.

STORM supports Key Rail Improvements

Local Rail User Group STORM are pleased that the Mayor of Greater Manchester is supporting significant improvements in local rail services through investments in infrastructure. However, it will obviously take quite a lot of time before most of them can be achieved.

STORM thinks there are a few quick wins which he would do well to pursue for early progress. Victoria station can be overwhelmed by the number of trains using it due to the insufficient number of platforms. Thirty years ago, the size of the station was considerably reduced. Railwaymen around then say that there is room beneath the Arena side for at least one platform and line backing onto the current platform 6, possibly even for a second. Investigating whether this is the case or not should be undertaken as a matter of great urgency.

At the moment there are five or six freight trains every day (each over a quarter of a mile long), which, joining

the line towards Rochdale at Miles Platting at a maximum permitted speed of 10 miles per hour, block both up and down lines as they slowly cross the junction. Until thirty years ago there was a connecting line from the westernmost track from Victoria to Newton Heath which passed behind the platforms at the old Miles Platting station. This line could easily and rapidly be re-instated and reduce the impact of the slow-moving freight trains by fifty per cent by allowing down passenger trains to continue whilst the slow freight wends its way across the junction.

The Saddleworth area, Mossley and Greenfield are the worst served commuter areas in the county if not the country. The railway approaching Diggle tunnel (where long ago there was a station) was four tracks wide. Today most of it is only two. With such a wide area it should be possible to provide a turnback siding between the main lines (rather like has been done at Rochdale station with the new

platform 4). This would enable a frequent service of stopping trains to serve Greenfield and Mossley. They would immediately follow a fast train from Stalybridge and be clear of the next fast train by going into the turnback siding.

Walsden, between Todmorden and Littleborough has been a problem area for flooding blocking the main Calder Valley route for over 100 years. Historically this was at the level crossing adjacent to the new station (opened 1986). Major work a few years ago has cured this recurrent problem but there is now an equally serious problem about a quarter of a mile away towards Littleborough. Here the railway crosses Walsden Water on a bridge with very little headroom above the river bed. Twice in 2019 the stream has washed over the top of the railway bridge, then run down the track through Winterbutlee tunnel and eventually escaped onto the main road adjacent to the station.

The responsibility for the stream and a downstream culvert which is now inadequate to take the peak flow lies with the Environment Agency and Calderdale Council. Network Rail are more than anxious for the problem to be resolved but any solution is out of their power. Hopefully the EA and Calderdale Council can be persuaded that the major upset to passengers caused by having to close the line between Rochdale and Todmorden for hours on end is not acceptable and urgent action is needed. The last closure, in November 2019, was for a period of twenty-four hours.

Curtailing the train service at Rochdale rather than Littleborough has a major negative impact on passengers for destinations beyond Rochdale. There is an emergency ground frame at Summit west which enables trains to terminate at Littleborough rather than Rochdale but this requires Network Rail to find two qualified members of staff to go to site to operate it. This crossover should have been made remotely operated by a signal box years ago but this work has never been done. In 2020 passengers will still be greatly affected by fifty-year-old technology.

The alternative, which is to run wrong line between Rochdale `Littleborough, also needs two qualified members of staff -- a pilotman and someone to be in charge of the Smithy Bridge level crossing.

Unfortunately, there's no easy solution to the intermodal trains coming through Oxford Road/Piccadilly 13 and 14. Even if there was a western exit from Trafford Park on to the CLC line, there are no paths for freight. Glazebrook loop probably not long enough and only westbound."

Still No Direct Rochdale - Manchester Airport Trains

Rochdale entered 2020 without a direct line to Manchester Airport. Following the completion of the Ordsall Chord railway line in December 2017, it was announced that Rochdale was on track for a direct rail link to Manchester airport. It was expected that Rochdale

trains would be able to travel directly to Manchester Airport without changes at Manchester Victoria by the summer of 2018.

The chord links Manchester Victoria, Oxford Road and Piccadilly stations in the city centre, providing a link to the airport by passing through Manchester Piccadilly. However, despite earlier reports, it seems as Rochdale will be going into 2020 without a direct line to Manchester Airport. A train service from Rochdale to Manchester Airport is available, but a change is required either at Manchester Victoria or Salford Crescent.

Both Network Rail and Northern were contacted for an update, but did not respond to our enquiries. However, Richard Greenwood, the chairman of local rail group STORM (Support the Oldham and Rochdale Manchester rail line), which has been present for over 25 years, shared his views about the situation. He commented: "The reason that we still do not have through trains to the airport is that Network Rail

cannot provide a path for the overcrowded corridor between Deansgate, Oxford Road and Piccadilly stations. "Because of the delay in expanding the capacity at Piccadilly, it is likely to be some time before we can get through trains." Rochdale Online.

...but Town Centre Access Now Free on Metrolink

Passengers arriving at Rochdale train station will soon be able to use their rail ticket to travel into the town centre by tram - at no extra charge. Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham has given the green light for a pilot 'integrated ticketing offer' to make the heart of Rochdale a more attractive place to live or visit.

Rail users would be able to use their ticket on the Metrolink, allowing them to travel from the station to Smith Street - where the new Riverside development is being built.

LASRUG welcomes better trains and service

Lancaster and Skipton Rail user Group (LASRUG) are very pleased that Class 158s will be operating services on the line regularly in the future, which will significantly improve public perception of the line. They are also pleased that through trains to and from Morecambe on Sundays have now been restored; during the busy summer months, a change has been needed at Lancaster, and the Lancaster-Morecambe service was all too often operated by buses,

because of the lack of train crew. They are disappointed however at that continued lack of a weekday train arriving into Lancaster before 0900. This long-awaited service for people working in Lancaster began running last May, with a return departure from Lancaster at 1745, but still is not due into Lancaster until 0913. We are told that the reason is pathing problems, and that Northern are hopeful that these will be resolved for May 2020.

No Local Stops on Popular Shrewsbury – Chester Trains

Local rail passenger lobbying group, the Shrewsbury – Chester Rail Users Association (SCRUA) are strongly objecting to service changes made by Transport for Wales (TfW) that saw the removal of a popular train service from December 2019 timetable change.

SCRUA saw draft timetables before the change which showed a new locomotive hauled northbound express service running from Cardiff to Holyhead on Mondays to Fridays. Between Shrewsbury and Chester, it only stopped at Wrexham. The previous service, which leaves Shrewsbury at 09.25 and calls at Gobowen, Chirk and Ruabon, is withdrawn, meaning a two-hour gap between trains for those stations and a 90-minute gap at Wrexham, northbound. In the afternoon, the southbound express service is scheduled to stop at all stations but the withdrawal of a later Cardiff service would also result in a two-hour gap between trains to Shrewsbury and beyond.

The 09.25 is the first off peak service on the line giving passengers access to cheaper fares, particularly important for those changing at Chester for longer journeys, for example to Liverpool, Manchester or London. The service is well patronised. Many who are reliant on these particular trains will face hardship.

SCRUA Chair, John Mattocks, said “At the start of the Transport for Wales franchise, in October 2018, we were promised more frequent services, improved and new rolling stock and more Sunday services. No mention was

made of withdrawing existing services. There was no consultation with any party before this totally retrograde move by the train operator”

At the CRP/RUGs' liaison meeting in Chester on 17th December 2019, Lowri Joyce of TfW was given a hard time by representatives and Steve Boulding, Secretary of SCRUA, stressed that this was “a reflection of the anger and frustration caused by these crass and damaging timetable changes implemented since December.” In a later email to Lee Robinson of TfW detailing SCRUA;s views, he said, “As you will be well aware by now, these change have caused not just inconvenience to hundreds of travellers, but in dozens of cases severe disruption and hardship to people travelling to work and education, and to people with luggage and/or mobility issues - not least the significant numbers of injured, unwell or disabled folk attending outpatient appointments at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital at Gobowen, for example.”

“As if this wasn't bad enough in itself, this has led to many people who have access to cars deserting the railway altogether, and those who haven't having to face long and slow bus alternatives, or expensive taxis, or (we hope not!) possibly change their employment arrangements. The reputational damage to TfW/TfWRS is considerable - as you are aware, BBC Radio Shropshire, The Shropshire Star and other regional media are giving this issue substantial coverage on an ongoing basis.”

“Owen Paterson MP and his colleagues are on the warpath, Secretary of State Grant Shapps has stated unequivocally that TfWRS are in unlawful breach of contract, and the driving away of passengers who are either Welsh citizens or travellers to, from, or within Wales from a highly sustainable form of transport by the actions and/or omissions of a WAG agency and/or its contractors is clearly also an offence under the relevant provisions of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015 as enacted by the WAG.”

“The committee and members of SCRUA have had to waste hundreds, probably by now more than a thousand, person-hours dealing with this completely avoidable situation, and the failure of TfWRS and others to engage meaningfully, and the perception that there was, if not underhand practice, certainly gross incompetence in the withholding of the timetable change information not just from voluntary groups like us, but from statutory consultees such as the Rail Partnership, has left us feeling badly let down.”

“The purpose of SCRUA and its fellow RUGs and partner local authorities and community organisations is to promote use of the railway for the benefit of social connectivity, sustainable economic development and opportunity, environmental protection, and not least to boost the revenues of the operator and the public purse to encourage further investment. Whilst we are happy to deal with routine issues and day-to-day liaison between politicians/officers and the public, for example, and as you know, happily put in a lot of time and effort unbidden, unpaid, and often un-thanked, we should never have been put in this situation in the first place.”

“We appreciate that TfW does not appear to have been made aware in a timely fashion of the likely impact of TfWRS's method of implementation of an obscure and, arguably irrelevant franchise commitment which appears to have little or no logic or benefit either in social or economic terms, and why, even once users' groups had communicated their disquiet in no uncertain terms some two months before implementation, no attempt appears to have been made to call in the decision and urgently review the likely consequences.”

“We therefore must urge in the strongest terms that this situation is rectified at the earliest possible moment, and absolutely no later than the May 2020 timetable change.”

“At the meeting, Sheila Dee, Chester-Shrewsbury Rail Partnership's Rail Officer, supported by all present, asked Lowri to convey a request that TfW prepare a position paper stating exactly what will be done, both in May and in terms of further mitigation measures to benefit the affected passengers meanwhile.”

“You will appreciate that this will need to be drafted, approved, and circulated to all interested parties no later than, say, the third week in January, so that there is sufficient time to consider and respond well before the May timetable's T-12 date.”

“Finally, we hope you will not mind us saying again, that ever since the start of the re-franchising process, many assurances and undertakings have been given about passenger, stakeholder and community engagement over all aspects of Wales and Borders rail operations,

regardless of which side of the border those concerned reside or are travelling to/from, and that many of these are now contractually and/or legislatively underwritten.”

OPSTA Services Get Worse

Readers may remember the ongoing issue of removal of through trains from Southport to Manchester Piccadilly and beyond and that it was hoped that the promised resumption of services in the December timetable change would bring some relief but with the problems reported elsewhere Ormskirk – Preston Southport, Travellers Association (OPSTA) this has resulted in a worse service, Alan Fantom Chairman of writes.

“Inevitably the implementation of the December timetable change by Northern was managed badly and the service deteriorated further (what is a worse status than 'abysmal?'). Not only did they introduce 19 new trains over the weekend of the change knowing these units present problems when first brought into full operational use and without contingency or back-

out plans (I asked) it seems they re-rostered many other classes too with the familiarisation and re-training requirements that brings.

It was pitiful observing crews trying to work out who was taking which services out of Southport when what Operations were signalling conflicted with the scraps of paper instructions in their hands.

It did bring in the return of the Piccadilly service but there are two immediate issues:

- will the service get any better soon? I don't think any one can influence that.
- with the inevitable change of operating arrangements to come, how do we ensure it is a vast improvement with priority given to getting passengers to their destination no matter what operational difficulties are being encountered? This is a matter that needs to be discussed with the CTA.

OPSTA will attend Northern's consultation event for the May timetable change but without any expectations.”

Future branch meetings.

After our AGM on 22nd February, the next two branch committee meetings, open to members, will be on 4th April 2020, this is a joint meeting with the Yorkshire branch at Brian Jackson House, 2 New North Parade Huddersfield, HD1 5JP. Its planned to have a speaker from Network Rail to talk about the Trans -Pennine Route Upgrade. The following meetings are on 13th June in Bromborough and on 5th September, venue tba. Details of the April meeting will be advised closer to the time, contact the Secretary or Chair for further information.

The June meeting will start around 1300 and is at the Merebrook pub, Bromborough, but for those that want lunch, we will normally be there from 1200.

**Railfuture North West England
 Annual General Meeting
 Saturday 22nd February 2020
 Holiday Inn
 The Ringway
 Preston
 PR1 3AU**



Railfuture North West England’s Annual General Meeting will take place in the Holiday Inn Preston, as above, meeting in the Ribblesdale suite.

Members should note we are looking to secure a speaker from Network Rail but currently are unable to confirm, so we plan to extend the day to accommodate if necessary. We will have a 1200 start, lunch at 1315 for 30 minutes and a finish no later than 1415. If we are able to secure a speaker, we will still start at 1200 but extend the day to 1500. We will advise by email.

The outline agenda will be the normal AGM business, we will also have two topics that will no doubt prove talking points, that of the current state of the Northern franchise and the second would be infrastructure developments under Network Rail, members can bring their views along!

Tea and coffee will be served on arrival and a sandwich lunch including chips and salad is available at £7.95 per head and needs to be pre-booked, we need to have bookings by 15th February as we need to confirm numbers before the meeting, please advise Christopher Norton by email, cjnblackpool@btinternet.com, or telephone 01253 623338. You can pay on the day to the Treasurer.

**Nomination for Railfuture North West England Branch
 Committee 2020/21**

Nominations are now invited for the 2020/21 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

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

Please return to Christopher Norton, either by post or email, addresses is 26 Handsworth Road, Blackpool, FY1 2RQ, email [c j n b l a c k p o o l @ b t i n t e r n e t . c o m](mailto:cjnblackpool@btinternet.com), the closing date is midnight on Sunday February 16th 2020.

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Rail User Groups within the North West

area Affiliated to Railfuture

(for those viewing in pdf format, there are embedded links to most group's 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
 - [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](#) (no website currently)
 - [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://wwwbafraua.org.uk/> click on "Join Our User Group."

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.

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 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;

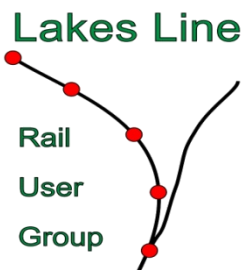
Corporate Bodies £25.00, representative bodies £12.50

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.



Join Today!

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

Membership: £5.00 Individuals,

£7.00 Family, £13.00 Corporate

LA9 5DA

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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 & 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.

www.railfuture.org.uk

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