

# MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

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ON LINE EDITION

The Newsletter of the Mid-Cheshire Rail Users Association, the Voice for Users of the Manchester-Stockport-Altrincham-Knutsford-Northwich-Chester and Crewe-Winsford-Hartford-Liverpool Lines.

Visit our website at [www.mcrua.org.uk](http://www.mcrua.org.uk).

## **NOTICE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING**

To all members: Notice is given that an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Mid-Cheshire Rail Users Association will be held on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2007 in the Tatton Room of Knutsford Civic Centre, commencing at 7.45pm. The business of the meeting will be the approval of a revised constitution for the Association. Arthur E. Sancto, Secretary

## **MARK BARKER OF NORTHERN RAIL TO ADDRESS KNUTSFORD MEETING**

As Arthur Sancto mentions in his article below Mark Barker, the Stakeholder Liaison Manager for Northern Rail (West), will be addressing the MCRUA meeting on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May after the conclusion of the EGM business. The venue for the meeting, the Knutsford Civic Centre, is on the main A50 (Toft Road) adjacent to the bridge entrance to Knutsford station. The Tatton Room has its own entrance at the rear of the building. There is ample car parking adjacent to the venue, accessible via Marcliff Grove, the first side road to the north of the station.

## **NEW TIMETABLE FOR THE MID-CHESHIRE LINE**

A new timetable for the line begins on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> March. This coincides with the reinstatement of the two trains per hour service between Alderley Edge and Manchester via Stockport and the hourly through service between Manchester Airport and Crewe via Wilmslow. There is little change to the timetable on the mid-Cheshire line. Off-peak Monday to Friday trains towards Manchester no longer call at Levenshulme and Heaton Chapel stations but most Saturday trains from Manchester continue to do so. Off-peak Monday to Friday trains will leave Chester at 05 minutes past the hour rather than at 04 past the hour. There are no changes to Sunday services. The timetable runs to the national timetable end date on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May.

## **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS by John Oates**

Since my last "Chairman's Comments" in the Autumn *Rail Report*, we have had an incredibly busy time. MCRUA's response to Network Rail's Draft North West **Route Utilisation Strategy** (RUS) took a lot of effort from a lot of people, and not just those on the Committee. I mentioned our response in my letter to you in January which enclosed the Spring Railtour booking form. It's downloadable from our web site – [www.mcrua.org.uk](http://www.mcrua.org.uk) or please contact our Secretary, Arthur Sancto, who can post you a copy. I'd like to thank all those for the hard work put into supplying information for our response, those who provided written comments, those who carried out passenger counts on our busiest trains, those who met with representatives of GMPTE and Passenger Focus and those who helped me in the drafting of the report. We have had some very

complimentary comments on our response which makes all this hard work justified and it has also helped us in MCRUA be much clearer on what we believe the short and longer-term strategies for rail and transport in Mid-Cheshire should be and why. The final version of the RUS is due for publication this month. Given the detail of our comments and those of other organisations, it will be interesting to see how the final version of the RUS accommodates these.

**“The Heart of Wales” Railtour** on 12 May next is booking very well. At time of writing, we have only 50 standard class seats left out of a total of 600. If you haven't booked yet and you still want to join us, I suggest you email me or ring me first to check for availability – my contact details are on the back page. The **Cheshire Best Kept Station Competition** awards ceremony was very well attended this year with lots of representatives from around the county - councillors, users, those who are both, officers and senior representatives from Northern Rail and Virgin Trains, as well as our then Community Rail Officer, John Kitchen. Held at The Salt Museum in Northwich in January, our line did very well indeed winning four awards. **Cuddington** won an award for the first time ever, this for the best station in Vale Royal, **Northwich** won an award for the involvement of the local youth community, my own station **Mobberley** won an award collected by the Mobberley Village Society for the tidiest station, and **Stockport** won an award for the first time, this for most improved staff performance through training. What a set of results! These are featured at [www.cheshirerail.org](http://www.cheshirerail.org), as is.....

The Salt Museum is hosting the **Mid-Cheshire Railways Exhibition** until the end of April. Entrance is free. For those of you yet to go there's lots of local characters featured from over the years. One part I found particularly interesting was the experiences as recounted by three retired drivers from Northwich and Warrington. One in particular, Ron Carey, with his picture alongside a class 25 freight locomotive at Tunstead Quarries near Buxton, brought back memories for me from the early 1980's, since on one snowy January day I was lucky enough to be invited to join Ron and the then local Area Manager, David McIntosh on a run from Northwich to and from the quarries. The scenery was superb and poor little engine 25086 rattled its way slowly up to Buxton. Then after collecting a full train and being banked to the summit, it was brakes on almost all the way to Deansgate Junction just before Navigation Road. From there it slogged really hard to drag the 18 loaded hopper wagons to Northwich. “Memorable” doesn't say it! For those who went to the Northwich Open Day in 1980 there's plenty of great shots including one of Black 5 5000 hauling the loaded hoppers through Northwich station and up over the viaduct to Oakleigh after the class 25 loco on the train had suffered “a loss of power” at Lostock Gralam and had to be rescued so as not to block the line (I seem to remember David McIntosh being summoned to meetings to explain himself, since steam on freight trains on BR was definitely not allowed!). I'll never forget that day either for the thousands of people there. Very many thanks to lots of people, too many to mention, for putting this superb exhibition together, and especially to our committee member John Hulme and to Mike Lenz and The 8E Association. If you've not visited yet, do go before the end of April. When I was there, there were around 20 people visiting including quite a few children who seemed to find it fascinating. All the pictures/films you can watch are available on a DVD.

As many of you know, **John Kitchen**, our **Community Rail Officer**, took up a new position to carry out a similar role with Cumbria County Council from January. John has done a superb job for us in Mid-Cheshire. He will be a very difficult act to follow. Currently Cheshire County Council and Vale Royal Borough Council are leading the search for his replacement, the hope being that person will be in place for May this year. Some of you have asked whether **Mid-Cheshire Steam** is continuing. This is a Mid-Cheshire Community Rail Partnership event, strongly supported by MCRUA. The hope is that the next steam event will run in May 2008. Hopefully by then the resignalling between Cheadle Hulme and Crewe will at last be completed. Thus, there is a good chance the first train would start from Crewe, running up the Middlewich line to Northwich, before continuing to Altrincham for the shuttles. **John Hulme** has also been instrumental in drafting our new **Membership leaflet**, the draft of which most of you will have seen with the January mailing and the final

version of which is now enclosed. This is generating lots of interest and is already bringing lots of new members to MCRUA. In the last 2 months we have had over 50 new members join (we count family members as two), taking our total membership to over 600 for the first time. It just goes to show what publicity does. We also have a new leaflet from Northern Rail entitled “**Your guide to the Mid Cheshire Line**”. This is very professionally produced and is being distributed through tourist information centres, stations and the like. Copies, which you might like to hand out, can be obtained from our staffed stations and from our Secretary.

I normally produce a separate article on the **Quality Improvement Team (QIT)**, but this time am including it here. Last December the QIT was reorganised more into a watching brief, reflecting the different needs due to the much improved performance of the train and replacement bus services recently. We now have a small **Trains Performance Team** made up of me and Nicola Paisley, Performance Manager West at Northern, and a **Replacement Bus Performance Team** made up of me and Karen Humphreys who is in charge of managing all replacement bus services at Northern. Nicola and I meet every 8 weeks, and Karen and I as required. Recent train performance has been very good with a Public Performance Measure of 89.7% for the four weeks to early March, very close indeed to target and closer than we’ve ever been before. We continue to monitor both rail and bus services to maintain this and hopefully improve them even more. Lastly, **Mike Honeyman**, our Vice-Chairman emigrated to Melbourne in January having been made an offer of employment he couldn’t refuse. He’s a waste water engineer. We are already missing Mike with his steady advice from the background. We hear he, his wife and 3-year old son have settled in well and wish them the very best for the future. Peter Davies, our Membership Secretary, has taken over the role of Vice-Chairman through to our next AGM. I appreciate this is a long report, but as you’ll see there’s a lot going on. Please keep you comments coming to us, either via Arthur, our Secretary, or direct to me.

John Oates, 11 March 2007

## **FROM THE SECRETARY’S DESK by Arthur Sancto**

### **A Busy time**

As members will know from the letter from our Chairman, John Oates, enclosing details of the Special Train to the Heart of Wales line, we sent a very full reply to the Network Rail Draft Route Utilisation Study for the North West. This made for a busy time for the committee in the period coming up to and over Christmas in the preparation of the reply which was finally pulled together over the Christmas holiday by John Oates. It also emphasised how many opportunities there are for others to get involved, particularly in niche projects. I am thinking for example of the work that was done by several of the committee to get some more reliable and up-to-date traffic census figure for the line. This could be an individual project for someone, possibly with an interest in statistics, to build up records of passenger numbers over the line and not just on the most heavily loaded trains. It would be useful for MCRUA to be able to have access to our own source of information, even though I know that Northern are starting to fit some trains with automatic passenger counters. This is but one example and if you have any ideas for activities which you think would be useful to MCRUA in furthering our objectives, please get in touch with me

### **New Constitution**

Another matter which has absorbed some time over the past few weeks has been to update the Association’s constitution as mentioned in this column in the last Mid-Cheshire Rail Report. This has now been completed and agreed by the committee. The revised constitution may be viewed on the ‘Membership’ page of our website [www.mcrua.org.uk](http://www.mcrua.org.uk) , or I will send you a copy if you ask. The important stage we now reach is for it to be approved by the membership at a general meeting. Which leads me to....

## **EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING – MARK BARKER IS GUEST SPEAKER**

It had been intended to seek approval of the new constitution by the membership at the 2007 Annual General Meeting, which under the revised constitution is to be held before the end of July. However, it has been realised that to call and hold the Annual General Meeting in accordance with the new rules, would require the revised constitution to be formally approved beforehand. Therefore formal notice is given elsewhere in this Rail Report of an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Association to be held in the Tatton Room of Knutsford Civic Centre on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May at 19.45 to discuss and adopt the new constitution. No other Association business, for example the approval of the accounts, will be conducted at this meeting as this will all wait until the Annual General Meeting. Suitable trains are the 18.24 from Manchester Piccadilly and the 18.56 from Chester. The adoption of the new constitution should not take the whole evening, so after the formal meeting has closed, Mark Barker of Northern Rail has kindly agreed to come and talk to us about how Northern is developing. It should be an interesting address and there will be an opportunity for a question and answer session. Please try to attend. This is an important meeting of MCRUA and our guest speaker is closely connected with how local rail services around Manchester are developing. We plan to finish the meeting by 21.30. Suitable return trains are at 21.40 to Manchester and 22.04 to Chester.

## **CAN YOU HELP MCRUA WITH ITS WORK? by David Miller**

How many men does it take to .....You have heard the joke about changing a light bulb, but in MCRUA we would rather like a few more people to do some of our jobs. As with most voluntary organisations, the active members have a range of aptitudes and available time, so even something like running the special train can require the efforts of quite a lot of us. Not only that, many of us are also involved in other aspects of the association. So, people organising the Heart of Wales are also doubling as Association Chairman, Membership Secretary, Newsletter Editor, etc, as well as participating in other of our focus groups. The message is that we would welcome assistance. You don't have to jump in at the deep end or face something beyond your ability. Try filling and posting 100 letters, for instance. If you will pardon the pun, "many hands make light work".

## **THE VIEW FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR by Andrew Macfarlane**

MCRUA sends its condolences to the relatives of the female passenger who died in the tragic accident at Lambrigg on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> February. It is vital that lessons are learned from what on the face of it appears to be virtually a carbon copy of the Potters Bar accident of 2002. It is a credit to Network Rail that nearly 5 years elapsed before there was another fatal accident for which the rail industry was responsible. No safety systems are perfect but Network Rail must put its track maintenance procedures under the spotlight to ensure that a similar accident never occurs again. It is only thanks to the inherent strength of the Pendolino bodyshell that more lives were not lost at Lambrigg. There is clearly an urgent need for more rolling stock on many local services in the Greater Manchester area. Yorkshire Forward, the Development Agency for that region sensibly and wisely agreed to fund additional trains for commuter services into Leeds. It is therefore deeply disappointing that the North West Regional Development Agency has chosen not to fund additional trains for the Manchester area. Of course it could be argued that it is the Department for Transport who should be funding such additional rolling stock anyway. Or do we have to wait for congestion charging to pay for more trains? We very much hope that GMPTE is able to lease some additional trains from those that are coming off lease thanks to the recent deal between Northern and Angel Trains, which is described elsewhere in the newsletter.

## **MCRUA's AUTUMN SPECIAL TRAIN**

MCRUA is in discussion with Northern about a possible special train in the autumn. The train would again use a pair of class 156 Super Sprinter units on a Sunday and we would again visit a destination “somewhere on the Northern network” (Northern is unable to run trains off its regular passenger network). Further details should be available in time for the next newsletter, due to coincide with the May timetable change.

## **SPECIAL TRAIN TO TOTNES (FOR THE SOUTH DEVON RAILWAY) AND PLYMOUTH**

The Dee & Mersey Group of the Ffestiniog Railway and the Chester Model Railway Club are jointly running a special locomotive-hauled train “The South Devon Express” from Hooton and Bache (for Chester) to Exeter St David’s, Newton Abbot, Totnes (for the steam-operated South Devon Railway) and Plymouth on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April. The route is via Shrewsbury, Hereford, the Severn Tunnel and Bristol. Plenty of seats remained available at the time of writing. Full details and a booking form can be found at [www.chestermodelrailwayclub.com](http://www.chestermodelrailwayclub.com) or from Laurence Wheeler on 01244-678070 (evenings).

## **MID-CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP REPORT by John Kitchen**

### **Leaving the Mid Cheshire**

As most people will now know I am leaving the Mid Cheshire Partnership to take up a new post as Rail Officer for Cumbria County Council looking after all the railways in Cumbria in January 2007. Many of you will know that my wife and I plan to retire to Cumbria in due course and this gives me an opportunity to advance this process. On leaving, however, I would like to express my deep appreciation of all the efforts made by MCRUA and its members to support the Rail Partnership. From my attendance at my first MCRUA committee meeting I have received nothing less than whole hearted support and huge financial backing. As an aspirational, forward looking and pro-active rail association I would challenge anybody to find a better example. The list of achievements associated with MCRUA is substantial and growing, long may it continue. Certainly MCRUA is widely recognised within the industry as a leading example of a well run, constructive partner. It has been a pleasure working with all the Partners in Mid Cheshire and I can truly say that I have had one of the most memorable and enjoyable periods of my life doing the job – but on my own I could have achieved nothing. One thing that I did not expect to be to say upon leaving the job is that the agenda is probably longer than immediately after I wrote my initial report on the line in June 2003 – we have achieved a lot but there is so much more to do. Whoever succeeds me will find a ready source of knowledge, advice, ideas and enthusiasm available in MCRUA to assist them on their way. Doubtless they will be different – for example they will probably not be able to quote valve lap and lead measurements on a Black 5 (I must get a life one day) – and will take the Partnership forward in their own distinct manner. I, of course, look forward to the challenge in Cumbria and acknowledge that those railways will require a different approach, plus as a Rail Officer rather than a Rail Partnership Officer, I will be slightly more establishment than I have been allowed to be in Mid Cheshire. The debt I owe to Vale Royal and Cheshire in managing me very “hands off” is immense and I would like to think that they very much embody the concept of accepting that results are what matter.

The railway industry have also supported me in so many ways – it would be invidious to cite too many, but Mark Barker, David Godley, Jamie Ross, Paul Rushton, Paul Salveson and all their staff at Northern have been superb to work with – it has been a true Partnership. That is not to say that we accept everything without demur – we are critical friends and Northern are grown up enough to accept that. An honourable mention for First North Western who kicked off the regeneration process at Northwich by reglazing the canopy. Richard Peck during his brief tenure as MD signed that project off. We also owe thanks to Jerry Swift at Network Rail who has worked on our behalf on Northwich and continues to work on Lostock. Stephen Cornish also helped with our rail days – a small example, in 2004 we technically infringed the twelve week rule [the notice period for a special train - Ed] and it was only through Stephen’s efforts that the day was saved. Our special train

partners at Riviera and West Coast also trust MCRUA to deliver a train on time and in the condition it left the depot in the morning and to run a safe operation; in particular on “long train” and steam days where the disparity between train length and platform lengths demands a very safety conscious operation. To paraphrase a very well known charter operator “we wouldn’t sign off the Mid Cheshire operation to some of our cranks”. It has been a pleasure to receive compliments from the railway industry on the professionalism of these operations – wholly attributable to MCRUA.

This article is not intended to list every event or credit everybody who has helped me – a few more Rudheath High School, Knutsford High School, the local and regional Press, British Transport Police, Mobberley Village Society, Forestry Commission, Café Arrabica, John Hulme, etc. A brilliant aspect of the CRP concept is that you can be as involving as you wish to be and for all the cynics out there, most people want to do good things. Rarely have I been refused co-operation by anybody. In case you are wondering about the relevance of MCRUA, half these contacts were made via MCRUA people – your network is one of your immense strengths and garnering support around the county one of your greatest achievements.

MCRUA is also making great strides in drawing up a set of guiding documents to advance its activities over the short and medium term. These documents should set the course for the Association and enable even more focused efforts on the development of the line. There are problems evident in the railway industry, not least due to increasing success and the associated problems set by resource limits in terms of physical capacity, personnel and finance. MCRUA and the Partnership must ensure that the Mid Cheshire is constructively represented in meeting these challenges. There are also opportunities – I am pleased to report that after several false starts (and again with a MCRUA input) a small team from DfT/Network Rail and consultants assisting DfT have visited various lines on which tram/trains are used in Europe and also visited Stadler and the participants converted from sceptics into enthusiasts. Tram/train may be an opportunity for the Mid Cheshire – MCRUA will doubtless assist the debate. On a more mundane level MCRUA must also try to assist Northern in identifying day to day problems and securing action for rectification – if ISS are not performing in the realm of maintenance, if Fraser Eagle are falling short with bus replacement, if performance on the line is declining MCRUA will, I hope, continue to be part of the solution. To conclude, I have felt extremely privileged to have worked with MCRUA and I hope that the good work to develop the railway will continue. I will doubtless be around in Cheshire from time to time and look forward to participating in the 2008 Rail Day, which received formal approval at the Partnership Meeting of 13/12!

## NEWS FROM THE LINE

Very good news is that MCRUA has been promised that services on the mid-Cheshire line will be “strengthened” during the closure of the Metrolink Altrincham line for the relaying of some of the track in July and August. This means that most (or hopefully all) services on the line will consist of four coaches rather than two during the period. Four class 142 Pacer trains are to be taken on short-term lease by Northern for the purpose. The trains will become available thanks to a deal whereby Merseytravel is to see some class 142s replaced by class 156s (which have more seats). The 156s are in turn available because Northern is to lease 30 additional class 158 trains from train leasing company Angel Trains. 24 class 142s are to be returned to the leasing company as part of the deal. Greater Manchester PTE is attempting to put together a deal whereby some of these 142s will remain available to Northern to strengthen services in the Greater Manchester area. We hope that these efforts prove to be successful. The new **Altrincham Ice Dome** opened to the public on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March. The facility is a temporary replacement for the former Altrincham Ice Rink but the new facility is much more convenient for public transport than its predecessor, being sited immediately adjacent to Altrincham station on the site of the former goods yard. We hope that many users of the new ice rink will use public transport to reach the venue. **Mouldsworth signal box** had been demolished by 18<sup>th</sup> March. We understand that the lever frame and nameboard have been preserved.

## **EXPANSION OF THE EAST CHESHIRE LINE(S) RAIL USERS GROUP by Chris Dale**

For many years the passengers using the railway from Manchester Piccadilly to Stoke-on-Trent have had the services of ECLRUG available to them to represent their views when things went wrong. As everyone reading this will know, things have gone spectacularly wrong at times, with the famous extra week of blockade in 2003 when Network Rail failed to complete the work on time. These problems now seem quite small after the more recent disruption experienced by passengers on the routes from Manchester to Crewe connected with the installation of the Ansaldo signalling system. There was no user group available to these “victims” and we received many calls at ECLRUG from users of these lines asking for help. Because of this, we decided that it would be a good idea to expand our activities to include the Crewe lines and the decision was formally made at our 2006 AGM. Northern Rail were very happy for us to do this as they had decided to set up a Community Rail Partnership for the line to lessen the effects of the prolonged blockade and minimal train services which had caused ridership on the line to plummet. They had decided that they would need a user group to help in this task and we filled the bill very conveniently. The expanded area needed a change of name and that was very easy because we decided just to add a letter ‘s’ to Line as both routes were mainly in the eastern part of Cheshire. This new organisation officially started on 7<sup>th</sup> March with a meeting in Wilmslow where about twenty people turned to see what we were doing. There will now be a period of publicity to tell everyone along the line that we are here. This is the start of an exciting new era for ECLRUG and hopefully we will continue to help all the passengers using these lines, whether they are members or not.

Chris Dale is a MCRUA member from Macclesfield who is also the Chairman of the East Cheshire Lines Rail User Group. He can be contacted on 01625-428379 or by email on [chris-dale@talktalk.net](mailto:chris-dale@talktalk.net).

## **FREIGHT NEWS**

A new Freightliner Heavy Haul freight service has recently started conveying stone from Dowlow (Briggs Sidings) to Garston (Merseyside) via Altrincham and the Hartford curve. The train runs on Thursdays only. The hydrochloric acid traffic from Sandbach to Dalry has ceased. The final train left behind 66100 on 17th February and the plant at Sandbach is said to be due to close. The brine traffic from Oakleigh Sidings (Winnington) to Middlewich in connection with the Northwich Salt Mine Stabilisation scheme has also ceased. The flyash traffic from Drax Power Station (Yorkshire) to Oakleigh in connection with the same scheme is said to be finishing in mid-May.

## **METROLINK NEWS**

21 of the 26 original “Phase 1” vehicles have now had their floors renewed. Vehicle 1024 is due to return from Wolverton at the end of April. GMPTE will be funding work on the remaining vehicles after the end of the present Metrolink contract. Keolis and Stagecoach remain in the frame for the new operating contract, which is now due to start “in the spring”. First Engineering and Carillion are the two short-listed bidders for the infrastructure maintenance contract. The £102m upgrade of the Altrincham and Bury lines will begin with weekend blockades on the Bury line in May. The Altrincham line will be closed between Altrincham and Cornbrook from early July to late August, during which period buses will replace trams.

## **FARES NEWS**

The popular **GM Rail Ranger** and **Evening Ranger** tickets increased in price to £3.50 and £1.75 respectively as from 2<sup>nd</sup> January. Northern implemented a 4.3% fare increase from the same date. Regulated fares (Singles, Saver Returns and 7-Day Season tickets) now increase by the increase in the Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 1%.

Northern introduced a **Cheshire Day Ranger** ticket as from 2<sup>nd</sup> January. This useful ticket can be used on the services of all Train Operators (but not Metrolink) in the area bounded by West Kirby, Liverpool, Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent, Crewe and Chester. The ticket costs £15 or £9.90 for railcard holders and it can be used after 08.45 on Monday to Friday and all day on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. We look forward to seeing publicity for the ticket at stations. The cheapest single fare between Manchester and London is now Midland Main Line's Advance C via Sheffield at £7. The cheapest single fare on Virgin West Coast is the Value Advance C at £12.50.

New ticket machines have been installed at Stockport and Piccadilly stations. However members should beware! These machines still sell the "peak" tickets in the off-peak after 09.30 on Monday to Friday and at weekends (in addition to cheaper fares). We have made representations to Northern about this as people can easily pay more than they need to. Members should also take care if booking a ticket to London from the machines because it is easy to buy a "Route Chesterfield" ticket, which is not valid on Virgin. The best advice is to always use the booking office. A new **Knutsford-Manchester Central Zone Duo fare** was introduced by Northern as from 2<sup>nd</sup> January. This enables two people travelling together to travel to Manchester for a total of £7.20 return. Return is not permitted from Manchester on trains timed to depart between 16.01 and 17.59 on Monday to Friday. Duo fares are now also available from Plumley, Mobberley and Ashley to Manchester. It is regrettable that Northern does not publicise the Duo tickets from the line to both Chester and Manchester. The bus concessionary fare in Greater Manchester increased to 70p as from 25<sup>th</sup> March. GMPTE concessionary pass holders still pay half fare on Metrolink and local rail services before 09.30 on Monday to Friday.

## LOCAL RAIL NEWS

There are two Open Weekends/Open Days to look forward to this summer. Lafarge Cement at Hope, Derbyshire, is holding an Open Weekend on Saturday and Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July, which should be well worth a visit. The last such event saw a passenger shuttle on the branch to Earles Sidings and connecting buses from Hope station on the Manchester-Sheffield line. Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September sees an Open Day at **Newton Heath** Traction Maintenance Depot in North Manchester. Several large steam locomotives should be present as well as more modern rolling stock and there is to be a steam-hauled shuttle service from Manchester Victoria. Lifts are to be installed adjacent to the footbridge at **Hazel Grove** station later this year to provide disabled access to and from the Manchester-bound platform. Ticket gates are to be installed at **Manchester Oxford Road** station in spring this year. Manchester Piccadilly, Bolton and Manchester Victoria are to follow. **Trans-Pennine Express** is looking to extend its new class 185 trains to 4 coaches. **Burnage** station is due to reopen at the end of March following platform rebuilding.

## THE SANDSTONE RAMBLER by David Miller

The bus that ran between Frodsham and Whitchurch stations via Delamere and Mouldsworth at weekends from April to September has been discontinued, as there is no money available to subsidise it.

## THE GREAT STORM ON THE MID-CHESHIRE LINE by John Oates (A day to remember.....but never again please!)

On Thursday 18 January I left home in Mobberley just after 7am heading for a business meeting in Hereford unaware of the reports of the coming bad weather (I hardly ever watch the news). I caught the 0712 train from Mobberley formed of 142.005 which was on time. The unit floor was covered in water which was also running down the sides of the walls (a "feature" of some of the class 142s) – apparently it had been raining heavily overnight, but I'd slept soundly and not noticed. The roof was leaking badly in the middle of the non-toilet

vehicle and the corridor connection was producing what amounted to a waterfall every time we braked. The conductor had done his best with paper towels from the toilet to mop up the floor, but it was a losing battle. A foretaste of what was to come. I found a dry seat, settled into the run and the conductor smiled as he sold me my day return to Hereford thinking of his commission, neither of us realising I would not be getting there.....

Chris Lodington, Trains Manager with Arriva Trains Wales at Chester joined us at Cuddington. He told us things were not good, especially for me who was looking forward to my trip down the very scenic “North & West” route to Hereford. Apparently the first train from Chester down the line towards Shrewsbury had hit a tree on the line near Chirk. Nobody was hurt, but the class 158 unit was damaged and the line had been shut. He spoke to his ATW Control finding out my train to Hereford would still run but be diverted to Shrewsbury via Crewe. The conductor checked with Northern Control, then made appropriate announcements. The 0820 to Cardiff via Hereford came into Chester from Holyhead on time, a class 158. There was some confusion at Chester about which way we were going. After waiting 20 minutes for another 158 to be attached to the front (which should have worked to Birmingham earlier, but hadn't due to the line closure), we left 25 minutes late. The conductor, a new Shrewsbury man announced we would still arrive in Shrewsbury on time (!) and was still saying this whilst we were sitting outside Crewe waiting a platform 10 minutes before we were due in Shrewsbury!! I told an adjacent passenger who turned out to be a Welsh MP going to see the Welsh Transport Minister in Cardiff that there was no chance of this.

By this time we had heard Network Rail had imposed a blanket 50 mph speed limit on lines in the area. The general consensus was this was a massive over-reaction. How wrong we were! At Crewe there was confusion as to what was going on. Eventually we discovered the unit we were on was being sent to Manchester and we quickly transferred to the front unit. We left after about 30 minutes proceeding at 50mph. I hadn't realised how much more scenery you notice at 50 mph rather than the usual 90 mph. Very relaxing, though my 1130 meeting was starting to look unlikely. We passed many waterlogged fields and fast-running streams and just before Shrewsbury went over the bypass which had massive traffic jams due to flooding. At Shrewsbury the train was delayed further. We were told it was to become the 1050 to Carmarthen (we should have left at 0918) and were being advised not to travel unless absolutely necessary. About the same time I got a call from Hereford to ask me to come later since earlier meetings had been delayed due to a number of road accidents on the A49. My Welsh MP friend and I decided to abandon our trips. I'd heard from Chris that the line at Chirk had been cleared (apparently the 158 had been driven back to Chester from its good end and sent onto the depot) and I saw there was a 1026 on the screens to Chester from platform 3. We got there, but it was a bus, so we rushed back to platform 4 and got the 1026 to Manchester as far as Crewe rather than risking the road. Yet again we had a chance to view the scenery to Crewe at 50 mph. There the next service to Chester was cancelled, but we caught the following one 30 minutes later and I headed for the 1304 back to Mobberley. We left on time, this time in 142.007, and I was joined by Bob Medlock, a senior Network Rail manager from Piccadilly who lives near Navigation Road station. He was amused to hear how I'd abandoned my trip to Hereford, the first time I've ever done this in the UK after many years railway travel. After Mouldsworth we passed a fallen tree on the other line. The driver stopped to report it and then waved heavily at the train coming the other way. We heard later that driver had managed to stop in time. After Delamere we progressed at the required maximum of 50 mph. Just after the farm crossing half way to Cuddington the brakes went full on, there was a big bang at the front of the unit, the train shook, a large tree trunk bounced off, then springing back and smashing into the rear carriage where we were sitting. Both Bob and I shouted “Duck!” and did so, as the tree trunk went “Bang, Bang, Bang,…” along the windows of the 142. We stopped. Everyone was OK and the driver got on to the signaller to report the problem. The front of the unit was dented and the nearside light cluster smashed, but we were cleared to continue. We carried on in very, very gusty conditions. At Greenbank the driver was told by the signaller that worse was to come and we were to stop at Northwich and wait there for instructions.

Well if you're going to stop anywhere, Northwich with its superb "The Zone" cybercafé has to be a great choice, not that we had had one. Many of us retreated to the café for lunch. The afternoon internet course had been cancelled due to the weather, so we had free internet access and Northern paid for a round of refreshments for the 40 or so passengers. The weather got really bad as most of you know. After 5pm when they normally close, the staff at The Zone stayed open especially for us. The driver got permission to restart just after 6pm. After I had collected some of the passengers from the nearby "Lion & Railway" pub (who were definitely the worse for wear!), we started again, this time in the dark. We brushed against a tree just before Plumley, setting passengers down there and at Knutsford. About ¼ mile after Knutsford we stopped. There was a tree on the line, but only a small one. The driver reported this to the signalman, making sure the train coming the other way was stopped (it turned out it was stopped anyway at Northenden with the train crew removing a garden shed from the line!). The conductor broke into the emergency tool cupboard taking out a crowbar, saw, length of rope and the rest of the tools. There were four on the train with track passes, so down they went to start cutting up the tree. Bob was one of them and soon noticed there was an even bigger tree on the line 100 yards further on in the dark, far too big to move. The four got back on and permission was received to reverse back to Knutsford station where we arrived (for the second time) 319 minutes late, my latest ever on a train in the UK. We heard the trams were still running from Altrincham and could not get through to Control, so I arranged for my local taxi company to take the 22 remaining passengers forward to Altrincham.

My wife came to pick me up to take me home where I arrived at ten past eight. What a day! All the passengers had been really good and understanding about the massive delay. The railway personnel were superb. The driver had been on for 16 hours and was clearly getting very weary, and the conductor for 14 hours. Bob arranged accommodation at a hostel in Manchester for a couple of students who were clearly not going to make Nottingham and Loughborough that evening. And to my amazement the trains were running the next morning. All in all, well done all round!

## **ALTRINCHAM WINTER LECTURE SERIES AND COACH TRIP TO THE SEVERN VALLEY**

The Altrincham Electric Railway Preservation Society (AERPS) is again holding its annual winter lecture series at Altrincham Methodist Church on the corner of Barrington Road and Woodlands Road (5 minutes' walk from Altrincham station in the direction of Manchester) on the second Friday of the month at 7.30pm. Admission (which includes free tea/coffee and biscuits) is £3 (free for AERPS members). The remaining talk in the current season is: Friday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2007 "Everywhere but England" by Bob Avery. The AERPS is also running a coach trip from Cheadle, Stretford, Sale, Altrincham, Knutsford, Lostock Gralam and Northwich to the Severn Valley Railway on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April. Fares are £23 for AERPS members and £24 for non-members. Further details and a booking form can be obtained from Andrew Macfarlane (contact details on the back page) or from the AERPS website at [www.altrincham-electric.org.uk](http://www.altrincham-electric.org.uk).

## **A WARM WELCOME TO ALL OUR NEW MEMBERS**

The following people have joined MCRUA since the previous issue of the newsletter was published:

Mr Martin Wright, Sale	Miss Patricia Gallagher, Ashton-under-Lyne
Mr Harry Boardman, Barnton, Northwich	Mr David Roberts, Sandiway
Ms Anne Macaulay, Altrincham	Mr John Hulme, Barnton, Northwich
Mr B Crompton, Knutsford	Mr P Moulds, Sale
Mr B Grealley, Timperley	Mr Brian Bennett, Chester
Mrs Irene Pickup, Timperley	Mr Frank Buxton, Connah's Quay
D Millington, Northwich	Mrs E C Myatt, Mobberley

Mr J A Leeson, Baguley  
John & Valerie Springsthorpe, Plumley  
James and Carol Graham, Ellesmere Port  
G L Alderson, Handbridge, Chester  
Mr David Parkes, Hartford  
Dr Peter Ackrill, Bramhall  
Mr Michael Cooper, Winsford  
Rev Paul and Mrs L Cieka, Coppenhall  
Mr Steven Taylor, London  
Ms Hilary Turner, Davenham, Northwich  
Mrs B Twist, Oakmere, Northwich  
Mrs P Bolland & Mr M Pitt, Lymm.

Mrs B Kelly, Timperley  
Mr & Mrs J Allan, Stockport  
Mr David Lewington, Cheadle Hulme  
Mrs D Baker, Rudheath, Northwich  
Mrs G M Higginson, Ellesmere  
Mr & Mrs A Rowlingson, Hale  
P Lockwood, Market Drayton  
Mrs Jean Warburton, Frodsham  
Mr Tony Rowe, Barnton, Northwich  
Mr Colin Maddocks, Knutsford  
Mrs A Hooker, Sutton Weaver

We regret to record the death of member Mrs E M Mills of Knutsford (formerly of Plumley).

### **2007 SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL**

Subscriptions are now due for renewal if you have not yet renewed for 2007 and a renewal form is enclosed with this newsletter. The association's subscription year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> March to 28<sup>th</sup> February.

### **MID-CHESHIRE LINE PEOPLE**

MCRUA committee member **John Hulme** is now the Northern Station Adopter for Greenbank, replacing **Mike Honeyman**, who as mentioned in John Oates's report has emigrated with his family to Australia. We also congratulate John Hulme on being awarded the High Sheriff of Cheshire's Good Citizenship Award.

**DISCLAIMER** Opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the MCRUA committee.

### **USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS**

National Rail Enquiries	08457 48 49 50 (24 hours a day)
The Trainline (bookings by telephone)	08457 222 333
Freephone number to report crime on the railway	0800 40 50 40
Network Rail (to report infrastructure faults)	08457 11 41 41
Northern Rail Train Running Information	0800 528 0200 or 0870 602 33 22
Northern Rail Customer Relations	0845 600 11 59
Passenger Focus (complaints appeals)	08453 022 022
Helpline for Manchester Piccadilly station	0845 0000 033
GMPTE Bus, Rail and Metrolink Enquiries	0161 228 7811 (08.00 to 20.00)
Metrolink Enquiries	0161 205 2000
Cheshire Traveline (bus and rail enquiries)	01244 602666 (08.00 to 20.00)
Merseyside PTE Public Transport Enquiry Line	0151 236 7676 (08.00 to 20.00)
National Public Transport Enquiry Line	0871 200 2233 ( <b>a recent change</b> )

### **YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

**CHAIRMAN** John Oates, "Swallowfield", Slade Lane, Mobberley, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 7QN.  
Tel: 01565-873059 (home), 07860-513309 (mobile), Email: john.oates@bakertilly.co.uk

VICE-CHAIRMAN  
& MEMBERSHIP  
SECRETARY

Peter Davies 53 Acacia Avenue, Hale, Altrincham, WA15 8QY.  
Tel: 0161-928-2203, Email: peterdavies@hotmail.com

SECRETARY  
& WEBMASTER

Arthur Sancto, 8 Roxby Way, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 9AX.  
Tel: 01565-651209, Email: arthur@sancto.fslife.co.uk

TREASURER

John Hanson, 4 Stelfox Avenue, Timperley, Altrincham, Cheshire,  
WA15 6UL. Tel: 0161-283-3384, Email: j.hanson4@ntlworld.com

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Andrew Macfarlane, 25 Prestbury Avenue, Timperley, Altrincham  
WA15 8HY. Tel: 0161-928-9394, Email: andrew@mcrua.fsnet.co.uk

COMMITTEE MEMBERS John Hill, Glenferry, Plumley Moor Road, Plumley, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 0TR.  
Tel: 01565-722423.

Malcolm Roughley, Flat 2, The Battens, 72 Stamford Road, Bowdon, Altrincham,  
Cheshire, WA14 2JG. Tel: 0161-929-5030, Email: CorporalJinja@aol.com

John Hulme, Brow Cottage, Leighs Brow, Barnton, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 4HT.  
Tel 01606-76092, Email: jh@johnhulme.com

David Miller, 16 Primrose Hill, Cuddington, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 2TZ.  
Tel: 01606-888093.

#### SUB-COMMITTEES

Middlewich & West Cheshire Sub-Committee. Chairman: Dave Roberts, 5 Whitley Close, Middlewich,  
CW10 0NQ. Tel: 01606-833404 (home), 07900-194975 (mobile). Email: stationcampaign@aol.com  
Hartford & Winsford Sub-Committee. Please contact David Miller (for contact details see above).

**MID-CHESHIRE QIT REPRESENTATIVE** John Oates (for contact details see above)

**MID-CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER** - job currently vacant.

Membership of the association costs £5 for individuals, £7 for families and £14 for corporate bodies.

If you wish to join please return the form below to MCRUA, 53 Acacia Avenue, Hale, Altrincham, Cheshire,  
WA15 8QY. Please make cheques payable to "Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association". Please also send any  
subscription renewals to the same address. MCRUA is affiliated to Railfuture.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

03/07 \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Family/Individual\*

New Member/Renewal\*

\* Please delete

as appropriate