

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

No. 75

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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.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE by John Oates

Since I last produced my comments in early May, we've had an excellent **Steam Day** and a great **Railtour** to Minehead. I mentioned many of those who contributed to these successes in my last column. They say the proof is in the eating, and it certainly was. Despite dull, wet weather on the Steam Day, the turn out was magnificent of members, the general public, the media and very many dignitaries. Indeed, the Mayor of Crewe & Nantwich stayed with us all day from before 9am until after 10pm. We've even got a picture of him conducting the band at Chester Station, one that's been entered for the Community Rail Awards. And then less than one week later, our railtour to Minehead went very well. We're very lucky to have so many willing helpers within our 650+ members. Talking of railtours, we've sadly had to postpone our planned railtour for October. It took far longer than expected to get a quote for the trip intended. When it did come, it was way over what we're used to paying per seat. There was too little time left to arrange anything else, so we decided to leave it and focus on a trip next spring. We know many of you will be disappointed, but at fares around 50% more than you're used to paying, we think this was the right decision.

You may remember the **Community Rail Partnership** and we ran our first **Music Train** last year from Chester to **The Railway Inn at Mobberley** and it was a great success. **Mike Ross** organised this for us as part of his retirement celebrations from Head of Transport Coordination at Cheshire County Council. Mike volunteered to run more for us this year, suggesting we go for four, two from each end of the line. The first one from Chester this year would probably have run well had the "hoppers" not broken down near Northwich and blocked our route for almost an hour. (The "hoppers" refers to the limestone brought from the Peak District by train in hopper wagons to the Brunner Mond works at Lostock and Winnington in the Northwich area). We only had about 40 on the first train from Chester, but the second from Chester was a great success with well over 100 and a "rather full" train. The first from Manchester ran to **The Golden Pheasant at Plumley**, and with around 30 people went well for a first one. The second runs on Wednesday 24 September – if we manage to get this *Rail Report* out in time for you to read before then, do come and join in for a great evening. And meanwhile, Mike has agreed to be co-opted to our Committee. Welcome, Mike.

Prior to this, many of you joined us at our AGM on 17 July. We voted in a full committee of ten prior to co-options, all of whom are making great contributions to MCRUA. Following the AGM, **Mark Willcox**, our Community Rail Officer gave a fascinating presentation of all that he's been involved in over the last year, especially the Steam Train and also **Cheshire Year of the Gardens '08**. He's been really busy, but just look at the great results at places like **Knutsford**, where we have a station to be proud of for the first time in about 30 years thanks to Mark, the pupils of **Knutsford High School** and **Northern Rail**, and **Northwich** thanks to the pupils of **Rudheath High School**. Some stations were a little disappointing, such as **Hale** where **Network Rail** appear to have got stuck in refurbishing the footbridge leaving the scaffolding up for ages making the place look scruffy and **Chester** where progress is happening, but still there is a passenger information system

that in the main doesn't work, intermittent passenger announcements, clocks broken and flower beds looking like a jungle. We hear this should be sorted soon. I mentioned how busy Mark Willcox has been which is great, but it has led to lots of little jobs remaining uncompleted. Jobs like keeping the **Community Noticeboards** updated, fixing the **leaflet dispensers** acquired and then keeping them replenished. If any of you reading this would be willing to **help for a few hours a week**, please let me know. If necessary, we'll find a way of paying for costs incurred.

In my previous two columns I mentioned our great concern that in the **proposed timetable recast in December 2008** we would lose half of our commuter services to/from Manchester, the proposals being that these would terminate at / start from Stockport. Well, this is almost certainly going to happen following "**consultation**", whatever that is supposed to mean. A number of us have written to our MPs about the reduction in services proposed. I wrote to mine, George Osborne, and received a less than satisfactory response. I have written back and this is in progress. At least the service to and from Chester is improving, but for those commuting to Manchester, the reduction of the service to only one through train per hour (it was three back in 1990!) is not a happy prospect. The **Department for Transport (DfT)** seem to take the view this is for the good of the country, but we take the view this will damage the local economy, never mind getting people from London to Manchester quicker.

Occasionally we have **replacement buses** on the line to cover for more significant engineering work. Our experience with these is unfortunately poor. This is despite all the hard work MCRUA has put in over the years firstly with First North Western and now with Northern. Despite a detailed plan and agreed routes, we still get buses getting lost, going the wrong way, missing some of the stations out and even sometimes starting from the wrong place at Altrincham. Very frustrating. And despite the services now being contracted by Northern to **First Rail Support**, a subsidiary of **FirstGroup**, one of the biggest transport operators in the country, it still goes wrong. If anyone has any useful ideas on how to fix this which don't involve one or more of us subsequently serving a spell in Strangeways, we'd love to hear from you!

Lastly, you'll be aware of the passenger counts we've been carrying out; see Roy Beacham's article elsewhere. This is to identify passenger loadings on the services, since we used to estimate that between 30-50% of passengers find themselves unable (often) to buy tickets. Ticket sales go into a system called LENNON, which the DfT then calls "footfall" suggesting this is the number of people who travel on the line, when in fact it is nothing of the sort. All this justifies in their mind reducing our services, despite the fact these are already overfull in the peaks. Northern appointed a **Revenue Protection Manager** and team for west of the Pennines last January. The team has been making great strides, and already there has been a significant increase in takings for the line. They have re-established the **highly-discounted Scholars Season Tickets**, and started other initiatives. We're including an advert for these in this issue – a first for us. Thanks again for being part of MCRUA. It's great to have the support of well over 600 members. Please let us have your views as well as continuing to support the railway in Mid-Cheshire as part of an improving transport infrastructure, itself there to support a better quality of life for all of us. And if you're one of the few receiving a **red renewal reminder**, please rejoin since these added numbers give us much more strength.

AUTUMN TIMETABLE

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, the autumn "leaf fall" timetable begins on Monday 6th October. Details are in the current pocket timetable for the line (guide 17). Trains will leave Chester earlier to give them more time to reach Edgeley Junction, Stockport on time. The standard departure time from Chester becomes 01 past each hour from 10.01 onwards. Before then, trains leave Chester at 05.53, 06.53, 07.22 and 08.05 on Monday to Friday. The "Northwich starters" will depart from there at 06.46 and 09.29. In the Chester-bound direction the only change is that trains are allowed an additional two minutes between Mouldsworth and Chester. There is no change to Sunday times.

DECEMBER 2008 TIMETABLE ON THE MID-CHESHIRE LINE

14th December 2008 will see the biggest change in local rail timetables for many years (probably since May 1989). Virgin Trains introduces its VHF (Very High Frequency) timetable on the West Coast main line with three trains per hour between Manchester and London (there are currently two per hour). The good news is that the mid-Cheshire line will still have an hourly service between Chester and Piccadilly through the main part of day. Also those irritating two-hour gaps in the morning service at the Chester end of the line have been filled. All of the hourly trains will run between Manchester and Chester calling at all stations between Stockport and Chester. Ashley, Mobberley and Delamere stations remain request stops. The 07.04 Chester to Manchester Piccadilly service will be formed of a *Sprinter* train (i.e. not a class 142 *Pacer*). The two morning trains, which currently start their day at Blackpool North, will start from Manchester Piccadilly, which should improve their performance. The main downside of the new timetable, as mentioned by John Oates above, is that the two additional morning peak trains from Chester will terminate at Stockport and passengers will have to change at either Altrincham or Stockport to reach Manchester. The two additional evening peak trains towards Chester will also start from Stockport. Also we lose the morning through train from Northwich to Blackpool North, which becomes part of the basic hourly Chester-Piccadilly service. We do not yet have any information on Sunday services from 14th December. The new pocket timetable for services from 14th December will be enclosed with the next issue of the newsletter, which is due out in late November.

DECEMBER 2008 TIMETABLE ON OTHER LINES

There are a number of improvements for users of other lines in our area. **Wilmslow** gains an hourly train service to and from London Euston throughout the day, which also calls at Crewe. The existing hourly Manchester Piccadilly to Macclesfield local train is extended to Stoke-on-Trent calling at **Congleton** and **Kidsgrove**. Congleton is currently served only every two hours. **Styal** gains a morning peak service to Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly, making commuting into Manchester from there a possibility once again. The Buxton to Blackpool North service is split in half with separate services between Buxton and Manchester Piccadilly and between Manchester Victoria and Blackpool North. A new hourly Hazel Grove to Preston service will also operate via Manchester Piccadilly. On the north side of Manchester the Manchester-Rochdale-Leeds "Calder Valley" route gains a third train each hour which will operate via the faster route via Brighouse and Dewsbury. Manchester-Bradford is speeded up with one of the two trains each hour taking 59 minutes in the new timetable. Rochdale loses its through service to Southport via Manchester Victoria with trains terminating at Wigan Wallgate. Hourly services will continue to operate between both Manchester Victoria and Manchester Piccadilly and Southport. The hourly Arriva Trains Wales from Manchester Piccadilly to Llandudno via Warrington Bank Quay and Chester is retimed to depart from Piccadilly at 50 minutes past each hour from December. Finally as mentioned in the previous newsletter **Chester** gains an hourly service to and from London Euston calling at Crewe.

MUSIC TRAIN ON THE MID-CHESHIRE LINE

Details of the final train of the summer 2008 season are:

Manchester-Plumley (Golden Pheasant)

Wednesday 24 September

Depart Piccadilly 18.24

Arrive Plumley 19.09

Depart Plumley 21.35

Arrive Piccadilly 22.26

The music will be provided by multi-instrumentalist folk singer Geoff Higginbottom. If you catch the 18.24 from Piccadilly at stations from Stockport onwards you can buy a cheap evening return, which costs half the price of a cheap day return. There is no need to book in advance for the Music Train or to buy train tickets in advance of the day. If you are boarding the train at Manchester Piccadilly, Stockport, Altrincham or Knutsford please purchase your train tickets from the station booking office on the night. For further information you can email Michael Ross michael.ross@mross.org.uk.

MCRUA SPECIAL TRAINS

As John Oates mentioned above, the next MCRUA special train will run in spring 2009 and we are looking for suggestions for possible destinations for the train. If you would like to put forward any ideas please contact Peter Davies (his contact details are on the back page).

MCRUA PASSENGER CENSUS by Roy Beacham, Passenger Count Coordinator

Regular users of our line have commented how much busier our trains seem compared to a few years ago and so it was decided to try and quantify the numbers of passengers travelling on the line. Thus, a number of volunteers have been counting numbers boarding and alighting at individual stations, as well as the numbers of passengers on board trains at four key points on the line, whenever they have been travelling. These counts have been input into a spreadsheet and over a period from September 2007 to June 2008, we have amassed a considerable amount of data covering all Monday to Friday services and almost all Saturday services. When we look at the average numbers of passengers on each service, we see the following points.

The busiest section of line is Knutsford to Altrincham, very closely followed by Altrincham to Stockport. It is pleasing to see this latter section performing so well as this indicates that, since the introduction of Metrolink and the diversion of our services from the shorter route through Sale to the longer via Stockport, a significant market has built up at Stockport and the number of passengers preferring a through service (rather than changing to Metrolink at Altrincham) to Manchester is significant. As for the busiest stations for our services, Manchester Piccadilly tops the table, followed by (in decreasing order) Knutsford, Altrincham, Stockport, Northwich, Chester, Hale and Greenbank.

The busiest trains on the line are the two trains popular with school children; the 0739 from Manchester and 1505 from Chester. The 0739 is the busiest and sees large numbers of children boarding at stations from Stockport to Hale, travelling to schools at Altrincham, Hale and Knutsford, with a smaller contingent travelling to Greenbank. The 1505 takes most of them back home, but a few use the trains before and after this one. The main commuter flows are in the opposite directions to the school children and in the morning peak the 0654 from Chester, with its Manchester arrival time of 0824, is by far the busiest. The afternoon peak is more staggered and starts earlier than might be expected, probably due to shoppers and day trippers returning home as well as workers. Here the 1624, 1524 and 1724 (in that order) are the busiest. On Saturdays, the early morning trains are lightly loaded, but from 0900 right through until 1900, all trains in both directions see high usage.

Returning to the morning peak in the Manchester direction, it is notable that the current service which terminates at Stockport, the 0650 from Northwich, sees only half the number of passengers as the preceding 0557 from Chester, and only 20% of the following 0654 from Chester. This can be partly explained by it starting from Northwich rather than Chester, but the figures suggest that it is mainly due to it terminating at Stockport, rather than running through to Manchester. Another interesting example occurs with the proposed withdrawal of the 1549 from Chester from next December; if all passengers currently using this train transfer to the slightly later 1600, then this latter train will become the most heavily used service after the two school trains and so would benefit from higher capacity stock. Facts such as these, along with our projections of

passenger numbers once three other services are terminated/started from Stockport in December, have been communicated to Northern in the hope that it will assist them in their allocation of stock to specific services to try and avoid overcrowding on the remaining through services to and from Manchester. We understand that Northern have found the detail of the census most useful. Although they are aware of how many tickets they sell from each station, they do not necessarily know how many passengers are travelling on each service and from which stations due to season ticket holders, passengers using the return portion of their ticket, rovers and PTE tickets/passes, as well as passengers unable to buy tickets (often from unstaffed stations and where the train is too full for the conductor to reach them) and the odd few who try to travel free.

The Association last conducted a census in 2002 and comparing those figures with this latest census, we see an overall increase in passenger numbers of 60%, equating to 12% per annum. It is noticeable that the increase is mainly during the day rather than in the peak, not surprising since the trains in the peaks are already overfull. Imagine how passengers numbers could increase with more capacity provided! Let us hope that this increase continues following the December timetable changes and that the effect of the Stockport curtailments are countered by the enhancements in services to and from Chester, which will see an hourly service throughout the day, including a service with a commuter-friendly arrival time just after 8.30am.

FARES NEWS

Firstly a correction on the issue of the new rules on the use of Cheap Day Return tickets on Cross Country trains, which were mentioned in the last issue. The ban on using such tickets between 15.30 and 18.15 on Monday to Friday **only applies where Cross Country sets the fare between the two stations concerned.** The only routes served by Cross Country in the North West are Manchester Piccadilly-Stockport-Macclesfield-Stoke-on-Trent and Manchester Piccadilly-Stockport-Wilmslow-Crewe and none of the cheap day return fares between any of those stations is set by Cross Country. It is of course virtually impossible for the average passenger to find out which Train Operating Company (TOC) sets their fare and it is therefore deplorable that Cross Country has been able to introduce such a ban. The company claims that they are merely bringing their terms and conditions into line with other TOCs when in fact no other long-distance TOC bans the use of cheap day return tickets in the afternoon peak.

Megatrain fares are available on certain Virgin West Coast services on Monday to Thursday. These include the 04.58 Manchester Piccadilly to Glasgow Central and the 20.10 Glasgow Central to Manchester Piccadilly. Bookings have to be made using the website www.megatrain.com or by calling a 60p-a-minute premium rate phone line.

Some Virgin Advance fares are to be reduced by 50% from December because Virgin will have so many extra seats to fill with in their new high frequency timetable. If you book rail tickets over the phone on 08457-222-333 you do not have to pay either a debit card fee or for postage of the tickets, unlike if you book over the Internet. You can buy train tickets for any train operator on this number.

£10 advance purchase single fares are now available with Arriva Trains Wales between Manchester and Stockport and Colwyn Bay and Llandudno. This fare is available over the phone, via the Internet (www.qjump.co.uk) or from station booking offices. Railcard holders will get a further discount. Talking of railcards, the Young Persons Railcard is now known as the 16-25 Railcard (although mature students can still apply for these railcards). The Family Railcard is now the Family & Friends Railcard. This railcard now provides discounted fares for up to 4 adults and 4 children aged 5 to 15.

Northern increased some fares from the May timetable change. To correct a statement made in the previous issue, the quotas for through tickets between Virgin West Coast stations and Eurostar destinations are not small

(although availability can be patchy). If you are unable to buy a through ticket to Paris or Brussels on the Eurostar website www.eurostar.com you can usually buy a discounted ticket between London St Pancras and Paris or Brussels from that website. It is then advisable to buy tickets to and from "London International" from your nearest main station booking office. This means that the whole of your journey is covered by CIV conditions. This in turn means that if your Eurostar train is late returning from the Continent you can use the next available Virgin service for no extra charge.

There is a real possibility of some hefty fare increases in January because of the current Government formula whereby regulated fares (singles, off-peak returns (formerly known as Savers) and 7-day season tickets) increase by the increase in the retail price index (RPI) plus one percent. The RPI has of course seen a big increase recently with steep increases in the price of food, fuel and energy. So we will be paying a lot more for the privilege of changing trains at Stockport in the morning and evening peak. Hardly a recipe for increased use of the line, which is supposed to be Government policy! Survey after survey have shown that what rail passengers are most dissatisfied with are expensive fares, which do not offer value for money. The Government however is more interested in spending vast sums to shave the odd minute or two off already fast journey times (e.g. the work currently under way at Rugby).

NEWS FROM THE LINE

Platform "planters" have been provided at **Greenbank** and **Cuddington** stations this summer as part of Cheshire Year of the Gardens 2008. The garden has also been planted and waiting shelter artworks have been created for **Delamere** station by Delamere Primary School pupils (the artwork is still to be installed). There is some new artwork and new planting alongside the car park at **Northwich** station, which has involved Rudheath High School pupils. More planting is to be done at Northwich and Greenbank in the autumn. Northern Rail has repainted Northwich station. The Mid-Cheshire Community Rail Partnership has received funding of £2,000 from Manchester International Airport - it is hoped that this will become an annual donation.

The Greater Manchester bid to the Government's Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) was approved by the Government on 9th June. Public consultation on the bid (which involves peak hour congestion charging) is currently under way and there will be a Greater Manchester-wide referendum on the bid in early December (the last day to vote will be 11th December). If the TIF bid gains public approval (and it is a big if) the £2.7 billion programme will include the rebuilding of Altrincham Interchange including a new station footbridge with lifts to improve disabled access. MCRUA has some spare copies of the TIF consultation document. If you would like one please contact Andrew Macfarlane (contact details on the back page). The car parking charge at **Hale** station increased to £2.50 for over 4 hours as from 19th May. Free parking is available in the nearby Brown Street car park. In a very welcome move, CCTV had been installed in the booking hall at **Altrincham** station by 8th August. This has already helped to reduce anti-social behaviour in the booking hall area. However the station footbridge at Altrincham was damaged by fire on the morning of Tuesday 9th September. The sandwich shop at **Navigation Road** station has ceased trading. The new booking office at **Chester** station opened in mid-June.

NEW CAMPAIGN TO OPEN A STATION IN WYTHENSHAW

The Wythenshawe Railway Action Group has been set up to campaign for a new station to be provided at Southmoor Road, Baguley so that the mid-Cheshire line can serve the people of Wythenshawe. The station would also enable patients and visitors to travel by rail to Wythenshawe Hospital, one of the major medical centres in the UK. The group has a blog and an online petition at www.wythenshawerailway.blogspot.com.

A MCRUA committee member is to attend one of the group's meetings. We can see the potential of a station at that location as a useful interchange with the proposed Metrolink line to Manchester Airport. Passengers from Stockport and from the mid-Cheshire line would be able to reach the Airport with one change.

METROLINK NEWS

The track in the city centre is in need of replacement after 16 years of use. The section between Piccadilly Gardens and Piccadilly Station will be closed for the relaying of the track from 27th September for 8 weeks. Trams will run every 6 minutes between Altrincham and Bury direct (calling at Market Street) and every 12 minutes between Victoria and Eccles. A replacement bus shuttle will operate between Piccadilly Station (Fairfield Street) and the bus stop outside Wetherspoons on the north side of Piccadilly Gardens. The delta junction at Piccadilly Gardens is to be relaid early in 2009. The island platform at Piccadilly Gardens is to be widened by 1.9 metres on the bus station side as part of this work.

Metrolink is now powered by hydroelectricity purchased from Scottish & Southern Energy so that GMPTE can claim that the system "runs on water". Physical construction work on the three approved extensions to the Metrolink system is due to start in 2009. Trains will cease running on the Manchester Victoria-Oldham-Rochdale "Oldham Loop" line in autumn 2009. Trams will commence running between Manchester and Central Park (Newton Heath) in spring 2011, to St Werburgh's Road (Chorlton) also in spring 2011, to Oldham Mumps in autumn 2011 and to both Rochdale and Droylsden in spring 2012. Metrolink tram 1010 has been fitted with Sheffield/Hannover-type destination displays, which are certainly much easier to see. No further vehicles will be modified until the arrival of the new trams next year as the installation of the new destination displays entails taking the vehicles out of service. Stagecoach Metrolink also intends to rewire all of the existing trams, which should eliminate the irritating internal noise.

28 new trams are now on order for the Phase 3a extensions to Rochdale, St Werburgh's Road and Droylsden. This is in addition to the 12 trams already on order for the existing system (8) and for the extension to the new BBC site at Media City [Salford Quays] (4). The first of this batch of 12 new trams is due for delivery to Manchester on 14th May 2009 and the track layout at Queens Road depot is to be expanded this autumn to create sufficient space to stable the new trams. All 40 new trams will be Bombardier Flexcity trams and they are to be built at the company's plant at Bautzen, Germany. They will not be compatible with the existing 32 vehicles and the profiled platforms at St Peters Square and Mosley Street will need to be modified as the new vehicles do not have steps which come out on the second vehicle of a coupled pair.

Metrolink are to convert the Bury and Altrincham lines to "line of sight" running by the removal of the existing signalling (except at junctions and between Timperley and Altrincham) in spring 2010. This will increase the system's capacity in advance of the opening of the extensions. The removal of signalling between G-Mex and Cornbrook will increase the capacity on that section from 15 to 84 trams per hour. The overhead line on the Altrincham line causes problems in hot weather because the wire sags in the heat. GMPTE is to replace the existing overhead line (which dates from the BR re-electrification in 1971) with a tensioned wire system using weights to keep the line taut. The existing overhead support structures will be retained and this work is due to be completed by 27th November 2009. The "scissors" crossover on London Road outside Piccadilly Undercroft is to be removed to increase the line speed at this location. There was a derailment of tram 1016 at St Peters Square at 23.15 on Sunday 29th June. The vehicle was the second vehicle in a coupled pair (with 1008). A 5 mph speed restriction has now been imposed at the site of the derailment.



SEASON TICKETS

Save money as well as time with a season ticket

- Choose anything from a weekly to an annual season ticket
- The longer the ticket you buy, the more you save!

Buy an annual ticket, pay for 40 weeks and get **12 WEEKS FREE!**

Season Tickets are valid at all times including weekends

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EDUCATIONAL SEASON TICKETS

Northern have a wonderful offer saving up to £241 for an educational season ticket between Altrincham & Knutsford

That's how much you could save if you buy an educational season ticket for the Sept 08 to July 09 terms.

Pupils 16 years of age or over in full time education may also apply for an Educational Season Ticket at the same rate as a child discounted season ticket. The School will need to verify by completing a form before a ticket can be issued.

Educational Season Tickets are valid at all times including weekends

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NEWS FROM THE MIDDLEWICH LINE by Harry Boardman

Positive responses in support of the project have been received from the local MPs. Funding is now in place to enable the Feasibility Study Brief to be released to the chosen consultants. Following a follow up letter, including a 'draft' of the Feasibility Study to Tom Harris at the DfT a reply was received from Brian Welch suggesting a meeting with the Steering Group sub Committee and Cheshire County Council. This meeting is taking place on Friday 12 September with the opportunity being taken to show him the platforms at both Northwich and Sandbach and the proposed location for the new station at Middlewich. A follow up meeting will then take place to finalise the Feasibility Study Brief prior to it being sent out to the chosen consultants. It is still hoped to have a response from the chosen consultant(s) to enable a briefing to be made to stakeholders by the end of the year. When the Feasibility Study Brief is sent to the consultant(s) a Press Release will be issued. The monthly MRLC meetings, held on the last Tuesday of the month, continue to be well attended and provide a good supporting link into the Steering Group. All who have an interest in seeing the line reopened are welcome to attend. Details of meetings can be obtained from Dave Roberts at stationcampaign@aol.com. At the Middlewich Transport Festival in July there was a manned publicity stand displaying photographs of the May Steam day through Middlewich along with photographs of how the new station could look. There was also a takeaway leaflet describing the proposal, a competition to design a logo embracing the adopted name of the line "The Wych Line", and badges promoting the line. Response to the stand was very positive throughout the two days of the festival

LOCAL RAIL NEWS

We understand that Network Rail is to launch a public consultation exercise on the future of **Crewe** station in the autumn. Options will include the construction of a new Crewe station at Basford Hall, one mile south of the present station, and the retention of the existing Crewe station site. The £58 million Crewe area remodelling scheme is among a number of schemes which have been refused funding by the Office of Rail Regulation. Funding is now in place for CCTV at Alderley Edge station. Every station on the Manchester Airport/Handforth to Crewe line (except Styal) is to be equipped with customer information screens and help points under a scheme funded by Network Rail. Bradway Tunnel between Sheffield and Chesterfield is closed until 12th December for engineering work including work on the tunnel itself and the relaying of the track through the tunnel. The Liverpool-Norwich service is running in two halves, Liverpool to Sheffield and Chesterfield to Norwich. Passengers making the through journey can either travel via Doncaster or they can bridge the gap between Sheffield and Chesterfield by using diverted Sheffield-St Pancras or Cross-Country services. The last day of rail services on the Manchester-Oldham-Rochdale "Oldham Loop" line has been fixed for Saturday 3rd October 2009. The line will then be closed for conversion to a Metrolink tram line (see above). GMPTE is lobbying for the trains displaced by the closure of the Oldham Loop to remain in the Manchester area. The class 150 *Sprinter* trains displaced from the West Midlands by new trains will start being transferred to other parts of the country in July 2009. It is not clear how many (if any) will be heading for the North West. All of the 17 class 323 electric trains used by Northern on services in the Manchester area are to be transferred to the West Midlands next year but it is not yet clear what will replace them. The former station building at **Urmston** station has been converted into a Belgian bar.

FORTHCOMING SPECIAL TRAINS

Past-Time Rail is running "The Cotton Mill Express" circular steam excursion from Manchester Victoria on Saturdays 27th September, 25th October, 6th December, 13th December and 20th December. Bookings can be made by phoning 01543-411971. Compass Tours run a regular programme of rail excursions from the North West. For a brochure please call 01704-840573. Spitfire Railtours also has a regular programme. They can be reached on 0870 879 3675. Rail Blue Charters (RBC) and Spitfire Railtours are running "The Electric Scot Tribute" with 87002 on Wednesday 15th October. The train starts from Birmingham International and picks up at Wolverhampton, Crewe, Warrington Bank Quay and Preston before running via Shap to Glasgow Central. Details can be obtained from RBC on 0161-850-0559. RBC is also running a special train from Manchester Piccadilly to Minehead and return on Saturday 18th October using 50044 and 50049 *Defiance*. Spitfire Railtours is running a trip with 55022 *Royal Scots Grey* from Preston, Bolton and Manchester Victoria to London Kings Cross and return on Saturday 15th November.

COACH TRIP TO THE RAVENGLASS & ESKDALE RAILWAY

On Sunday 21st September the Altrincham Electric Railway Preservation Society (AERPS) is running a coach trip from Cheadle, Stretford, Sale, Altrincham, Knutsford and Northwich to the scenic Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway on the edge of the Lake District. The fare (including a return journey on the railway) is £25 (£24 for AERPS members). MCRUA members and their partners and friends are welcome. Full details and booking forms are available from Andrew Macfarlane on 0161-928-9394 or at andrew@mcrua.fsnet.co.uk.

ALTRINCHAM WINTER LECTURE SERIES PROGRAMME

The AERPS has announced details of its 27th Winter Lecture Series. The venue remains the Altrincham Methodist Church Hall, Barrington Road, Altrincham, 5 minutes' walk from Altrincham bus/rail/Metrolink interchange. To reach the hall turn right outside the bus station side of Altrincham station and continue past Barringtons pub. The church hall is on the left-hand side just before the crossroads with Woodlands Road.

Lectures begin at 7.30pm and free tea/coffee and biscuits is included in the admission charge of £3 (free for AERPS members). This seasons's programme is:

Friday 10th October "Steam on Shed" by Alan Ashurst.

Friday 14th November "Steam Revived" by Tom Heavyside.

Friday 12th December "The Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway" by Noel Coates.

Friday 9th January "Manchester Railway Stations" by David George.

Friday 13th February "Scottish Branch Line Steam in the 1960s" by John Ryan.

Friday 13th March "Persia – Back Door to Russia in 1942/Steam & Modern Traction in the 1960s" by Robin Patrick.

Friday 3rd April. "Modern Traction in the UK, 1980s to the Present Day" by Phil Taylor.

Further details from Andrew Macfarlane on 0161-928-9394 or andrew@mcrua.fsnet.co.uk.

8E RAILWAY ASSOCIATION PROGRAMME

The 8E Railway Association continues to meet on the second Tuesday of each month at the Gladstone Club, which is off Station Road in Northwich, around 5 minutes' walk from the station in the direction of the town centre. Meetings start at 7.45 for 8pm and the forthcoming programme is listed below. Non-members are welcome.

Tuesday 14th October "Tracks around Britain" by Cliff Parr.

Tuesday 11th November British Transport Films by Alvin Barker.

Tuesday 9th December AGM followed by a presentation to be announced.

Tuesday 13th January Preserved Steam on Video by Karl Jauncey and Dave Richards.

Tuesday 10th February Archive Cine films by Colin White of B & R video.

Tuesday 10th March Quiz Night, questions set by Chris Simon.

STEPHENSON LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY NORTH WEST AREA PROGRAMME

The North West Area of the SLS continues to meet monthly over the winter on Saturdays at the Friends' Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester (on the other side of the Central Library from St Peters Square Metrolink station), starting at 14.00. The forthcoming programme is:

Saturday 4th October "The Liverpool Overhead Railway 1893-1957" by Dr Adrian Jarvis.

Saturday 1st November "Over the High Alps – the Rhaetian Railway's World Heritage Line" by Dr Michael Bailey.

Saturday 6th December "The Class 185 Introduction Project" by Paul Staples, Commercial Manager, First TransPennine Express.

Saturday 17th January Area AGM followed by "Locomotives of the Highland Railway" by Clive Holden.

Saturday 21st February "Where the Canal Ends, the Railway Begins" by David Frith

Saturday 21st March. Joint Meeting with the Manchester Locomotive Society. "The L & Y 1908-24 – the Photographs of George Smith" by Neville Fields.

Further details from Mike Blease on 0161-928-2461 or blease@mighty-micro.co.uk.

A WARM WELCOME TO ALL OUR NEW MEMBERS

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

ASLEF (Newton Heath Branch)	Mr. O.M. Reading, Shrewsbury
Mr. B. Williams, Shrewsbury	Mr. J. and Mrs. E. Murray, Congleton
Mr. K. Jackson, Woolston	Mr. P. Yeoman, Altrincham
Mr. J. Whittingham, Chester	Mr. J. Perry, Reddish Vale
Mr. K. Williams, Bagillt	Mr. D. Roberts, Flint
Mr. G.L. Ramsbottom, Blackpool	Mr. B. Duckworth, Chorlton
Mr. D. Cuthbert, Offerton	Mr. D. Topless, Chester
Miss R. Coll, Knutsford	Mr. and Mrs. J M. Paterson, Altrincham
Mr. A. Cliffe, Chester	Mrs. W. Cliffe, Chester
Mr. N. Morrow, Boughton, Chester	Mr. J. Braham, Knutsford
Mr. C. Crompton, Chester	Mr. R. Hassall, Middleton

We regret to report the death of **County Councillor Bert Grange** of Knutsford on 13th June. Bert had been a local councillor for many years and he was Chairman of the Macclesfield District Public Transport Liaison Committee up to his death. We also regret to report the death of MCRUA member Mr. M. C. Fairley from Styal. Subscription rates are to increase from the next renewal date on 1st March 2009. A subscription renewal form will be included with the next issue of the newsletter in late November.

MID-CHESHIRE LINE PEOPLE

Jamie Ross, who was until recently the Area Director (West) for Northern, has gone south to manage a bid for the South Central franchise. **Iryna Terlecky** has taken his place and we welcome her to the role.

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
British Transport Police Manchester Control Room	0161 228 5685
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
Northern Rail Customer Relations	0845 0000 125
Passenger Focus (complaints appeals)	08453 022 022
Helpline for Manchester Piccadilly station	0845 0000 033
GMPTE Bus, Rail and Metrolink Enquiries	0161 228 7811 (07.00 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	0871 200 2233 (08.00 to 20.00)
National Public Transport Enquiry Line	0871 200 2233

YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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 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 Harry Boardman, 19 Willow Grove, Barnton, Northwich, Cheshire,
CW8 4LZ. Email: harryw.boardman@btopenworld.com

TREASURER John Hanson, 4 Stelfox Avenue, Timperley, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 6UL.
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Michael Ross, 80 Lache Lane, Chester, Cheshire, CH4 7LS.
Email: michael.ross@mross.org.uk

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 COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER – Mark Willcox

Email: mwillcox@valeroyal.gov.uk Tel: 01606-867534 or (mobile) 07825-681583.

Membership of the association costs £2 for younger persons (under 21), £5 for individuals, £7 for families, £14 for voluntary bodies and £25 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, the national, voluntary body for rail users.

Name _____

Address _____

Family/Individual*

New Member/Renewal*

* Please delete

_____ Postcode _____

as appropriate

Email address (if any) _____

09/08