

# MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

No. 81

SUMMER 2011

ISSUED FREE

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).

\*\*\*\* TRAINS ARE REPLACED BY BUSES ON SATURDAY & SUNDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> JULY \*\*\*\*

## **THE NEXT MCRUA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING by Harry Boardman**

I know this reminder is a little earlier than usual but we would like you to put the date in your diary now. After a very successful change of venue last year to the Golden Pheasant in Plumley, the 2011 MCRUA AGM will again take place there on Thursday 21st July this year. The meeting will be held in the conservatory at the back of the pub and the start time is as last year 7.15pm. The Golden Pheasant is only a short walk from Plumley station along Plumley Moor Road. If coming from the Manchester direction exit from the platform via the side gate and continue along the station approach road to Plumley Moor Road. The pub is then directly opposite on the other side of the road. If coming from the Chester direction, exit via the gate, turn left and climb the steps to the road bridge. Once at the road turn left and walk along Plumley Moor Road to the pub. Suitable trains are the 18.17 from Manchester Piccadilly and the 18.07 from Chester. Suitable return trains are the 21.43 to Manchester Piccadilly and the 21.03 or 22.03 to Chester. We are always looking for members to either join the Committee or put themselves forward to help us in the many varied activities we perform both for the benefit of you our members and users of the Mid Cheshire Line. If you can spare just a few hours of your time each month please don't be shy and put yourself forward for nomination to the Committee or as a volunteer to help the Committee. Committee meetings take place every six weeks and are held on a Monday evening starting at 7.15pm at the Golden Pheasant and usually last up to two hours. If you are interested, nominations for any of the Committee positions should reach me as the current Secretary no less than one week before the date of the meeting. My contact details can be found on the back page of this Rail Report. The person nominated must want to be nominated and the nomination must be accompanied by the names of a proposer and seconder, both of whom must be paid-up members of the association. If you want to know more about the positions on the Committee please contact me to discuss. On a more personal note, after three very full and enjoyable years as Secretary I will be standing down this year at the AGM, but wish to remain as a member of the Committee so as to continue my work in the other areas of MCRUA activities in which I have an involvement. A copy of the minutes from the 2010 AGM and the MCRUA Constitution can be found on our website Notice Board. If you don't have access to email and would like copies please let me know. After the formal AGM business we will again be inviting Sally Buttifant, the line's Community Rail Officer, to give us an informative update on the many and varied activities she has been involved with in taking the Mid Cheshire Line forward in both promoting it and the stations to a much wider audience.

## **SUMMER 2011 TIMETABLE**

The new pocket timetable guide 17 is enclosed with this newsletter. There is very little change from the previous timetable. The "autumn leaf fall" timetable will this year start a month later, on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, and presumably a new pocket timetable leaflet will be produced for the period from then to 10<sup>th</sup> December.

## CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS by John Oates

I'm writing this the day before our *North Eastern Express railtour* to Darlington, Durham and Newcastle. We've around 460 passengers on the train with just over 100 taking the Beamish option. I went to Beamish a few weeks ago for the first time for around 15 years and was very impressed with how it's come on since then. We're being joined by over 30 passengers getting on at Reddish South, a station on the Stockport to Guide Bridge line that normally only has one train a week in one direction only. It should be a fun day out for all of us. The great achievement since our last issue has been the installation and commissioning of the **Northwich Humps**. MCRUA has been trying to get the platforms raised at Northwich since we were formed in 1987. These humps are already making a big difference for those who struggle to get on and off trains at Northwich due to the difference in height between the train and the platform of around two feet, and also on the Manchester-bound platform the track is canted away from the platform meaning the trains are leaning away from the platform. This gap has come about due to modern ballasting techniques requiring much more ballast under the rails than previously and the canting of the track to assist with faster through running. Just look at old pictures of trains in the Manchester platform at Northwich station and you'll see what I mean.

Special thanks for achieving the "humps" go to **Sally Buttifant, our Community Rail Officer**, officers and members at **Cheshire West & Chester Council** for pushing for the humps and funding half of them, **Northern** for funding the other half and putting the work in to work out where trains made up of various combinations of class 142, 150 and 156 units need to stop and to **Network Rail**, (as well as us in MCRUA for not giving up on the aspiration over all these years!). To use the humps when alighting from a Northern train at Northwich the plan is the front door of the train is placed alongside the hump. On a train from Chester, which is 4 coaches, the last door of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coach and the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 3<sup>rd</sup> are placed alongside the hump. A great result! Sally, MCRUA and the Knutsford Local Area Partnership and **Cheshire East Council** have recently produced a "**Rail Walks around Knutsford**" booklet funded by The National Lottery. There were a few hoops to jump through to get this money and MCRUA members tested the walks involved – Plumley, Knutsford, Mobberley, Ashley and Chelford. The booklet is very high quality. I tested the Mobberley walk and it's really good. Well worth trying out. If you want a copy of the booklet, just drop us a line or download it from our website – <http://www.mcrua.org.uk/chairmansblog/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/rail-walks.jpg> This booklet is proving very popular already, such that we're looking to see if we can get funding to produce two more, one for the Cheshire West & Chester part of the line, and one for the Greater Manchester section. Our series of **music trains** this year started earlier than last year and is already well patronised. Come and join us if you can. Details through our website or from Mike Ross whose contact details are in the back section.

Our **Community Rail Officer**, Sally Buttifant continues to achieve an incredible amount given her contract is only for 3 days a week. She works closely with all the stakeholders along the line. Many of you will have noticed **lots of extra noticeboards** springing up along the line. **Chris Ingham**, our Stations Manager, has had a hand in this. **Northern** also agreed to promote our railtour at stations along the line, as well as paying for the posters to be produced. This is very much appreciated. Our **Train Performance** up to the end of March has been the best since we started keeping records in 1998; a very creditable effort. In the last few months however, performance has been slipping a tiny bit. On the Train Performance QIT we're looking into why this is (there's no obvious factor immediately apparent), with a view to then fixing it! **Bus Performance** recently has been good. So now summer's here, come out for a trip along the line. There's lots of attractions at each end and also through the middle. And in these days of fuel at £1.40 a litre and with all the other motoring costs, it could be fun and relaxing on the train and also save money!

## COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER'S REPORT by Sally Buttifant

### Music Trains on the Mid Cheshire Line

March to November 2011 - *More trains than last year*

### **Chester to Plumley – Wednesday evenings to the Golden Pheasant at Plumley**

9 March	Hot Foot Jazzmen		
13 April	Chester Folk Festival		
25 May	Acoustak		
15 June	Nelson Peach		
13 July	Time Bandits		
17 August	Root Chords		
14 September	Weavils		
12 October	Rusty Cadillacs		
16 November	Merseybillies		
Train times: (out)	Chester depart 19:07	Plumley arrive 19:43	
(return)	Plumley dep 22:03	Chester arrive 22:45	

### **A better package deal than last year - Altrincham to Chester - Wednesday evenings for Jazz at Alexanders**

1 June	Geoff Higginbottom		
3 August	Dr Butler's Hat Stand Medicine Band		
5 October			
Train times: (out)	Altrincham depart 18:46	Chester arrive 19:45	
(return)	Chester depart 22:48	Altrincham arrive 23:44	

### **A NEW venture – lunchtime music - Chester to Plumley – Thursday afternoons to the Golden Pheasant at Plumley**

12 May	Roy Clinging and the Hat Show Band		
7 July	Geoff Higginbottom		
1 September	Nelson Peach		
Train times: (out)	Chester depart 12:07	Plumley arrive 12:43	
(return)	Plumley depart 15:03	Chester arrive 15:45	

### **Community Rail Partnership Update**

Activity on the line is starting to increase as the weather improves and the days lengthen though volunteers are giving their time to the Line throughout the year. Our programme of music trains has increased this year and now runs from March to November and we are trialling afternoon trains aimed at those who have time during the day and may not wish to come out at night. We are also running a Cranford special in May with a guided tour to find out more about Mrs Gaskell and Knutsford where she lived. I have boldly entered the Line (from Mouldsworth to Altrincham) in Northwest in Bloom so any volunteers who wish to exercise their green fingers or anyone who wishes to sponsor a station – please get in touch – judging will be in July. We now have to record volunteer hours on the Mid Cheshire line and you might be surprised to know that over the last quarter **16 volunteers have spent 574.93** decimal hours carrying out such diverse activities as litter picking, weeding, bulb planting, attending meetings, updating notice boards, responding to emails, blogging, monitoring train or bus rail replacement services, proof reading rail walks booklet, trialling rail walks, timetables – distributing and copy, station visits. And these statistics do not include all the volunteers active in this quarter!! Look out for the Knutsford Rail Walks booklet which highlights local walks from Plumley, Knutsford, Mobberley, Ashley and Chelford stations – free copies available from outlets in the Knutsford area. And have you seen the Northwich rail walk on Youtube? Check out the footage at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7IsUjT8LwE>. It would be good to get 5000 hits on this Northwich clip so please share the link with your friends and colleagues. There are more walks being added to the website so eventually we will have at least one walk for each station. [www.midcheshirerail.org.uk](http://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk) There are lots of things happening along the Line – if you are interested – please get in touch (Sally's contact details are on the back page – Ed).

## FARES NEWS

The **Disabled Persons' Railcard**, which enables the holder and their carer to obtain one third off rail fares, increased in price to £20 per year from 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2011. New restrictions were applied to the **All Line Rail Rover** ticket as from 2<sup>nd</sup> January. This is now not valid for boarding or alighting from train services operated by CrossCountry, East Coast, East Midlands Trains, or Virgin Trains before 10:00 on Mondays to Fridays at the following stations: Birmingham New Street, Bedford, London Euston, London Kings Cross, London St Pancras International, Luton, Luton Airport Parkway, Milton Keynes Central, Stevenage and Watford Junction. The Greater Manchester Rail Ranger and Evening Ranger tickets increased in price to £4.40 and £2.20 respectively as from 2<sup>nd</sup> January. Many **Off-Peak Day Return** and **Duo** fares on the mid-Cheshire line were **reduced** (amazingly) as from 2<sup>nd</sup> January. This included fares between Altrincham and Chester. Northern-only fares (including Duos) have also been introduced between Manchester and Chester. There is also now a Mouldsworth to Manchester Anytime Return (£13.30) enabling return travel up to 30 days later. **PlusBus** is now available as an add-on to 7-Day and Monthly season tickets to Greater Manchester destinations. Previously this was only available on day tickets. PlusBus is an add-on to your rail ticket which covers onward transport from your destination station by bus. All of the PlusBus destinations in Greater Manchester provide onward travel across the whole of the Greater Manchester bus network. More information can be found at [www.plusbus.info](http://www.plusbus.info). The increase in the Retail Price Index currently stands at 5.2% and the Government has said that regulated rail fares will rise by RPI plus 3% in January 2012 so we could be in for some hefty increases. Metrolink increased the price of their **Saver day rover tickets** (formerly known as Metromax tickets) from January. These now cost either £3.50 or £4.20 depending on where you buy them. They cost £3.50 from stations in zones C, E and H and £4.20 from stations in zones A, B, D, F and G. Zone D is the City zone, F and G include all stations between Dane Road and Altrincham. The child equivalents are £1.50 and £2.00. The Greater Manchester "System One" day tickets are increasing in price from 22<sup>nd</sup> May. The Bus and Train day ticket becomes £5.80 and the Bus, Train and Tram day ticket becomes £7.50. The *Wayfarer* ticket remains good value for money at £10 for adults and £5 for children and anyone over 60. The ticket covers off-peak travel in the area from Northwich and Warrington to Parbold, Chorley, Darwen, Bury, Littleborough, Glossop, Macclesfield (by train), Congleton, Grindelford, Buxton (by train), Bakewell, Matlock and Crich Tramway Museum. Metrolink and buses are also included, the latter at all times. The ticket is a scratchcard, which is dated by the user. They can be only obtained from staffed stations, TfGM bus station travelshops and the Northwich bus kiosk.

## THE NORTH EASTERN EXPRESS, SATURDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> MAY by John Oates

Over 460 passengers enjoyed the trip with on time arrivals at our destination stations and an early arrival back in Chester. Most notable was the over 30 passengers who joined us at Reddish South, many of them from the hard work put in by The Friends of Reddish South Station to whom we were delighted to provide a commission on ticket sales generated. Over 100 passengers took the Beamish option and had a very enjoyable time. Beamish, as the Living Museum of the North, has turned into a very interesting visitor attraction over the years that we have visited. We had many compliments on the good condition of the rolling stock from Riviera Trains and the excellent buffet service provided by Rolling Riot. The bacon butties were so popular, with almost 150 sold, they sold out before we had left Stalybridge. Our caterers have been asked to increase their stocks on our next excursion train. The raffle had more prizes than ever, with much excitement on the return trip as people passed with bottles of wine, boxes of chocolates, a voucher for a first class return for two anywhere on Virgin Trains, a signal box visit to Manchester Piccadilly signalling centre, free return trips over the Ffestiniog or Welsh Highland Railways and Churnet Valley Railway and even an Overnight Stay for two, with Full English Breakfast, courtesy of the Heathercliffe Country House Hotel in Frodsham. We extend our grateful thanks to those who supported the raffle. For the first time, we provided a questionnaire asking for views on highlights of the day, areas for improvement and ideas for future railtours. This should provide us with valuable information, as we can continually review how we run our Railtours, and improve our service to our passenger. One of our

passengers, on leaving the train at Northwich, said: “An excellent day out with an on time service throughout. Many thanks to MCRUA. I look forward to your next Railtour”. When MCRUA have arranged the next Railtour, details will be posted to the MCRUA website and we will advise those that travel with us.

## **MOSLEY STREET STATION CLOSURE**

The Department for Transport has said that they are minded to approve closure despite 80 objections (including one from MCRUA and 3 from local authorities). Thank you to those individual MCRUA members who objected. The Consultation has been shown to have been something of a sham. The Office of Rail Regulation now needs to approve closure. GMPTE (now TfGM) have said that closure will not take place until “Next Altrincham” information screens are up and running to indicate whether the next service to Altrincham departs from Piccadilly Gardens or Market Street (a printed timetable would also help!). There is summary of the responses to the DfT consultation at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/closed/2010-35/>.

## **ENGINEERING WORK**

There is to be a complete blockade of the mid-Cheshire line for engineering work on the weekend of Saturday and Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> July. On the Saturday buses will replace trains between Altrincham and Chester. A normal train service will run between Piccadilly and Altrincham via Stockport and connecting buses will then depart from Altrincham (platform 4 side) calling at all stations to Chester. On the Sunday the Southport-Chester train service will terminate at Stockport with buses then calling at all stations to Chester. We are calling for “buddies” to be provided (a second member of staff as well as the coach driver) to search platforms to prevent passengers who don’t know about the buses being left behind. A buddy is provided as a matter of course when we have late-night bus replacements (every 6 weeks on a planned basis). Buses will also replace trains between Piccadilly and Altrincham via Stockport on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> June and Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> July from the start of service until 16.30. Members are reminded that valid National Rail tickets can be used on the Metrolink Altrincham line between Altrincham and both Piccadilly and Victoria on Sundays. This is stated in the new pocket timetable. Other planned engineering work is on Monday to Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June, when the following trains are replaced by buses:

22.17 Manchester Piccadilly to Chester, 23.17 Manchester Piccadilly to Chester

22.48 Chester to Manchester Piccadilly.

From Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June to Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June (inclusive) the 23.17 Piccadilly to Chester terminates at Altrincham with a replacement bus service forward from Altrincham (behind platform 4) to Chester. On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June Arriva Trains Wales services between Manchester and Chester are diverted via the mid-Cheshire line.

## **NEWS FROM THE LINE**

Two new waiting shelters (one on each platform) had been installed at **Lostock Gralam** by 23<sup>rd</sup> April. The new shelters are substantial and have lighting. We welcome this improvement along with the new car park alongside the Chester-bound platform. MCRUA members who are customers at the Hamilton’s café on platform 1 at Altrincham will receive a discount of 10% if they mention that they are a member and also give the name of a Committee Member. A new Stagecoach bus depot has opened alongside the line just west of Northenden Junction. The new Sharston depot, which is only a stone’s throw from the former Northenden bus depot, replaces Princess Road depot in Moss Side, which has closed. Locomotive 67018 hauled a UK Railtours *Moorland & City* railtour via the Middlewich line, the mid-Cheshire line and Cheadle Heath on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Statesman Rail ran a special train from Shrewsbury to Carlisle picking up via the mid-Cheshire line and then running via the Settle & Carlisle line on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup>

April. They were very fortunate that the divergence on to the Guide Bridge line at Heaton Norris Junction had been reinstated the previous weekend!

The GMPTE phone number for real-time train running information, 0161-228-0322, will no longer be available after July 2011. The facility is being withdrawn because of a reduction in usage. Car parking at **Altrincham** station is to be increased by 100%. The present car park behind platform 4 is to be replaced by a temporary car park while work is carried out in connection with the Altair development to provide a new 60-space rail car park including 8 spaces for disabled drivers. The opening hours of **Northwich** station booking office have changed recently and are now 06.15 to 13.30 on Monday to Saturday only (previously the single shift started later and finished later). The "Northwich Nipper" trial bus service between Northwich station and the town centre was apparently a success in terms of the number of passengers carried and funding is being sought for a longer trial in 2011/2012. Work has recently been carried out at rail overbridges in Ashley and Mobberley to provide better protection from road vehicles straying onto the railway. This is a consequence of the Great Heck accident when motorist Gary Hart fell asleep at the wheel and drove his Land Rover off the M62 to a position, which was fouling the East Coast main line and led to a fatal derailment and collision. As John Oates mentions above, "Harrington Humps" were installed at Northwich from 21<sup>st</sup> March and have proved a boon to the elderly and the mobility-impaired in helping them to board and alight from trains more easily. Not all trains are stopping at the correct places and we look forward to Northern Rail addressing this issue. The main works on the **Altrincham Interchange** scheme (such as the replacement of the station footbridge) have been deferred to start in 2012. The only two elements of the scheme planned for completion in 2011 are the removal of the concrete footbridge over Stamford New Road and the improvement of the pedestrian ramp from the bus station up to Moss Lane bridge.

#### **HARTFORD, WINSFORD & ACTON BRIDGE NEWS by David Miller**

Car parking at Hartford station has been causing problems for some time with cars overflowing onto the main road when the car park is full. Opposite the station, The Coachman pub is offering parking for rail users at £5 a day but does not seem to be attracting many takers. Acton Bridge station car park is also overflowing. When work on the West Coast main line started a few years ago, a large part of Acton Bridge car park was fenced off for use by engineers. At first, this did not seem to cause a problem, but since then, the train service has improved and so has usage. The small group of MCRUA members who take an interest in Hartford, Winsford and Acton Bridge, think that it should now be possible to reopen a large part of the Acton Bridge car park, as very little of it is now used for engineering purposes. Not only would this benefit Acton Bridge users, but it might attract some of the people who find parking difficult at Hartford. It would also help if all the Liverpool - Crewe stopping trains stopped at Acton Bridge. We are therefore asking for the closed part of the car park to be reopened at Acton Bridge and for an improved service there. We held a meeting in The Coachman recently and several members came along to offer their services. As they were particularly interested, we agreed that Acton Bridge Parish Council would be best placed to take the lead. An initial approach has been made to Network Rail and work continues. London Midland has launched a consultation on reducing the hours of opening of many of their booking offices including Winsford and Hartford. We have responded via Passenger Focus and have opposed the proposal. Following an inspection several months ago, the footbridge at Hartford has received some maintenance. Areas have been patched up where the concrete had deteriorated and reinforcing steelwork corroded. Buses no longer stop in Winsford station forecourt, due to "road safety concerns". The nearest stop is in Station Road, a 6-minute walk away.

#### **NEWS FROM THE CAMPAIGN TO OPEN BAGULEY HALT**

We are delighted that the Baguley Halt has been included in the TfGM (Ex-GMITA) Local Transport Plan 3, (Page 94, Para 1). Our suggestions to TfGM include a new half hourly off-peak shuttle service, Altrincham to the railhead at Stockport via Baguley. This would be quite attractive to a promoter because of the high BCR (Benefit to Cost Ratio) of about 5 which would more than cover the construction costs

and provide a viable service in the long term. We have also suggested that the platform work for the Baguley Halt be carried out concurrently with the road and bridge widening required there for the Metrolink extension to the airport, as this would not entail any additional interruption to road and rail services. **Eugene Ring, Chairman, Wythenshawe Railway Action Group** [wythenrail@gmail.com](mailto:wythenrail@gmail.com)

## METROLINK NEWS

There was a little-publicised timetable change on the Altrincham line from 4<sup>th</sup> April to accommodate a Piccadilly–Media CityUK shuttle service. **The whole Altrincham line service now runs 6 minutes later from Altrincham.** The first tram from Altrincham is 6 minutes later than previously, at 05.59, and every tram thereafter is 6 minutes later. So between 06.00 and 07.00 when only a 12-minute service operates every service towards Manchester is now 6 minutes later than previously. Also the Bury and Piccadilly services from Altrincham have now “swapped paths” so that the Bury trams now leave Altrincham at 05, 17, 29, 41 and 53 minutes past each hour on Monday to Saturday and Piccadilly trams leave Altrincham at 11, 23, 35, 47 and 59 minutes past each hour. Departures from Piccadilly Undercroft have also been swapped between the Altrincham and Bury lines so that Altrincham trams now leave the Undercroft at 01, 13, 25, 37 and 49 minutes past each hour and the Bury line departs at 09, 21, 33, 45 and 57 minutes past each hour. The first Sunday tram from Altrincham is now three minutes later at 06.56. The last Sunday tram from Piccadilly Station to Altrincham is now 5 minutes later at 22.48. Of course it would help enormously if Metrolink were to publish a proper timetable (as they did in 2003!). Tram times can be found on the Journey Planner on the Transport for Greater Manchester website [www.tfgm.com](http://www.tfgm.com). They are shown if you plan a journey involving Metrolink and if you go to the Journey Planner and select “Timetables” you are then prompted to enter a “Bus Number”. If you put in “MET1” it will give you the timetable for the Altrincham and Bury lines and “MET2” shows the timetable for the Eccles line.

**Abraham Moss** station (north of Woodlands Road station on the Bury line) opened on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> April. From the same date Woodlands Road has been reduced to a “Parliamentary” service between 10.00 and 16.00 on Monday to Friday only until permission is received from the Department for Transport and the Office of Rail Regulation to close the station. A Piccadilly-Media City shuttle began operating regularly in May but sometimes has to reverse on the crossover at Aytoun Street (between Piccadilly Gardens and Piccadilly Station) because of congestion in the Undercroft. New trams up to 3033 have now arrived in Manchester. Most of the new trams are stored at Old Trafford depot and most cannot be used until the signalling is changed to the new TMS (Tram Management System) signalling. The problem with through booking from the new Metrolink ticket machines to heavy rail stations in Greater Manchester has been resolved. To buy a through ticket you find a machine which says “Single, Return and Season Tickets to all Metrolink destinations” on the front at the top. You press the large square button which says “Tram Bus Train Savers”, then “Day”, then “Railzones”, then whichever Railzone you need (there is a poster telling passengers which rail zone their destination station is in) and then “Single” or “Return”.

An engineering blockade is to take place on the Altrincham and Eccles Metrolink lines on Saturday and Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June and trams will be replaced by buses. This is presumably to do with the final commissioning of the junction with the Chorlton line at Trafford Bar and the commissioning of the Cornbrook turnback siding for the Media CityUK shuttle. No opening date has yet been announced for the Chorlton line to St Werburghs Road apart from “spring 2011”. The line appears complete apart from the final commissioning of the junction at Trafford Bar. This will entail conversion of part of the Altrincham line to the TMS signalling, which has proved to be most unreliable at MediaCityUK. Also when the Droylsden/Ashton line is open (the first section as far as Velopark is due to open this autumn) the plan is apparently to run services from Bury and Altrincham through to the Ashton line (the services which currently terminate at Piccadilly Station). So any delays and problems due to the street running on the Ashton line (35% of the route) will be transferred on to half of the Altrincham and Bury service.

## CHANGE IN CONTROL OF TFGMC

The Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority (GMITA) became the Transport for Greater Manchester Committee (TfGMC) as from 1<sup>st</sup> April. TfGMC is currently controlled by a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition with Councillor Keith Whitmore as its Chairman but as a consequence of the May local elections it will revert to Labour control. 20 of TfGMC's members are now Labour councillors with 13 from other parties. One consequence of the change could be greater political support for the Leigh Guided Busway, which Transport for Greater Manchester (the new name for GMPTE) is still planning to build despite much local opposition and the fact that the Cambridge Busway scheme is several years late and many millions over budget. We hope that the "new regime" is as willing to meet rail user groups as its predecessor was.

## **MUSIC TRAINS ON THE MID-CESHIRE LINE by Michael Ross**

### **Music Trains and Line Events - Fifteen Music Trains in 2011 – with new ideas**

From March to November we have a full programme of monthly Music Trains from Chester to Plumley – a longer season than last year. These run on Wednesday evenings. From June we have more trains from Altrincham to Chester to hear Jazz at Alexanders – these run on 1 June, 3 August and 5 October. These are a package deal, booked through Alexander's website, covering music on the train both ways, taxis to and from Alexanders and sausages' mash at Alexanders. The rail fare is extra. There were two new ventures in May – a Cranford Train from Chester to Knutsford and an afternoon Music Train to Plumley from Chester (on 12 May). The Cranford Train was a package with a guided tour of Knutsford from the Civic Society and refreshments. It ran on Wednesday 18 May. The afternoon Music Train was on a Thursday, leaving Chester at 12:07. There are more afternoon Music trains planned for 7 July and 1 September. The mailing list has grown and you can join by emailing [musictrains@midcheshirerail.org.uk](mailto:musictrains@midcheshirerail.org.uk) to get regular details of Music Trains and all other Line Events. Details of all the Music trains and other Line Events are on the Community Rail Partnership website at [www.midcheshirerail.org.uk](http://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk)

### **Review of 2010**

The 2010 Music Train season finished in November. It was very successful - our best so far. In all there were ten Music Trains. Average numbers on the train were around 40 with a peak of 79 in July and a trough of 25 in May. The music has been varied and lively and we have built up a good following of regulars. Talking to people it is clear that extra trips on the line and extra visits to the Golden Pheasant are being generated as well. The Golden Pheasant has prepared us a special Music Train menu with more items under £10. We extended the season from September to November and also tried two Altrincham to Chester Music Trains to hear Jazz at Alexander's, which were successful as pilots. In October we ran a Ghost Train to Chester, which was very popular. In 2010 the improved style of the notice boards, plus regular updating of them through the MCRUA network, and the website have contributed to marketing. Sally Buttifant has sent out regular press releases, we have been frequently mentioned in the MCRUA Chairman's Blog and developed a growing email circulation list for Line Events.

## **TRAM-TRAIN PROPOSAL FOR THE MID-CESHIRE LINE**

There has been much misinformation about this proposal in the local press (including a photographic mock-up of a Metrolink tram at Knutsford station). Cheshire East Council is keen on the idea of a tram-train service from the mid-Cheshire line (it is not entirely clear where because Northwich is in Cheshire West & Chester) to Manchester, using heavy rail to Altrincham and then the Metrolink line via Sale into Manchester. The vehicles used would have to be purpose-built and they would be hybrid diesel and electric. They would operate under diesel power on the mid-Cheshire line and then from the existing overhead line on the Metrolink system. The scheme does not entail the installation of overhead wires on the mid-Cheshire line. A connection already exists just north of Altrincham station from heavy rail to Metrolink but currently it can only be used during an engineering possession. This connection would

therefore need to be signalled as part of the scheme, which sounds exciting but a whole raft of issues needs to be addressed before it can see the light of day, not least funding.

## **FREIGHT NEWS**

The Penmaenmawr to Guide Bridge stone train, which was mentioned in the last newsletter, conveys ballast to a stockpile at Guide Bridge for use on the new Metrolink extensions. Brunner Mond was renamed Tata Chemicals Europe as from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011. Stone trains to the Lafarge Sidings at Northenden began running again occasionally early in the year. The empty train currently has to go to Northwich to run round because the loop at Skelton Junction is out of action due to a track defect (part of the trackwork at the Skelton Junction end was replaced by plain track around Christmas time). The loop is to be reinstated and a new piece of trackwork is already on the ground waiting to be installed (during the possession of the line on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July perhaps?).

## **LOCAL RAIL NEWS**

Trans-Pennine Express services have been calling at **Liverpool South Parkway** station since the December 2010 timetable change. Work has started on the electrification of the line between Manchester and Liverpool via Newton-le-Willows with much work taking place at bridges in the Eccles area to provide clearance for the overhead wires. The **Ordsall Chord**, a short link in Salford enabling trains to run directly between Manchester Victoria and Piccadilly via Salford Central and Deansgate, was approved in the 2011 Budget. This is part of the Northern Hub scheme, which will hopefully in the future also include two additional through platforms at Manchester Piccadilly. Five four-car class 322 electric trains are being transferred from Scotland to Northern Rail to operate additional trains or replace diesel-operated trains in the Leeds area. This in turn will enable some peak-hour trains on the Leeds-Bradford-Manchester Victoria "Calder Valley" route to be strengthened. Inter City West Coast, Britain's most profitable train franchise could be taken back into public hands following a government decision to delay the auction of the West Coast service until the results of the McNulty Review of the industry's costs are known. Virgin may have its franchise extended from its planned end date of April 2012 to January 2013 but, with a deal yet to be resolved, the government is considering handing the management of the service to Directly Operated Railways, the taxpayer-funded organisation that runs the East Coast main line Inter City service, for a 9-month period until the new franchise begins. Journey times on the **Manchester-Cardiff** route operated by Arriva Trains Wales have been speeded up by up to 15 minutes from the May 2011 timetable change to take advantage of the higher speeds now possible between Manchester and Crewe since the completion of the upgrade of the West Coast route.

## **ALTRINCHAM ELECTRIC RPS COACH TRIP**

On Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October the Altrincham Electric Railway Preservation Society is running a coach trip to the Llanberis Lake Railway and along the full 25-mile length of the spectacular Welsh Highland Railway through the Aberglaslyn Pass from Caernarfon to Porthmadog Harbour. The coach will pick up at Sale, Altrincham, Knutsford and Northwich and the all-inclusive cost is likely to be around £35. More details can be obtained from David Walton on 0161 928 4112 or at [www.altrincham-electric.org.uk](http://www.altrincham-electric.org.uk).

## **SPECIAL TRAINS WHICH MAY BE OF INTEREST**

Compass Railtours ([www.compasstoursbyrail.co.uk](http://www.compasstoursbyrail.co.uk) or 0151 722 1147) is running the following tours:  
Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July. "The Mid-Cheshire Scot" from Hooton (06.30 approx), Chester, Delamere, Northwich, Knutsford, Altrincham and Stockport via the East Coast main line to Edinburgh (3.5 to 4 hour stopover). Fares: Standard Class £59, First Class £89.  
Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August. "The Mid-Cheshire Moorlander" from Hooton (07.30 approx), Chester, Delamere, Northwich, Knutsford, Altrincham and Stockport to Carlisle via Settle, returning via the Cumbrian Coast. Fares: Standard Class £49, First Class £79.

Every Monday in August. "The Mersey Moorlander". Crewe (06.30 approx), Hartford (06.55 approx.), Runcorn, Liverpool South Parkway, Mossley Hill, Liverpool Lime Street then steam-hauled to Carlisle via Settle, returning steam-hauled via Shap to Liverpool and then diesel back to Crewe. Standard Class £69, First Class £109.

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July (two trains on the same day!) also sees "The Lakelander" run by Statesman Rail running from Llandudno picking up at Chester (07.10 approx.), Northwich, Knutsford, Altrincham (08.10 approx.), Stockport and Manchester Victoria to Whitehaven. The train is steam-hauled between Carnforth and Whitehaven calling at Ravenglass (for a trip on the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway). Fares: Standard Class £65, First Class £99. Further details are at: <http://statesmanrail.com/lakelander-230711.html> or Statesman Rail can be contacted on 0845 310 2458.

## **8E RAILWAY ASSOCIATION PROGRAMME**

This railway enthusiast group continues to meet on Tuesdays at the Gladstone Club, just off Station Road, Northwich CW9 5RB, which is around 5 minutes' walk from Northwich station. Meetings are open to non-members and start at 7.45 prompt. Admission is free. The forthcoming programme is:

Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> June. Evening Social at *The Penny Black* Wetherspoons pub in Northwich to mark 30 years of the association. To reach the pub from the station, carry straight on at the Gladstone Club across Chesterway, continue along Witton Street and it is on your left.

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July. Greater Manchester Wayfarer Day. Meet at Deansgate-Castlefield (formerly G-Mex) platform at 10.45 to 11.00 for a tram trip to St Werburghs Road (if open) and then a walk to Fallowfield for lunch at the Great Central pub. Then bus into the city centre for afternoon options to be announced.

Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> August. Evening Visit to Crewe Heritage Centre where Centre Manager (and MCRUA member) Mike Lenz will give us a tour of the site. Meet at Hops pub (opposite Crewe library) at 17.00 or at Crewe station concourse at 18.30. Meetings:

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> September. Subject to be announced.

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> October. Edgar V. Richards. Steam Around Britain in the 60s.

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> November. Bill Andrews. Life as an Engine Driver.

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December. AGM followed by local Black & White presentation.

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

The following people and local authorities have joined since the last issue of the newsletter and we welcome them to the association:

P. S. Lawrence, Mobberley.

Mrs R. M. Wright, Hale.

P. Young, Hawarden.

A. J. O'Brien, Wallasey.

I. Lindley, Worsley.

P. O. Bailey, Hazel Grove.

C. Frith, Bramhall.

Rev. I. Fallows, Stockport.

W. Lloyd, Winsford.

P. Scott, Stockport.

Mrs H. Webster, Cuddington.

W. J. Notman, Cuddington.

M. Meaney, Denton.

S Barrett, Hartford.

E.T. P. Evans, Middlewich.

L. Tinkler, Chester.

J. Skyner, Weaverham, Northwich.

D. Hope, Timperley.

J. G. Smither, Higher Whitley, Northwich.

R. Green, Eastham.

J. Sutton, Offerton, Stockport.

P. Riley, Knutsford.

S. Blakemore, Bucknall, Stoke.

E. Povall, Sandiway, Northwich.

D. J. Williams, Barnton, Northwich.

C. Hunt, Crewe.

J. Coats, Winnington, Northwich.

J. McCormack, Rudheath, Northwich.

J. Howarth, North Rode.

B. Kinsey, Cuddington.

J. Goodfellow, Davenport.

N. Cole, Altrincham.

R. Cunningham, Timperley.

S. Douglas, Timperley.

D. S. Roberts, Chester.  
P. Dutton, Barnton, Northwich.  
P. Foster, Baguley.  
Mrs C. Bradley, South Reddish.  
Mrs P. Bloor, Hale.

D.W. Plant, Orford, Warrington.  
M. Sasse, Altrincham.  
Mrs A Thompson, Frodsham.  
A. Stanford, Edgeley, Stockport.

We regret to record the death of MCRUA member John Marshall of Lostock Gralam in December 2010.

## MID-CHESHIRE LINE PEOPLE

We very much regret to record the death of **Peter Frier** from Plumley on 28<sup>th</sup> September. Peter was a former MCRUA Committee Member who had been particularly involved with Special Trains. In his working life he had been a Captain with Manchester Liners. We send our condolences to his widow Lillian. **Jim Horsford** from Chester, a former Transport Officer of Cheshire County Council, sadly died on 7<sup>th</sup> October. Jim, who originally came from Sale, once spoke at a MCRUA public meeting and joined MCRUA after he retired. Congratulations are due to **Vernon Barker**, the Managing Director of First Trans-Pennine Express, on being awarded the OBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours. This is certainly a well-deserved honour in the light of the success of TPE in attracting more passengers into the railway and in achieving higher passenger satisfaction ratings.

## 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 or 0207 068 0500
Virgin Trains Ticket Sales (to buy any rail ticket)	0871 977 4222 (08.00 to 22.00 every day)
Freephone number to report crime on the railway	0800 40 50 40
Network Rail (to report infrastructure faults)	08457 11 41 41 or 0207 557 8000
Train Running Information - TrainTracker	0871 200 49 15
Northern Rail Customer Relations	0845 00 00 125 (Option 2) or 0113 234 9330
Passenger Focus (complaints appeals)	08453 022 022
TfGM Bus, Rail and Metrolink Enquiries	0161 228 7811 (08.00 to 20.00 every day)
Stagecoach Metrolink Customer Services	0161 205 2000
Cheshire Traveline (bus and rail enquiries)	0845 140 2666 (08.00 to 20.00 every day)
Merseyside PTE Public Transport Enquiry Line	0871 200 22 33 (08.00 to 20.00 every day)
National Public Transport Enquiry Line	0871 200 22 33 (08.00 to 20.00 every day)

## USEFUL WEBSITES

[www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) (includes a journey planner which shows times and fares and a facility to obtain real time train running information for any station)

[www.northernrail.org](http://www.northernrail.org) (includes details of forthcoming engineering work under "Travel Tools" and then "Engineering Works")

[www.networkrail.co.uk](http://www.networkrail.co.uk) (includes a link to download the National Rail timetable)

[www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk](http://www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk) (to buy any GB rail ticket using a credit or debit card)

[www.tfgm.com](http://www.tfgm.com) (what was the GMPTE website, includes a link to the North West Journey Planner which shows tram times and also the Metrolink timetables [MET1 and MET2])

[www.metrolink.co.uk](http://www.metrolink.co.uk) (shows any current problems with the tram service and details of future engineering work on Metrolink)

[www.transportdirect.info](http://www.transportdirect.info) (uk-wide journey planning by public transport)

[www.uksteam.info](http://www.uksteam.info) (details of steam-hauled special trains on the main line)

## YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

CHAIRMAN John Oates, "Swallowfield", Slade Lane, Mobberley, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 7QN.

Tel: 01565-873059 (home), 07860-513309 (mobile),  
Email: [john.oates@mcrua.org.uk](mailto:john.oates@mcrua.org.uk)

**VICE-CHAIRMAN & WEBMASTER** John Hulme, Brow Cottage, Leighs Brow, Barnton, Northwich, Cheshire,  
CW8 4HT. Tel 01606-76092, Email: [jh@johnhulme.com](mailto:jh@johnhulme.com)

**SECRETARY** Harry Boardman, 19 Willow Grove, Barnton, Northwich, Cheshire,  
CW8 4LZ. Tel: 01606-782222, Email: [harryw.boardman@sky.com](mailto:harryw.boardman@sky.com)

**MINUTES SECRETARY** Elaine Sancto, 8 Roxby Way, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 9AX.

**TREASURER** John Hanson, 4 Stelfox Avenue, Timperley, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 6UL.  
Tel: 0161-283-3384, Email: [j.hanson4@ntlworld.com](mailto:j.hanson4@ntlworld.com)

**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY** Peter Davies, 53 Acacia Avenue, Hale, Altrincham, WA15 8QY.  
Tel: 0161-928-2203, Email: [peteredavies@hotmail.com](mailto:peteredavies@hotmail.com)

**NEWSLETTER EDITOR** Andrew Macfarlane, 25 Prestbury Avenue, Timperley, Altrincham  
WA15 8HY. Tel: 0161-928-9394, Email: [andrew@mcrua.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:andrew@mcrua.fsnet.co.uk)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Malcolm Roughley, 403a Hale Road, Hale Barns, Altrincham, Cheshire,  
WA15 8XX. Tel: 0161-980-2757, Email: [malcolmroughley123@btinternet.com](mailto:malcolmroughley123@btinternet.com)

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

Michael Ross, 80 Lache Lane, Chester, Cheshire, CH4 7LS.  
Email: [michael.ross@mross.org.uk](mailto:michael.ross@mross.org.uk).

Phill Bamford Email: [phillip.bamford1@ntlworld.com](mailto:phillip.bamford1@ntlworld.com)

**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](mailto:stationcampaign@aol.com)

Hartford & Winsford Sub-Committee. Please contact David Miller (for contact  
details see above).

**MID-CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER** – Sally Buttifant

**Tel:** 01244 976788 or 0773 652 3863 **Email:** [railofficer@midcheshirerail.org.uk](mailto:railofficer@midcheshirerail.org.uk)

**Location:** Backford Hall, Backford, Chester **Visit:** <http://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk>

**FRIENDS OF ALTRINCHAM INTERCHANGE** – Please contact Andrew Macfarlane.

Membership of MCRUA costs £2 for younger persons (under 21), £6 for individuals, £8 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.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Email address (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

Family/Individual\*

New Member/Renewal\*

\* Please delete  
as appropriate