

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

No. 100

WINTER 2017-2018

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 and find us on Facebook by searching for Mid Cheshire Line or by clicking on the link - <https://www.facebook.com/#!/betterrailservicesmidcheshireline?fref=ts>.

***** HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL MEMBERS AND FRIENDS *****

TRAINS ARE REPLACED BY BUSES BETWEEN STOCKPORT AND NORTHWICH DUE TO ENGINEERING WORK ON SUNDAYS 21ST AND 28TH JANUARY, 25TH FEBRUARY AND 4TH, 11TH, 18TH AND 25TH MARCH – SEE PAGE TWO.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS by John Oates

We're pleased to provide our latest "Rail Report", number 100, and all edited by Andrew Macfarlane. Quite a feat! Also enclosed is the **Mid Cheshire Winter Timetable** which commenced on Sunday 10 December. This is to a large extent the same as that prior to the autumn "Leaf Fall" timetable. We have delayed the publication of this, our winter edition. This would normally be distributed in early December to coincide with the publication of the winter timetable. We had heard that by mid-November Network Rail would be providing confirmation of acceptance of the **May 2018 Mid Cheshire Line timetable**, called by many the "Two Trains an hour timetable". This date slipped to late November, then December, and now we hear it may be February. The changes due to be made from May 2018 are very substantial, not just due to the increased number of train services over our Mid Cheshire Line, but also due to the "Ordsall Chord" changes with many trains from the east going towards the Airport in future running through Manchester Victoria, then Piccadilly and on to the Airport. Once we hear confirmation, we intend to be in touch by email with those members where we have their permission – see below.

We, in conjunction with the **Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership** have had a very busy autumn following the wonderful launch of our **Marvellous Days Out Campaign**. The posters have been selling fast, and the booklet has had to go to a reprint. The support Sally and we have had from outside agencies along the line such as Marketing Cheshire, Lion Salt Works and Knutsford Heritage Centre has been superb. Please read Sally's report for more detail. And none of this could have happened without Sally's drive and enthusiasm. Wow!

Following our meeting with the Rail Minister last August organised by Esther McVey MP, we have been very fortunate in three of the MPs along the line, Esther, MP for Tatton, Fiona Bruce, MP for Congleton, which covers Middlewich and Mike Amesbury, MP for Weaver Vale, which covers part of Northwich raising both the **Mid Cheshire Rail Link** (the Knutsford, Northwich, Middlewich, Sandbach, Crewe line) and the proposed **Airport Western Link**. Esther McVey and I were invited to meet with the Chair and Chief Executive of the **Cheshire & Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership**. They are very focussed on ensuring HS2 gets to Crewe as quickly as possible and soon thereafter is extended on to Manchester. We both made the point very strongly that whatever the pros and cons of HS2, it will be of no use to us in Mid Cheshire if it takes us an hour

or more to get to it. This is exactly where the Mid Cheshire Rail Link comes in, as well as sorting out the desperate traffic problems around Middlewich and Gadbrook Park. The Airport Western Link then provides the missing link providing a further and much shorter route into Manchester, relieving the very congested section from Stockport into Manchester. We left the meeting agreeing to be in touch for a follow up meeting in a few months' time.

Sadly, the RMT Strike Days continue with three more in January and no end in sight. It seems to me that with neither the RMT nor the Department for Transport being prepared to alter their stance on the matter, we and Northern staff are just continuing to suffer. For many passengers, this disruption is very hard to deal with, despite the reduced services available. For the conductors it is equally difficult, especially so this January losing up to 3 days' pay when they've all those January bills to settle after the festive season. There are many and varied views on what should be done to resolve this situation. Whilst it continues we are all losing.

The **Data Protection Regulations** are changing. On this occasion, this is important to both **you and MCRUA**, as we need you to read and complete the enclosed document put together by our Secretary, Paul Wilkinson. If you don't, it will be illegal for us to be in touch with you much more! And whilst you're at it, please renew your subscription where it's due. The fact we have hundreds of members means we are listened to as a respected users' voice. Further, if you're able and willing to receive most contact by email, this postpones the day of the next subscription increase! From last December, we have a new franchise operator on our **Crewe to Liverpool line**. It's early days yet, so more about this next time. We'll be back in touch soon after the May 2018 timetable is confirmed.

DECEMBER 2017 AND MAY 2018 TIMETABLES by Andrew Macfarlane

As John Oates has mentioned above, the December timetable began on Sunday 10th December and most trains towards Manchester were retimed to run 2 minutes later. The May timetable, which begins on Sunday 20th May, will see a complete change to the line's timetable with the start of the two trains per hour service between Piccadilly and Greenbank on Monday to Saturday and the introduction of an hourly Sunday service between Piccadilly and Chester (if all goes according to plan). As with all radical timetable changes there will be winners and losers. We hope that MCRUA has managed to minimise the number of losers, in particular at stations where not all trains will stop. Also the change in clockface departure times may not suit all existing users who have got used to the existing times and find them convenient (myself included). We have been told that our services will inter-work with those on the Buxton line, a line on which Pacers are banned, so we should therefore see fewer Pacers on the Mid Cheshire Line. Whatever we have instead of Pacers, even if it is only a class 150 Sprinter, will have more seats and will therefore help to ease peak hour overcrowding. The two trains an hour service is only up to the evening peak. The evening service will remain hourly but on the plus side the trains which currently only run between Chester and Stockport in the morning peak and between Stockport and Chester in the evening peak will again run to and from Manchester Piccadilly (if all goes according to plan).

******* STOP PRESS ******* On 11th January it was announced that the completion of the Manchester-Bolton-Preston electrification had been delayed until December 2018 (it had been due to be completed by May 2018). Northern have said that this will have implications for the planned May 2018 timetable changes because of the need to continue using diesel trains on that line. The effects on the May 2018 timetable for the Mid Cheshire Line are not yet clear.

FORTHCOMING RAIL REPLACEMENT BUSES DUE TO PLANNED ENGINEERING WORK

On Sundays 21st and 28th January, 25th February and 4th, 11th, 18th and 25th March, all trains between Stockport and Northwich will be replaced by buses due to planned engineering work as Network Rail tries to remove as many speed restrictions as possible prior to the start of the May timetable. These are just the dates that we know about. The work may continue until April. Trains will operate between Manchester Piccadilly and Stockport and

between Northwich and Chester. From Monday 5th February to Thursday 8th February (inclusive) the 22.48 train from Chester to Manchester Piccadilly is replaced by a bus throughout its journey. An additional bus runs at 23.30 from Knutsford to Manchester Piccadilly. This continues to happen on a 6-week recurring cycle. From Monday 26th February to Thursday 1st March (inclusive) the 22.48 Chester to Manchester Piccadilly train will terminate at Northwich. A replacement bus will run between Northwich and Manchester Piccadilly. Also the 23.17 Manchester Piccadilly to Chester train will only run between Northwich and Chester. A replacement bus will run between Stockport and Chester. Passengers travelling from Manchester Piccadilly should use alternative trains between Piccadilly and Stockport to connect with the bus. It is a highly retrograde step that rail replacement bus times are no longer provided on posters at stations, just a summary sheet for the whole region. The provision of such posters should be a requirement in the franchise agreement.

THE ARRIVA TRAINS WALES CLUB 55 OFFER IS BACK ON by Andrew Macfarlane

A new Arriva Trains Wales Club 55 offer for those aged 55 or over began on Sunday 7th January and runs until Saturday 3rd March. The price is £27 return with £1 off for railcard holders. The add-on fare for Northern is £2.50. The usual conditions apply: no travel before 09.30 on Monday to Friday but there are no restrictions at weekends except travel is not permitted to or from Cardiff on Saturday 3rd February due to a major sporting event. Return travel must be within 8 days and all return travel must be completed by 10th March 2018. The ticket can be purchased on the day of travel and break of journey is allowed. More details are at: <https://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/Templates/Club55Home.aspx?pageid=12884903058>.

OTHER FARES NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

The average national fare increase from 2nd January was 3.4%. Through fares from rail stations to Metrolink stations increased for the first time since 2015. Northern have introduced DUO fares between all pairs of Greater Manchester stations except between Stockport and Piccadilly. The new Greater Manchester Traincard prices are: Weekly £30.60, Monthly £104.70 and Annual £990.00. The Traincard covers all trains in the TfGM area plus Metrolink in the City Zone and is often cheaper than a rail season ticket. In a welcome move, a railcard for those aged 26 to 30 is to be introduced by the industry in the spring but it will only be available as an App on a mobile phone. The railcard will cost £30 and give 34% off many fares but there will be a £12 minimum fare before 10.00 on Monday to Friday.

SOME GOOD DEALS FROM SAPHOS TRAINS by Andrew Macfarlane

Saphos Trains is the new company set up by millionaire Jeremy Hosking to run steam-hauled charter trains out of Crewe. As an introductory offer, the company is offering half-price fares (typically £45) on its 2018 tours to destinations such as Holyhead, Cardiff via the Welsh Marches and Stratford upon Avon. Two of the 12 trains in the programme call at Hartford. Full details can be found on their website <http://saphostrains.com/> or by phoning 0800 038 5320.

TORNADO VISITS THE MID CHESHIRE LINE

On Wednesday 1st August Tornado, the famous new-build steam locomotive, will visit the Mid Cheshire Line when it hauls its tenth anniversary train "The Mad Hatter" returning from Chester to Darlington via Northwich, Altrincham, Cheadle Heath, Hazel Grove and the Hope Valley line to Sheffield. The train will leave Chester at around 16.30. Final timings will be on www.uksteam.info nearer the time.

MID CHESHIRE TRAIN RUNNING PERFORMANCE CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE by John Oates

Regular *Rail Report* readers will know that train running performance on the Mid Cheshire Line has been deteriorating since early 2011. The target is a Public Performance Measure (PPM) of 92.2% of trains to run, arrive at destination within 5 minutes of scheduled time and call at all scheduled stations. In early 2011 a high Moving Annual Average (MAA) of 91.57% was reached after a lot of hard work since the early 2000s by First North Western then Northern Rail, by Railtrack, then Network Rail and with a lot of evidential support and

ideas from MCRUA. Since 2011 despite a number of initiatives the downward slide has been persistent, now to such an extent that the figure is below 80%.

This is bad for our passengers both locally and for those making connections and is causing a fall in the public perception of the reliability of the railway. This is also of particular concern at the moment given the anticipated almost doubling of the passenger train service from May 2018 between Greenbank and Piccadilly. Adding these extra trains onto an already unreliable railway could only make matters worse. Back in First North Western days when an analysis of the root causes of the reasons behind the delays/cancellations (PPM failures) was carried out, it was found around 45% of the delays were caused by the TOC (train operating company), 45% by Railtrack and around 10% were due to other factors. I was involved in those meetings and remember the TOC's decision to first sort its own problems out before taking Railtrack to task too strongly. Over the following 4 years the PPM failures from the TOC (by now Northern Rail) were much reduced, as were those from the infrastructure operator, by then Network Rail. Interestingly, even with performance much improved, the relationship of PPM failures between the TOC and Network Rail still remained around 45/45 with 10% other. And from there performance continued to improve right up to 2011.

Since then one of the two biggest factors to hit performance on the line has been the big increase in patronage on the trains extending the time trains are in stations, known as "dwell time". Northern Rail, now Northern have mitigated that to some extent by running longer and/or higher capacity trains where they can and by adding dwell time. The other main factor has been the big increase in loaded freight trains over the line, especially those that are loaded and running through Northwich towards Altrincham and onwards. Up until a few years ago most loaded freight trains ran in the other direction, coal from Yorkshire and its ports, limestone from the Peak District and refuse from Greater Manchester. Now going the other way there's biomass from Liverpool to Drax, and refuse from Liverpool to Wilton (near Middlesbrough). From our analysis it now appears that around 80% of the PPM failures for trains along the Mid Cheshire Line are down to Network Rail, which as most of you know is now part of the Department for Transport. In the late summer Northwich Town Council met with newish MP for Weaver Vale, Mike Amesbury and cited their concerns about the deteriorating performance, especially concern in relation to the increased passenger train services due from next May. Mike wrote to Mark Carne, Chief Executive of Network Rail, receiving the following reply from Jon Crampton, Senior Communications Manager at Network Rail:

"Dear Mr Amesbury,

I am responding to your letter, dated 13 September 2017, to Mark Carne regarding the current level performance on the mid Cheshire lines.

We have a number of track and embankment stability issues along the route which we have protected with temporary speed restrictions that are impacting on train performance. The route has seen a significant increase in freight traffic over the last 18 months and we have three speed restrictions between Knutsford and Stockport, and two on the line between Stockport and Knutsford. We also have an additional speed restriction on a section of track at Cheadle.

We are working to resolve and below are details of the issues and what we are doing to resolve them.

Cheadle line: we need to replace some of the timbers which support the track and carry out some structural improvements. This work is due to be completed in March 2018. The speed restriction has recently been increased from 5mph to 20mph for passenger traffic which has significantly reduced the impact to passenger trains. Full line speed will be restored when we have completed the work in March 2018.

Northenden Junction: the embankment slip is a result of saturation caused by the adjacent motorway bridge preventing the natural watercourse flow. This is protected by a 20mph speed restriction. We are planning to undertake work to restore line speed of 50mph in December 2018 but these repairs are only a temporary solution. A full repair, which will cost around £3m, is currently being planned for 2019/2020.

Northenden: the temporary speed restriction has been in place since October 2016. The track is lower on one line than on the adjacent line. Planning is ongoing regarding repairs and they will also be carried out in March 2018.

Hale Level Crossing: the temporary speed restriction is due to track quality issues resulting from deteriorated ballast - the stones which support the tracks - in the vicinity of the level crossing. Passenger trains are authorised over the affected area at line speed. Work is planned to remove the crossing and replace the ballast in January 2018. This will enable us to restore the full line speed of 60mph.

Hale: the temporary speed restriction of 30mph is due to inadequate drainage resulting in deteriorated ballast. Drainage design is on-going with an anticipated delivery of the drainage solution in January 2018 with following track formation work delivered in March 2018. This will enable us to restore the line speed of 60mph

Mobberley: the temporary speed restriction is due to drainage issues resulting in formation/ballast problems. Passenger trains are authorised over the affected area at line speed. Work is planned to replace the defective ballast in February 2018, but further work is required to resolve the drainage issues and a date is still to be confirmed for this activity.

I appreciate the situation is not ideal and that the cumulative impact is affecting passenger journeys. I hope that the detail above shows that we have plans in place to improve both reliability and performance in the coming months.

Our head of maintenance for the north of the London North Western route, Terry Strickland, would be happy to meet with you to discuss these issues in more detail. Please let me know if this would be of interest.

Regards, Jon”

Northern have been very aware of the falling performance on the Mid Cheshire Line. Northern, which is the trading name for Arriva Rail North, provided us with the following statement last November:

“Over the previous 6 months, train punctuality performance on the Mid Cheshire line of route has averaged out at 77.3% per period, compared to a network average PPM (Public Performance Measure) target of 91.7%. As of 30th November 2017, the moving annual performance average was 77.7%.*

Train performance has been impacted by two underpinning factors:-

- *Adverse seasonal autumn conditions:*

The rail industry’s ‘leaves on the line’ explanation is often seen as a convenient excuse, but from a technical perspective, this autumn has been particularly challenging across Northern’s network. The operational difficulties the weather and falling leaves has created over recent periods cannot be underestimated, with train drivers having to exercise extra caution to ensure they approach junctions and stations safely due to slippery conditions created by the build-up of leaves on the tracks.

The autumn conditions have also put extra pressure on the maintenance schedule of the fleet. A significant number of trains have had to be taken out of service for wheel repairs following damage caused as a result of excessive build-up of leaves on the railway. This has directly affected the number of trains available to operate and, and subsequently, the capacity offered. Customers can be assured that Northern always deploys all available trains out on the network.

- *Network Rail enforced temporary speed restrictions (TSRs):*

This year has seen ongoing and major TSRs imposed by Network Rail on the Mid Cheshire route between Stockport and Mouldsworth, with the maximum speed down from 75mph to just 20mph on certain sections of the railway. A particularly problematic TSR applies to Northenden Junction, due to a twist fault and structure issue on the line.

Looking forward

The autumn season is almost over, meaning Northern will expect to see improvements in terms of the adverse conditions attributed to declining performance over recent periods. Northern’s regional performance team is also working closely with the company’s Newton Heath depot to deliver a performance improvement initiative to drive fleet reliability.

Whilst the Network Rail imposed TSRs will remain a significant and underpinning contributory factor affecting performance, Northern are now part of a TSR working group with Network Rail, which is aimed at removing this enforcement as a

priority. The Northenden TSR is expected to be removed by early 2018, which should have a positive impact on performance.

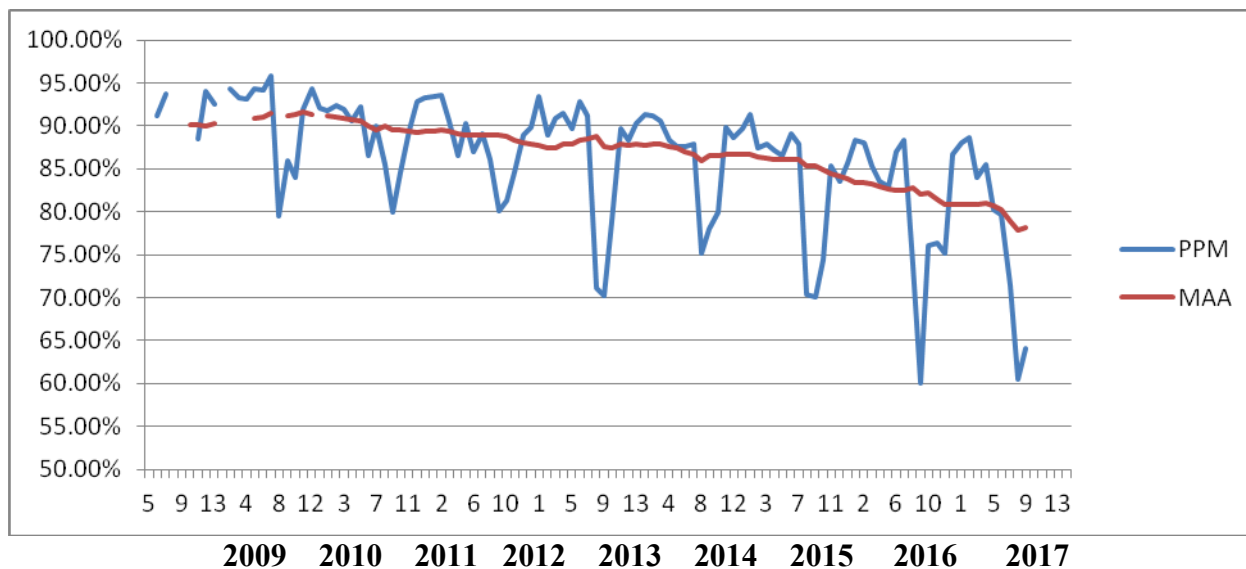
Northern continues to liaise with Network Rail regarding wider improvement and maintenance work to be undertaken on the line, which is directly linked to removing other TSRs along the route.

As Northern's investment in modernising its fleet of trains – which includes the removal of Pacers, a complete refurbishment of all existing trains and the introduction of 281 brand new carriages (ordered in 2016 and remain on target to start arriving from late 2018) - continues, customers travelling on the Mid Cheshire route will start to see significant improvements, such as more seats, better connectivity and improved reliability. The removal of Pacers and the train refurbishment programme / introduction of the new fleet will be completed by early 2020.

*For more information on PPM:

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/who-we-are/how-we-work/performance/public-performance-measure/>

We are all looking forward to our greatly improved Mid Cheshire train service from May 2018, together with much improved train running performance.



Performance on the Mid Cheshire Line over time. PPM = Public Performance Measure, MAA = Moving Annual Average. Graph courtesy of Mike Battman.

COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP UPDATE by Sally Buttifant

The Marvellous Days Out project has been really successful since our launch back in sunny & warm August. We have sold posters & postcard sets across the world (!) and the artwork has brought visitors in wherever it is exhibited. The artwork is still on tour and has been at Lion Salt Works, Stockport Plaza, Art With A Heart, Altrincham, North West Media Centre in Warrington and it is currently in Northwich Information Centre (five of the posters only). At the end of January the exhibition goes to Knutsford Heritage Centre for two months (free entry) and the artist Nick will be giving a talk on Saturday 3rd March with a talk by me on Saturday 24th March. We will also be launching our exclusive, British Made Knutsford Marvellous Days Out mug, sold through the Heritage Centre. Posters and postcards are still being sold in various outlets (Chester Zoo, Chester, Visitor Information Centre, Art With A Heart, Lion Salt Works, Knutsford Heritage Centre, Staircase House, Stockport). The Hale artwork has also featured on the Hale Civic Society calendar. We hope to do a 2019 Marvellous Days Out calendar so watch this space! Phase two of Marvellous Days Out is the Women in history rail trails (Amazing Women By Rail), encouraging people to take the train for a marvellous day out, a collaboration between Calder Valley, Community Rail Lancashire & Mid Cheshire. Again the project includes a website (Marvellous Days Out), booklets & leaflets. We hope to launch in March 2018 at Gaskell House, Plymouth Grove, Manchester. We look forward to using Marvellous Days Out to promote the new May 2018

timetable improvements when they are confirmed. Other areas of work include working with our Station Friends at Mid Cheshire Line Stations and working with Northern to try and improve stations and the passenger experience. We are always looking for new volunteers so if you think that you have time & talent to offer, we would love to hear from you. We are particularly looking for people with a car who could deliver leaflets and people who could update our websites.

AN EMAIL TO THE EDITOR

This is from MCRUA member John Tate and is dated 7th October:

Gents,

It is very seldom that I write to any Editors asking for corrections to be made but I am afraid this time I have no choice but to do so. Your newsletter is very well written and gives a huge amount of information that comes in useful. However, I would really appreciate you making a correction please. In the page with the 'IN MEMORIAM' on it you have made mention of John Hobbs. You are correct in that the day he died was the 6th September but where you are wrong and I would like this corrected please is that you state that 'John Hobbs was a Vice President of the East Lancashire Railway'. Can you please correct it to read that '**John Hobbs was a Vice Chairman of the East Lancashire Railway Preservation Society**'. Following his funeral a couple of weeks ago at Walton Lea Crematorium, at which some 170 people attended, we have agreed with the family that at some point in January 2018, his wishes will be carried out in that his final journey will be on the East Lancashire Railway to Irwell Vale where after a few moments of reflection by all those attending, his ashes will be placed in the firebox. Should anybody from MCRUA wish to attend on the day – yet to be agreed – then you will be more than welcome. Thank you for this and keep up the good work.

Regards, **John Tate, Hon. Secretary, East Lancashire Railway Preservation Society**

MUSIC TRAINS – REVIEW OF THE YEAR by Michael Ross

The Music Train season for 2017 finished on 3 November with a daytime Music Train from Chester to Mobberley by Nelson Peach for Chester U3A. This year has been the busiest and most popular season since we started in 2008. We arranged 18 Music Trains compared with 14 in 2016. In total 810 people travelled on them (2016 – 647) generating around £6,000 of potential revenue for the railway, about 30% more than in 2016. Ten Music Trains were advertised for everyone and eight were arranged for groups. Unfortunately we also had to cancel one because of a strike. Ten groups and performers returned from previous years – Time Bandits, Steerage Class, Full House, the Murray Quartet, Marts ManJazz3, Nelson Peach, Deportees, Mossley Hill Grasshoppers and Geoff Higginbottom. Their music ranged across pop, renaissance, bluegrass, country, classical, jazz and folk (from both sides of the Atlantic). Our programme was extended even further with four new groups - jazz from Loose Change, sea shanties from Port Sunlight Sea Dogs, country, folk and rock from Espionage and blues from the Terry Burgin Blues Band. Our venues were the newly refurbished Golden Pheasant at Plumley (who on one evening coped cheerfully with over 80 of us arriving at once), the Railway Inn at Mobberley (who offered a warm welcome to our new venture of daytime Music Trains for groups) and Alexanders in Chester (where food, music and staff created a great atmosphere). The 2016 Music Train programme was shortlisted for an ACORP Award in the 'Best Community Engagement Event' category, although it did not make it into the final three. Thanks to the musicians, the train conductors, the venues, the on-train hosts – and to the audiences - for coming along and helping to make the Music Trains such popular and enjoyable events – and for their singing - and even their dancing!

NEWS FROM THE LINES by Andrew Macfarlane

The memorial planter in memory of **Martyn Hett**, one of the victims of the terrorist attack at Manchester Arena on 22nd May, who was a regular commuter on the train between Stockport and Altrincham, was installed on platform 4 at Altrincham on 5th December and was visited by his family on 6th December. The planter has its own lighting. Work was carried out months ago now at **Navigation Road** station (the rail platform) to install a new help point, new public address speakers and the base for a ticket machine inside the shelter. The help point

and speakers have still not been commissioned but a new ticket machine had been installed and was working by 12th January. It is a Parkeon machine which only accepts bank cards but you can pick up pre-booked tickets from the machine. The new train operator serving **Hartford, Winsford and Acton Bridge** is using the brand name “London Northwestern”.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS

The **Ordsall Chord** opened with the timetable change on Sunday 10th December. Initially it is only being used by six trains each way per day between Manchester Oxford Road and Leeds via Bradford (hourly on Sundays). This service is due to be extended to run to and from Manchester Airport from May 2018. Also from May 2018 the hourly Manchester Airport to Newcastle and Middlesbrough TransPennine Express services will be diverted to run via Oxford Road, the Ordsall Chord and Manchester Victoria. This will reduce crossing moves across the Piccadilly “throat” and help to enable our service to be doubled to two trains an hour. Also the Liverpool-Scarborough service is diverted to run via Manchester Victoria from May 2018 so will no longer cross the whole layout from one side to the other at Ardwick Junction, again releasing paths for our service and for the additional Northern trains from Piccadilly to Macclesfield and New Mills Newtown. On 24th December the Government said no to TfGM’s request to take over all rail stations in their area. In a surprise move, Arriva announced in October that they were pulling out of the bidding for the new Wales franchise. The service between Manchester Victoria and Blackburn via Bolton was increased to half-hourly from the December 2017 timetable change following the lengthening of the passing loop at Darwen.

METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

As mentioned in the last issue, a new Metrolink timetable will start on Sunday 28th January. The first tram from Altrincham on Monday to Saturday will be significantly earlier at 05.49. The first Sunday tram from Altrincham will also be earlier, at 06.49. However the last tram from Piccadilly station to Altrincham on Monday to Thursday will be **much earlier**, at 23.31 rather than the present 23.47. The Bury-Altrincham service is being given a 10-minute layover at Altrincham to improve timekeeping. From 29th January this service will use platform 2 at Altrincham and the Altrincham-Piccadilly service (as it will become) will use platform 1. We hope that this will be communicated adequately by the Metrolink operator and TfGM. Currently the PID (Passenger Information Display) on platform 2 does not work. Sunday services will operate until 23.30 (an hour later than currently), a very welcome move. Also all trams will run back to the depot in service and the Metrolink service from Manchester Airport will be extended to Manchester Victoria. There was a fare increase on Metrolink of an average of 5.93% as from 5th January, the first increase since January 2014. The new electrical substation at Brooklands was commissioned in November 2017 and there are now more double trams running on the Altrincham line. Two of the eight trams on the Altrincham-Etihad Campus service are now doubles (as well as all of the Altrincham-Bury services). A shame it’s not more than two!

ALTRINCHAM WINTER LECTURE SERIES

The Altrincham Electric Railway Preservation Society (AERPS) is again running its popular series of railway lectures at Altrincham Methodist Hall, which is a short walk from Altrincham station on the corner of Barrington Road and Woodlands Road (turn right from the bus station side of the station). Meetings start at 7.30pm and admission is £3.50 which includes refreshments (AERPS members are free). The remaining programme is:

Friday 9th February “Over the Water - Isle of Man and Ireland in the 60s”, a colour slide presentation by Bill Chapman.

Friday 9th March “Trains of Thought”, a digital presentation by Bob Avery. Includes India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the US and the UK.

Friday 13th April “Navigation Road and All That”. Ted Buckley shows pictures (mainly of steam) taken by his late father Bill in the 1960s. The show includes scenes at Navigation Road, Ashley, Cinderland Crossing, Dunham Massey and other locations in the Altrincham area.

STEPHENSON LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY PROGRAMME

The SLS continues to meet in the Manchester area and meetings, which are open to non-members, are held at the Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester (very close to St Peter's Square Metrolink station) on Saturdays at 2pm. The remaining programme is:

20th January. Area AGM (brief) followed by: Graham Jellett 'New French Light Rail Systems in the 21st Century' From 2000 to date France has built and brought into service 21 new steel-wheel tramways with a total route length of 460 kilometres. This presentation shows the speaker's photographs of all these tramways, and also some data tables he has drawn up for all 44 French urban public light rail systems currently operating.

17th February. David Stannard, Technical Officer, Railway Performance Society 'Delving into Aspects of Modern Traction Performance' An illustrated talk focusing on a period of intensive change on the Crewe-Manchester line between 1998 and 2008 but also including a look at what has been going on recently with Voyager traction modifications and an interesting conundrum concerning HST traction power history.

17th March. Ian Clark 'The Evolution of Rail Tours from an SLS Perspective' A look at how the development of Special and Excursion Trains led to the Rail Tour Era beginning, including the SLS's contribution by Area during the first 20 years.

A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following people who have joined since the last issue of the newsletter:

Mr KJ Hulme of Timperley Mr M McEwan of Timperley Mr N D Lomas of Wilmslow
Mr M S Lomas of Handforth Mr Dave Tobutt of Plumley Mr & Mrs R & S Plumb of Barnton

IN MEMORIAM

Longstanding MCRUA member **Tony Icke** from Chelford, a retired former BR Civil Engineer, died on 11th October. Another longstanding member **Mrs E B Hogg** of Hale died in the autumn.

DISCLAIMER

Opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the MCRUA Committee.

USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS

National Rail Enquiries	03457 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)
London Northwestern Railway ticket sales (to buy any rail ticket)	03333110006
Northern ticket sales	0344 241 3454
British Transport Police for non-emergencies	0800 40 50 40 or text 61016.
Network Rail (to report infrastructure faults)	03457 11 41 41 or 0207 557 8000
Train Running Information - TrainTracker	03457 48 49 50 and then Option 1.
Northern Customer Services	0800 200 6060 (24 hours per day, 7 days per week)
Transport Focus (complaints appeals)	0300 123 2350
TfGM Bus, Rail and Metrolink Enquiries	0161 244 1000 (0700-2000 Mon-Fri, 0800-2000 Sat/Sun)
Metrolink Customer Services	0161 205 2000 (seven days a week)
Merseytravel Public Transport Enquiry Line	0151 236 7676 (08.00 to 20.00 every day)
National Public Transport Enquiry Line	0871 200 22 33 (07.00 to 22.00 every day)

USEFUL WEBSITES

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.northernrailway.co.uk (includes details of forthcoming engineering work under "Travel" and then "Improvement Works")

www.networkrail.co.uk (includes a link to download the National Rail timetable)

www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk (to buy any GB rail ticket using a credit or debit card)

www.tfgm.com (includes a Journey Planner called “MyTfGM” which shows scheduled tram times if you plan a journey involving Metrolink).

www.metrolink.co.uk (shows any current problems with the tram service and details of future engineering work)

www.traveline.info (a national public transport journey planner).

www.transportfocus.org.uk (the website of Transport Focus, the statutory body for rail and bus users).

www.railfuture.org.uk (the website of Railfuture, the independent, national, voluntary body for rail users)

traintimes.org.uk (an unofficial website which provides rail information derived from official sources in a user-friendly format).

www.uksteam.info (details of steam-hauled special trains on the main line).

www.brfares.com (lists all available fares on the National Rail network).

railwayherald.com/railtours (lists special trains (both steam and modern traction) on the main line).

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FRIENDS OF ALTRINCHAM INTERCHANGE – Please contact Andrew Macfarlane.

MCRUA is affiliated to Railfuture, the national, voluntary body for rail users.

MCRUA MEMBERSHIP

There are five classes of membership of the Association:

Individual under 21 years - £2.00, Individual 21 years and over - £7.00, Family - £10.00, Voluntary body - £20.00 and Corporate - £100.00.

New members can now join online at www.mcrua.org.uk/membership. Alternatively, you may pay by standing order, details available from the Membership Secretary membership@mcrua.org.uk. Standing Orders are fixed price for five years from the start of the payments. You may also pay by cheque made payable to **Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association** and sent to the **Membership Secretary, 48 Romana Square Altrincham WA14 5QB.**