

# MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

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

**THE NEXT RMT STRIKE DATES ON NORTHERN ARE SATURDAYS 27<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 3<sup>RD</sup> NOVEMBER AND 10<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER.**

## **MID CHESHIRE'S TWO TRAINS AN HOUR TO MANCHESTER UNDER THREAT?**

**by Simon Barber and John Oates**

Members will know that MCRUA has campaigned for many years for a better train service for Mid Cheshire, as have the borough councils and others locally. We have had success in that the train service requirement for the present Northern franchise specifies a minimum of two trains per hour, from 7am to 7pm, between Manchester and Greenbank. This is a welcome - and necessary - doubling of the off-peak service, with the additional trains being limited stop to bring a faster service to and from Manchester. This service was due to start in December 2017, but delayed to May 2018 owing to shortage of diesel trains, then delayed again to May 2019.

By chance on the evening of 11 October one of our members was reviewing the recently published minutes of Transport for the North's Rail North Committee meeting on 9 October and came across ....

*“Northern have not been able to bid the second Greenbank to Manchester train due to pathing issues between Stockport and Manchester. They have bid to provide a second train per hour between Altrincham and Chester, benefiting the core section of route and enabling interchange with Metrolink.”*

This is shocking news as it looks as though we are not to get a second hourly train or a semi-fast service to/from Manchester at all - despite it being specified as a minimum requirement in the Northern franchise agreement. This is unacceptable. We have written to our MPs along the line asking them to liaise with the Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, so that we get the train service that is promised and written into Northern's contract.

The background to this is that two trains per hour from Greenbank to/from Manchester is part of the minimum train service requirement which Network Rail signed off when the invitation to tender (ITT) for the franchise was being developed. Moreover, both of us were invited to review Northern's planned May 2018 timetable (the version that had to be abandoned due to the heavily-delayed Bolton electrification), and that timetable included two trains an hour between Greenbank and Manchester. So we know that the paths between Stockport and Manchester were available and had been offered to Northern then by Network Rail. We believe it is inconceivable that Network Rail should be allowed to not make available the paths which are required for a contracted minimum train service.

As a reminder, the reasons why this second hourly train is so necessary and why it must run to Manchester, not just to Altrincham include:-

- Knutsford station has over 500,000 passengers a year despite slow and infrequent trains, so we know there is demand for the train service.
- The journey time from Knutsford to Manchester is more than 45 minutes, yet Knutsford is only 14 miles from Manchester in a straight line.
- The train journey from Northwich to Manchester takes an hour, yet Manchester is only 20 miles away.
- We hear from businesses in both towns that they struggle to recruit staff from Manchester (where many new graduates live) because of the excessive journey time from home to work in Mid Cheshire.
- Likewise, Mid Cheshire residents are put off travelling to Manchester for work or leisure.

There is a real economic impact on Mid Cheshire from such poor connectivity to the region's principal city.

There is a suggestion in the Rail North minutes that a Chester to Altrincham service (changing at Altrincham onto Metrolink) is an adequate substitute. This is false, for several reasons. Travelling from Mid Cheshire to Manchester via a change onto Metrolink at Altrincham is actually slower than the train via Stockport, so this fails to deliver the planned faster service. Moreover, it's much slower and more difficult on the return. Going via Metrolink misses out Stockport which is important for commuters and for train connections there.

In fact more passengers board and alight from Mid Cheshire Line trains at Manchester Piccadilly than at any other station, so the suggestion from Rail North that a train service between Chester and Altrincham 'benefits the core section of the route' is wrong. We need our trains to run through to Manchester. The minimum train service requirement in the franchise, as well as the draft timetable we saw, requires all Mid Cheshire trains to run to Manchester; there were to be no Stockport terminators, let alone Altrincham ones.

It is hard to know why we are in this position. The minimum train service requirement was developed through long consultation with public bodies, local businesses and passenger groups. It is an agreement between the rail operators, including Network Rail, and the travelling public who pay for the railways through their tickets and taxes. It is not optional! And in this case, it is vital to Mid Cheshire's economy.

We have asked MPs to intervene with Chris Grayling for us. This is urgent if we are to influence and correct the May 2019 timetable. MCRUA and our friends will continue the campaign to get the train service that was promised.

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

Despite the shocking news above, we are pleased to provide our latest "Rail Report". We normally provide this in early October to coincide with the distribution of the "leaf fall" timetable. This year there is **no leaf fall timetable** as Northern had no time to plan one after the desperately late notice given by Network Rail that the Bolton electrification would not be ready for spring 2018 (it still isn't, making it now over two years late).

Without a leaf fall timetable and with the Mid Cheshire Line being one of the three worst in the North West struggling with adhesion problems through the leaf fall season (the other two are the Buxton line and that to Clitheroe) train running performance this autumn is likely to be difficult. Network Rail's "Rail Head Treatment Trains" started running a little earlier than last year on 2 October. The first day that leaf fall really affected the line was on 12 October. The "On Time" performance that day (train ran and within 5 minutes of due time at destination) was 40.47% against a target of 92.2% and the current (poor) moving annual average of 77.88%. We suggest through to mid-December where you need to get somewhere at a particular time, that you go for the previous train.

Meanwhile, for those who didn't know, on the Mid Cheshire Line we have had **no Saturday train service** since 25<sup>th</sup> August when the latest round of RMT strikes started. Normally on Saturdays the line has 37 trains, 19 one way, 18 the other. On previous Saturday strike days this service had been replaced by a service of 8 trains in each direction between Chester and Altrincham with bus connections onward. Since

25<sup>th</sup> August this has been replaced by 3 buses each way, each taking an hour longer than the train. The first bus arrives at Altrincham at 0922 making it too late for those with Saturday jobs to use, with the last bus leaving Altrincham at 1553, far too early for those with Saturday jobs. For Chester, the first arrival is 1000, with a last departure of 1515, again no use for those with Saturday jobs. There are no parallel bus services along parts of the line, thus leaving Mid Cheshire cut off by public transport for every Saturday since August. Those with Saturday jobs are finding this very difficult – not everyone has recourse to a car or someone who can drive them to and from work. Using taxis could cost more than those on minimum wage earn on a Saturday. We also hear the lack of Saturday services has had a notable effect on special events along the line including Chester Races and events in Northwich and Knutsford. Whatever one's views are on whether the conductors or drivers should be allowed to open and shut the train doors (the official reason for the strikes), we are stuck here as “piggies in the middle” suffering from what is in effect a dispute between the Department for Transport and the RMT union. Those of us with longer memories will remember the similar disputes in the 1960's, 70's and 80's between British Rail and the, then, NUR union, now the RMT. Meanwhile, this is badly affecting our economy in Mid Cheshire.

Our **Crewe-Liverpool line** has recently benefitted from the arrival of a new “Stakeholder Manager” in the form of **Vicky Cropper**, who joined **London Northwestern (LNw)** in late September having previously been with Northern's Central Region and working with us as their “Community & Sustainability Manager”. Our loss on the Mid Cheshire Line is definitely our gain on the Crewe-Liverpool line. Train services were due to improve on the line in December, especially at Acton Bridge with the beginning of services on Sundays. Many of you will know that after last May's “timetable meltdown”, especially on Northern and Thameslink, the DfT and rail industry introduced a ban on timetable changes, apart from “minor tweaks” for many train operators including LNw. It seems LNw have taken this as an excuse not to introduce the Sunday service at Acton Bridge even though it would only be a “minor tweak” as the trains are running anyway. We don't understand why – there are to be “minor tweaks” to Mid Cheshire Line services from the December timetable change. Vicky has kindly accepted Acton Bridge Parish Council's invitation to meet with them in November.

The Mid Cheshire CRP's **Marvellous Days Out (MDO)** initiative continues to be a very effective promotional campaign for the Mid Cheshire Line and our local economy. Not only do we have three sizes of the excellent **posters**, but also **Staffordshire Bone China mugs** for Chester and Knutsford and now also **2019 calendars**. These calendars are beautifully produced coming with an envelope. They will look superb at home as well as great presents for those fond of our lovely Mid Cheshire area. Calendars can be purchased online from the Crewe Heritage Centre shop - <https://crewehc.org/shop> Of the 500 produced there are already fewer than 300 left (when the Heritage Centre run out, we'll replenish their supplies until they've all gone). What a great way to promote Mid Cheshire and its attractions throughout the year!

Meanwhile, at the recent Community Rail Awards in Glasgow, Altrincham Interchange won 3rd prize against very strong nationwide competition for Community Art Schemes – Permanent and Larger Projects for the great improvements there funded by TfGM. Very well done! Special thanks go to the local rail users who agitated for the years from its reopening for the Interchange to be improved, for those providing input into the very critical report provided to TfGM in March 2016. Further thanks are due especially to Mike Keating of TfGM for picking up this “long running sore”, arranging meetings and in due course persuading TfGM to fund the improvements, and in working with our Community Rail Officer (CRO), Sally Buttifant on the detail based on the CRP's Marvellous Days Out (MDO) Campaign and involving the Blessed Thomas Holford College (BTH) in the project. For those who've not been to Altrincham since the improvements, please go. The large size MDO posters together the excellent murals produced by students at BTH look quite superb, as do the planters maintained by BTH. A wonderful credit to the CRP's MDO campaign. And whilst you're there, if you've not been to the Market since it reopened, do go. You'll be quite shocked – it's now a wonderful attraction in its own right and great for lunch and local produce. Then even more recently, the project has just won this year's Leisure & Tourism Award at the Altrincham and Sale Chamber of Commerce 2018 Business Awards. Very well done everyone, especially those who've persisted from the outset in 2015. Further, there's more to happen at Altrincham Interchange – keep visiting!

Also at the Community Rail Awards “Women in Community Rail” (WiCR) won first in the Influencing Positive Change section. Many congratulations to all those involved in this initiative and with special credit to Sally, our CRO, one of WiCR’s founding members.

Lastly, some sad and strange news at Greenbank. In March Northern demolished the Victorian shelter on the Chester-bound platform without any consultation or notice to either the Friends group maintaining the station, the CRP, MCRUA or anyone else as far as we can find. The rubble was removed within a couple of days, as were the poster cases, the Customer Information Screen (CIS) and the litter bin. After the area being fenced off for over six months its replacement has been opened, though it’s only around half the size of the previous shelter and open to the weather and there are still no poster cases, CIS or litter bin. The new shelter is inadequate for purpose given the numbers using the station in the afternoon, especially scholars returning home to Cuddington, Delamere and Mouldsworth. We have made representations to Northern about this, asked for an explanation, and sent further emails reminding them we’d like an explanation of what they will do to improve the facilities at the station, not reduce them. We have had no response despite meetings and prompts. We also hear Northwich Town Council are very upset about what has happened and have written to Northern. We haven’t heard whether they’ve received a response.

### **MEMBERSHIP MATTERS by Paul Wilkinson**

We thank those members who have renewed their membership for 2018 which started on 1st March. Those who have not yet renewed will find this is your last Rail Report from MCRUA. Individual notices are enclosed for those still have a 17xxx membership number on the envelope and have not renewed. If your address label has an 18xxx number, your next subscription will be due on 1st March 2019. We continue to attract new members to MCRUA and thank all members for their continued support.

Ian Goldsack of Knutsford

Samuel Gregg of Timperley

Paul Hart of Ashton near Chester

Andrew Percival of Weaverham

Stephen McKinney of Knutsford

Carthy-Torbitt family of Holmes Chapel

Margaret Hayman of Plumley

Keith Noble of Timperley

Ian Maddocks of Hoole

Mark Hannan of Hazel Grove

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The Annual General meeting of the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association took place on Tuesday 12 June 2018 when the 26 members present re-elected your committee on bloc. An informative presentation was given by Vicky Cropper, the Regional Community and Sustainability Manager, for Northern’s Central Region. Based in Manchester, the region stretches as far north as Clitheroe and Colne, down to Crewe, Stoke on Trent and Buxton.

## **FORTHCOMING RAIL REPLACEMENT BUSES DUE TO PLANNED ENGINEERING WORK**

From Monday 26<sup>th</sup> November to Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> November (inclusive) the 22.46 train from Chester to Manchester Piccadilly is replaced by a bus throughout its journey. An additional bus runs at 23.33 from Knutsford to Manchester Piccadilly. Also the 23.41 train from Manchester Piccadilly to Chester is replaced by a bus throughout (departing from Piccadilly at 23.46). An additional bus will run at 00.23 from Knutsford to Chester. The Chester-Piccadilly bus is “set down only” at stations from Knutsford onwards and the Piccadilly-Chester bus is also “set down only” at stations from Knutsford onwards. This bus replacement continues to happen on a 6-week recurring cycle.

## **NEWS ON THE MIDDLEWICH LINE RE-OPENING CAMPAIGN by Simon Barber**

It is quite some time since the Rail Report carried an article about the Mid Cheshire Rail Link, also known as the Middlewich line, and the continuing campaign to re-open it. You could be forgiven for asking whether anything is happening, but the answer is yes, and we are now cautiously optimistic about the chance of success. By way of background, the Mid Cheshire Rail Link connects Northwich station to Sandbach station (just north of Crewe), via Middlewich. The line is still open and carries occasional freight trains and diverted passenger trains, but has not regular passenger services since 1960. That's when Middlewich station closed, at a time when the railways of Britain were in decline and the motorways, such as the M6 which was built parallel to the Mid Cheshire Rail Link, were seen as the future. However, over the last 20 years, the rail network has started to expand and passenger numbers have grown rapidly, including on our Mid Cheshire Line through Northwich and Knutsford. Indeed, Middlewich is the largest community in Cheshire not to have a railway station. It is a larger town than Knutsford, and Knutsford station is the busiest on the Mid Cheshire Line. Surely the case for re-opening Middlewich station is obvious. How hard could it be? As with all railway re-opening campaigns in England, it turns out to be a lot harder than it looks.

Dave Roberts led the campaign to re-open Middlewich station for many years and kept the idea alive. Indeed, he succeeded in that you never now meet anybody who suggests that Middlewich doesn't need a station, but this isn't enough to make it happen. A few years ago, Stephen Dent and Samantha Moss took over the day to day running of the campaign. They broadened its focus to the other towns and communities that the re-opened line could serve and re-branded it the Mid Cheshire Rail Link Campaign. They spotted the potential of a station at Gadbrook Park (the busy business park on the A556 Northwich bypass, which is alongside the railway line) and they realised the importance of the line for connecting the towns of Northwich and Knutsford, and Hale and Altrincham, to Crewe via Middlewich. The discussion about the potential HS2 hub station at Crewe has come at just the right time because it emphasises the importance of good links to Crewe, but Crewe has been a railway hub since 1837 so we don't need to wait for HS2 before getting the Mid Cheshire Rail Link re-opened!

Stephen and Samantha successfully enlisted the support of the two borough councils, Cheshire East, which includes Middlewich and Knutsford; and Cheshire West & Chester, which includes Gadbrook Park and Northwich. They have had strong cross-party support from local MPs, especially Fiona Bruce whose constituency includes Middlewich, and more recently Mike Amesbury (MP for Northwich) and Esther McVey (MP for Knutsford and for Gadbrook). Fiona has been active in raising questions about the line in the House of Commons and she recently asked Secretary of State Chris Grayling to confirm his support for re-opening the Middlewich line to passengers. Chris Grayling said that the Middlewich line was one of his top two priorities for rail re-openings in the north of England (the other one being the Colne to Skipton line). Chris Grayling also requested the Cheshire & Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (the 'LEP', a partnership of businesses and local government established by the coalition government) to produce an appraisal of the case for re-opening the line. It is unusual for the Secretary of State to do this and we see it as a significant development. Cheshire & Warrington LEP have already produced and published a transport strategy for the area, which calls for re-opening the Middlewich line, so we know they are supportive. They have appointed consultants to do the appraisal. Stephen and I have met the consultants and we found them very well-briefed and professional. We will be meeting them again as their work progresses. The report should be published early next year and assuming it is positive, it will be followed by development of a full business case for the re-opening.

There are advantages to a long campaign. The team has been able to identify the likely passenger flows that a train service would attract, and to ensure that the possibility of re-opening is included in local plans, and to think of ways to re-start passenger train services at minimum cost. Stephen, Samantha and I will be able to share these ideas with the consultants doing the evaluation. We know, for example, that land has been protected for Middlewich and Gadbrook Park stations. Each one will only need a single platform, which keeps costs down and means that step-free access is easy to arrange. The existing track is maintained to passenger train standards and the signalling is modern, so no new track or signals are needed. The line speed limit will need to be raised, but we understand from rail industry insiders that the present low limit (20 mph!) only reflects the low level of use of the line today and does not indicate poor trackwork. At Northwich, the currently disused platform 3 will need to be re-opened for trains to and from Middlewich. The island that serves platforms 2 and 3 may be too narrow by modern standards for two operational platforms, but this can be cheaply addressed by switching all services from platform 2 to platform 3 instead. As platform 3 is the only platform there that is bi-directionally signalled and has access from all directions, there are operational advantages to re-opening platform 3 in any case. In fact, the largest infrastructure cost may be in arranging step-free access to this platform island, something for which we have not yet thought of a cheap solution!

What train services might we expect to see? The consultants will look into this, but we will say that it is important for Gadbrook and Middlewich to have through trains to/from Manchester, in both directions; and of course to and from Crewe. For example, Middlewich residents need the opportunity of work in Manchester; and Gadbrook businesses attract employees who live in Manchester. All the Mid Cheshire towns need links to Crewe. The new Northern rail timetable, sadly delayed, will include two trains an hour from Manchester to the Mid Cheshire Line, and the paths for these trains are protected. MCRUA will suggest that one of the two trains should run as 4 coaches from Manchester to Northwich, where it will divide (in platform 3), with 2 coaches continuing to Middlewich and Crewe, and the other two to Greenbank and Chester. In the other direction the two trains would combine at Northwich. We will also ask the consultants to look at a train service from Middlewich to Greenbank or Chester, because there is heavy student travel between Middlewich and Northwich/Greenbank (by road today, of course) which may make this service very worthwhile.

Coming back to the Secretary of State's re-opening priorities, he mentioned the Middlewich line and Colne to Skipton, but the Middlewich line still has its track and signals, unlike Colne to Skipton, so I'd put my money on 'our line' opening first! When, however, is harder to say. But I believe that the campaign recently has been making very good progress.

### **FARES NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane**

As you may have read, the national January 2019 rail fare increase for regulated fares (singles, 7-day season tickets and Off-Peak return tickets) will be 3.2%.

### **IMPROVEMENT TO DELAY REPAY ON NORTHERN**

As from the December 2018 timetable change Delay Repay will be available on Northern for delays of 15 minutes or more. Currently it is available on delays of 30 minutes or more.

### **COMPENSATION SCHEME FOR NORTHERN'S MAY 2018 TIMETABLE PROBLEMS**

The compensation scheme has now been extended to also include non season ticket holders who travelled three days per week or more. You are able to claim compensation if you were affected by severely delayed or cancelled trains between 1 April and 30 June 2018. The following text is from the Northern website:

#### **[How do I claim compensation? - Season ticket](#)**

You have ten weeks to make a claim from when the scheme opens on Thursday 12 July until Tuesday 4 December 2018, by completing a simple [claim form](#) on our website. You will need to provide proof of travel such as copies of tickets or, if tickets are unavailable, proof of payment. If this evidence is not available, you can contact our dedicated customer support team ([compmay18@northernrailway.co.uk](mailto:compmay18@northernrailway.co.uk), or Helpline: [03332 220 126](tel:03332220126) Mon to Fri 08:00 to 20:00) who will review each case individually.

## [How do I claim compensation? - Non-season ticket](#)

You have 8 weeks to make a claim from when the scheme opens on 9 October until 4 December 2018, by completing a simple claim form on our website ([northernrailway.co.uk/compensation](http://northernrailway.co.uk/compensation)). You will need to provide proof of travel such as copies of tickets or, if tickets are unavailable, proof of payment. If this evidence is not available, you can contact our dedicated customer support team ([compnay18@northernrailway.co.uk](mailto:compnay18@northernrailway.co.uk), or Helpline: 03332 220 126 Mon to Fri 08:00 to 20:00) who will review each case individually.

## **NORTHERN DUO TICKETS**

As many members will know, DUO tickets enable two people travelling together on an off-peak day return journey to benefit from a reduced fare – effectively it is a 25% reduction on the normal off-peak fare. Unfortunately these tickets cannot be purchased from Northern's current station ticket vending machines. However, they are available online via Northern's website and from booking offices. If you get on at a station without an open booking office then you can buy one from the conductor. Details of DUO fares can be found on the useful website [www.brfares.com](http://www.brfares.com). They cannot be used during the evening peak (16.01 to 17.59) for return journeys which both start and finish in the TfGM area. There is also a Monday to Friday evening peak restriction on journeys back from Manchester to stations on the line outside the TfGM area, e.g. Knutsford. There are no such restrictions on journeys to and from Chester.

## **NEW NORTHERN EXPLORER 55 WEST DAY TICKET**

On 20<sup>th</sup> May Northern introduced a Northern Explorer 55 West off-peak day ticket priced at £15 for those aged 55 or over covering its Central and Western areas. This includes all Northern services in the North West of England including to Carlisle via the Cumbrian Coast but not the Settle & Carlisle line. It is valid after 09.30 on Monday to Friday or any time at weekends and bank holidays. A map showing the area covered by the ticket can be found here: <http://www.railover.org/pages/northern-explorer-55-west-day-ranger.html>.

## **COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER'S REPORT by Sally Buttifant**

It has been an exciting few weeks:

- 13<sup>th</sup> Sept, in collaboration with Knutsford Promenades as part of Heritage Open Days (HODS) we took some of our Amazing Women out along the Mid Cheshire Line performing a specially commissioned theatre piece on the train and at Manchester Piccadilly, handing out booklets & promoting the initiative. This was widely promoted on social media & picked up by Sir Peter Hendy and received good coverage in the Chronicle & Knutsford Guardian
- 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> Sept - the artwork was also displayed in Northwich Plaza for the HODS weekend & one of our Northwich Station Friends led a well attended, guided rail walk from Northwich station & people could have a look around The Zone
- On 4<sup>th</sup> Oct it was the national community rail awards & I was hosting a table with ACORP colleagues in my ACORP board role networking with DFT, TOCs and judges, all very positive about community rail.
- At the awards I was really pleased that the CRP/TfGM art project at Altrincham station with Blessed Thomas Holford College gained 3<sup>rd</sup> place. The joint artwork & planting has really brightened up the Interchange as part of TfGM's improvement partnership initiative there.
- I was also very proud & pleased that Women in Community Rail, that I am a founder member of, won first prize in the Influencing Positive Change category – this means a lot – WiCR are working across the CR world promoting community rail good practice and working hard to make CR more inclusive & welcoming. We have just worked with partners on a Code of Conduct endorsed by ACORP that we hope all CRPs & station groups will sign up to.

- Sadly we didn't win in the marketing category or the outstanding volunteer category but in both categories there were some absolutely fantastic projects and volunteers who deserved to win & we appreciate that being shortlisted is a real achievement in itself as the CR awards embrace the crème de la crème of community rail projects across the UK.
- However we had a real treat last night (11<sup>th</sup> Oct) when we won first prize for Marvellous Days Out (artwork & amazing women) in the leisure & tourism category of the Altrincham & Sale Chamber of Commerce Business awards!! This means a lot as it is recognition from the local business community that we are making a difference with MDO.

We work hard to try & be an innovative CRP & this is achieved through creative partnership working with volunteers and partners along the Line and beyond, volunteers and partners from both community rail and the wider community. We couldn't achieve so much without positive people & organisations who make things happen! We are always looking for volunteers who want to get involved gardening at stations or who have a car & can deliver leaflets to attractions along the Line, please contact me at [raiofficer@midcheshirerail.org.uk](mailto:raiofficer@midcheshirerail.org.uk) or by phone on 0773 652 3863.

### **CHANGES TO THE 82 NORTHWICH-CHESTER BUS**

The 82 bus from Northwich to Chester (which serves Greenbank station) will be taken over by D&G with effect from 29 October. The service will be similar to Arriva's, with 11 complete journeys Monday to Friday (10 Saturday), but at a more even interval and starting and finishing earlier.

### **NEWS FROM CUDDINGTON**

In pursuance of their strategy of removing level crossings wherever possible, Network Rail propose to remove the barrow crossing at Cuddington station. In order to maintain step-free access to the Chester-bound platform, they are planning to modify the existing footpath to that platform. The slope will have to be more gentle for wheelchair users so it will continue past the top of the steps to near the east end of the station and then double back to platform level near the shelter. Details are still to be worked out but it would appear to require significant civil engineering and the cost is estimated at £390,000. A wheelchair user bound for Chester, after using the soon-to-be-installed ticket machine on the Manchester-bound platform, would have to go up the drive to the traffic lights before crossing the line on the road bridge and using the new footpath, a distance of about 300m.

### **FRANCHISE CHANGE**

The Arriva Trains Wales franchise ended on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October and the new Transport for Wales franchise started the following day, Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October. The new franchise is operated by Keolis Amey on behalf of the Welsh Government. The franchise has a new website at <https://tfwrail.wales/>. It remains to be seen if the Club 55 offer continues under the new operator!

### **HALTON CURVE**

The planned new hourly service between Liverpool Lime Street and Chester via Runcorn and Frodsham, to be operated by the Transport for Wales franchise, will not now begin until May 2019 due to a shortage of rolling stock (linked to the delays with the class 769 programme).

### **BROOKSIDE GARDEN CENTRE RAILWAY HAS CLOSED**

The miniature railway at the Brookside Garden Centre in Poynton ran for the last time under its present management on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September after the operator Chris Halsall was given notice to quit. Strikes, who own the garden centre, are looking to secure a new operator for the railway.

### **METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane**

27 new trams were ordered from Bombardier on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. It is planned that all services on the Altrincham line will be operated by double trams at peak periods (7am to 8pm on Monday to Friday) once the new trams are in service. Currently 7 out of 10 services are operated by double trams at peak periods. Good progress is being made with the construction of the new Trafford Park line from Pomona to the Trafford Centre and the



line may open earlier than its planned opening date of 2020. A zonal fare system will be introduced on Metrolink in January 2019. Family return fares are being abolished but Family Day tickets for the whole system will remain available.

The through ticketing from rail stations to Metrolink stations will continue. The planned increase in frequency on the Ashton line to every 6 minutes may now start in January 2019. This will be achieved by extending the Media City-Etihad Campus service to Ashton. There is an issue with traffic light phasing where roads cross the line in Ashton which has delayed the start of the increased frequency. Signalling alterations took place between Trafford Bar and Old Trafford over the weekend of Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> October and Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October to provide more operational flexibility for special events. We think that the new signalling will enable trams from the Manchester direction to use the facing crossover at Old Trafford and then run over the level crossing into the Manchester-bound platform to form a service back towards Manchester. There are now functioning ticket machines on both platforms at **Dane Road** after long periods when one or both machines was out of order due to damage caused by attempted thefts from the machines. There is a plan to install more Passenger Information Displays (PIDs) at Altrincham station. At least one is certainly needed on platform 2 because Bury departures are (confusingly) shown on the platform 1 PIDs even though they depart from platform 2!

### **TORNADO AND THE MID CHESHIRE LINE**

New-build steam locomotive 60163 *Tornado* did not travel along the Mid Cheshire Line on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> August because it was still under repair. The excursion which it was due to haul was postponed until late spring 2019 but the train is now unlikely to be routed via the Mid Cheshire Line because Network Rail has identified a number of loading gauge issues on some sections of the line which prevent its use by large steam locomotives.

### **MARVELLOUS DAYS OUT CALENDAR AND MUGS by Michael Ross**

We have a first ever – a Mid Cheshire Line calendar. It is designed by Nicky Thompson using the posters he prepared for the Marvellous Days Out campaign with the addition of a new one showing Manchester Town Hall. It is packaged with a posting envelope. Pictures of it are on the Marvellous Days Out website at [www.marvellousdaysout.org.uk](http://www.marvellousdaysout.org.uk).

The calendar is available at Chester Visitor Information Centre, Northwich Information Centre and Knutsford Heritage Centre for £9. It is available from the webshop of Crewe Heritage Centre <https://crewehc.org/shop> for £10 post-free.

Knutsford Mugs are available from Knutsford Heritage Centre for £10 and Chester mugs are available from Chester Visitor Information Centre for £11. They are Staffordshire bone china mugs decorated with the Knutsford and Chester posters respectively together with the new Mid Cheshire Line diagram.

### **LOCAL RAIL NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane**

Due to the alleged lack of train paths between Piccadilly and Stockport referred to in the lead story the local service between Manchester and Macclesfield will remain at one train per hour and the hourly service from Blackpool North to Piccadilly will now run through to Hazel Grove from May 2019 rather than running to Macclesfield. So Bramhall, Poynton, Adlington and Prestbury stations will continue to have one train per hour rather than the two promised by the current Northern franchise although the change does mean that Hazel Grove, Woodsmoor and Davenport stations regain their through service to stations beyond Manchester Piccadilly. Transpennine Express (TPE) will be tweaking their services to improve performance from December 2018. The Piccadilly-Leeds local service will be split at Huddersfield and turn round times will be increased at Manchester Airport by swapping the departure times for the Middlesbrough and Newcastle services. The New TPE Mark 5A loco-hauled stock with class 68s is due to start running on the Liverpool-Scarborough service from December 2018. A full electric service on the Bolton line will not now begin until May 2019.

### **ALTRINCHAM WINTER LECTURE SERIES**

The Altrincham Electric Railway Preservation Society is again running its popular Winter Lecture Series at Altrincham Methodist Hall, which is on the corner of Barrington Road and Woodlands Road, around 5 minutes' walk from Altrincham station in the direction of Manchester. Meetings are on the second Friday of the month starting at 7.30pm. Admission is £3.50 inclusive of "half time" refreshments (AERPS members are free). The remaining programme is:

9<sup>th</sup> November. "Steam through Skelton Junction and Timperley Junction 1955-1968" by Tony Martin.

14<sup>th</sup> December. "People & Places 3". Images of railway staff, enthusiasts, the general public and the steam railway by Paul Shackcloth.

11<sup>th</sup> January. "Journeys through Wales during the 1960s including narrow gauge railways" by Bill Chapman

8<sup>th</sup> February. "Steam and Diesel in the Northern Fells 2010-2016" by Ian Pilkington.

8<sup>th</sup> March. "The Glorious Steam Railways of India". Steam across India from 1976 to the early 1980s by John Sloane.

12<sup>th</sup> April. "Great Western and Southern Steam in the West Country" by Alf Storey.

### **STEPHENSON LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY PROGRAMME**

The Stephenson Locomotive Society continues to meet in Manchester, at the Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, very near St Peter's Square Metrolink station at 2pm on Saturdays. The remaining programme for this season is:

3<sup>rd</sup> November. "Steam in Scotland and the North East 1961-78" by Mike Swift.

1<sup>st</sup> December (at Sale United Reformed Church lounge, Montague Road Sale M33 3BU not far from Sale Metrolink station) "Development of the Steam Locomotive in Germany" by Ian Mainprize.

26<sup>th</sup> January. Centre AGM (brief) followed by: "The Construction of 82045" by Chris Proudfoot.

23<sup>rd</sup> February. "Woodhead Old and New" by Ken Grainger.

23<sup>rd</sup> March. "Manchester to Cleethorpes on ex-GCR routes" by Phil Lockwood and Enid Vincent.

13<sup>th</sup> April. "British-built Steam Locos.: Down Under" by Dr Michael Bailey.

### **8E RAILWAY ASSOCIATION PROGRAMME**

The 8E Railway Association continues to meet at the Gladstone Club, Station Road, Northwich CW9 5RB, which is a short walk from Northwich station in the direction of the town centre. Meetings take place on the second Tuesday of the month and start at 7.45pm. Admission for first-time guests is free, subsequent meeting entrance fee is £3. Free sandwiches are provided at the half-time break. The remaining programme is:

13<sup>th</sup> November. "Scotland in the 1960s" by John Cashen.

11<sup>th</sup> December "Diesels in the Northern Fells" by Ian Pilkington.

8<sup>th</sup> January. AGM followed by material from the Jon Penn archive.

12<sup>th</sup> February. "Terminal (Part 1)" by John Cowlshaw.

12<sup>th</sup> March. "Diesel and Electric in the Blue Era" by Roger Sutcliffe.

9<sup>th</sup> April. "Developments at Corwen" by Paul Reynolds.

14<sup>th</sup> May. "Steam in the Snow" by Les Nixon.

### **MID CHESHIRE LINE PEOPLE**

**Cheryl Thorne** has left Knutsford station booking office to take up a similar role at Hartford station (also Winsford station on relief). We are sorry to see her go and wish her well. We welcome **Pete King** as the new Station Manager for the Mid Cheshire Line, replacing **Pam Williams**. **Dr Jon Lamonte**, the Chief Executive of Transport for Greater Manchester, is leaving shortly to take up a position in charge of the new Sydney Metro in Australia.

### **IN MEMORIAM**

**Frank Macfarlane** (Andrew Macfarlane's father), MCRUA's first Treasurer when we started in October 1987, died on 15<sup>th</sup> September in Macclesfield District General Hospital aged 86. He helped us when we were getting started and was Treasurer for a short time before John Oates took over the role when he joined in 1988. John Hanson, MCRUA's auditor, attended Frank's funeral at Wilmslow Parish Church on 11<sup>th</sup> October. We regret to report the death of **Eugene Ring**, who led the Wythenshawe Station Campaign.

Former MCRUA member **Bert Ellery** from Chester has died. Bert was also a member of the Branch Line Society.

## 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 (0700-2200)
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](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.northernrailway.co.uk](http://www.northernrailway.co.uk) (includes details of forthcoming engineering work under “Travel” and then “Improvement 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) (includes a Journey Planner called “MyTfGM” which shows scheduled tram times if you plan a journey involving Metrolink).

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

[www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info) (a national public transport journey planner).

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

[www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk) (the website of Railfuture, the independent, national, voluntary body for rail users)

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

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

[www.brfares.com](http://www.brfares.com) (lists all available fares on the National Rail network).

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

## YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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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.

**You can join or renew online** at [www.mcrua.org.uk/membership](http://www.mcrua.org.uk/membership). Alternatively, you may pay by standing order, details available from the Membership Secretary [membership@mcrua.org.uk](mailto: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.**