

# 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>.

\*\*\* A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL MEMBERS AND FRIENDS \*\*

**THE NEXT RMT STRIKE DATES ON NORTHERN ARE SATURDAYS 15<sup>TH</sup>, 22<sup>ND</sup> AND 29<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER.**

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

We are pleased to provide our latest "Rail Report" to coincide with the beginning of the **winter timetable**. This is enclosed for those of you receiving this by post. Northern had intended to make some significant changes this December. However, we hear that after the "timetable meltdown" last May, Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling mandated that there would be **no changes apart from "minor tweaks"** for a number of train operators, including Northern, Transpennine Express and London Northwestern. The main tweaks on the Mid Cheshire Line are only a few minutes' differences in most cases, though we are especially pleased that Northern were able to implement our request to allow the 2240 Monday-Friday from Piccadilly to also call at Navigation Road – it already does on Saturdays. On the Crewe-Liverpool line the introduction of Sunday services at **Acton Bridge** has been postponed. London Northwestern (LN) were challenged about this as it would only have been a "minor tweak" as the trains already run and the time is in the running times, but still declined to introduce it. At a meeting with Acton Bridge Parish Council, Vicky Cropper, LN's Stakeholder Manager stated LN was now looking to introduce these changes from May 2019.

As regular readers know, the current "interim" Mid Cheshire Line timetable was put together without the usual planning and at very short notice due to Network Rail's seriously late notification that the Bolton electrification would not be ready for last May. This **timetable** was only ever intended to be temporary and has flaws in it which make it **unreliable**. This is especially around when trains, both passenger and freight, traverse the single line sections between Mickle Trafford and Mouldsworth, through Navigation Road and between Northenden and Stockport (Sharston Junction to Cheadle Village Junction). Now the Secretary of State has mandated no substantive changes, we are stuck with a timetable that doesn't work well both for the present and possibly until this time next year.

**Train running performance** along the line continues to be unimpressive. This is not for the previous main reason of the numerous temporary speed restrictions along the line as Network Rail had removed most of these by last summer, but because of the lack of resilience in this "interim" timetable. Add in the usual problems in connection with "leaf fall" and train running in the last couple of months has been poor. The figures at the end of Period 9 (the 4 weeks to 8 December 2018) show a PPM (Public Performance Measure) of 57.06% with an MAA (Moving Annual Average) of 78.17%. The targets are above 92%. Back in 2011 the line was close to this with an MAA of 91.57%. Now the service is way below target. Add in that there have been **no train services on Saturdays** since mid-August due to the continuing RMT strikes and the regular suspensions of service for hours when Northern to all intents abandon their passengers (see next article) and passengers are feeling very badly let down by "the Railway".

We think someone in Northern read our previous *Rail Report* and the criticism of the minimal **Saturday replacement bus services** being timed such that Saturday workers couldn't use the service of three buses each way to get to and/or from Saturday 9-5 jobs, a real problem for the many who have no access to a car and where for most there is no alternative public transport. We're sorry the service continues at only three buses each way compared to the 18 trains each way that we were used to, but pleased that from 1 December last the timetable was changed to allow users to get to and from 9-5 jobs. Thanks, Northern for this.

In our last issue I wrote about us having read in Transport for the North minutes that our **"Two Trains an Hour" service** which was due to start in December 2017 had been either cancelled or postponed with an alternative of extra trains between Altrincham and Chester in their place. I won't again go through what an unsatisfactory replacement that would be, having discussed that in last *Rail Report* available online via the MCRUA website once this issue is published. Many including me wrote to our MPs about this. My MP (Esther McVey) forwarded my letter to the Secretary of State for Transport for his response as we know other MPs did for their constituents. Despite prompts, almost two months later no responses have been received. A very unsatisfactory state of affairs.

I also wrote last time about the situation at **Greenbank Station** following the demolition without notice last spring of the historic **shelter** on the Chester-bound platform, its replacement months later with a smaller one more open to the elements. As I write there is still no reinstatement of the Customer Information Screen, poster cases or litter bin. We and others including Northwich Town Council had written to Northern about this. A response has just been received from Northern suggesting a meeting early in the New Year. This meeting is also to cover the complaints received from head teachers at the local schools and local MP, Mike Amesbury, about the trouble scholars are having getting home in the Manchester-bound direction. The relevant service under the previous timetable was the 1459 from Chester, now the 1502 in the current "interim" timetable. This used to be formed by four medium-sized Class 150 carriages with a total of about 260 seats. From last May this service has been reduced to two Class 150 carriages with a total of about 130 seats. All the scholars can get on this even though there are already about 30 passengers on the train, but this can take 3-4 minutes. However, as a consequence, it takes longer for passengers to get off at each station along the line, usually making the train late into Piccadilly. In November only 5% of these trains arrived within 5 minutes of schedule at Piccadilly. And this in turn makes the returning 1641 Piccadilly departure to Chester late. However, worse than this there are days when the service is formed of only two, smaller Class 142 (Pacer) carriages with a combined seating capacity of around 110. This usually means **30-40 scholars are left at Greenbank waiting for an hour** for the following train and on a platform where there is only shelter for 5 people. We are told the January meeting will also cover this very unsatisfactory situation. Greenbank has a "footfall" of 230,000 a year. Its facilities were reduced to minimal in 1996 when the ticket office and waiting room were closed in the week before privatisation. The building was later sold to the local church. And how about a "very special" Christmas present for those on the 1528 from Greenbank and the 1545 from Knutsford? - <https://www.brainboxcandy.com/sardines-travel-card-wallet/>

In the run up to the festive season, remember our CRP's **Marvellous Days Out 2019 calendars**. These are beautifully produced coming with an envelope. They look superb at home as well as making great presents for those fond of our lovely Mid Cheshire area. They can still be purchased online from the Crewe Heritage Centre shop - <https://crewehc.org/shop> A great way to promote Mid Cheshire and its attractions throughout the year.

Have a great festive season. Let's all look forward to the situation on the railways improving in 2019, including on our Crewe-Liverpool and Mid Cheshire Lines.

## **NORTHERN POOR CUSTOMER SERVICE FROM "BACK OFFICE STAFF" AT TIMES OF DISRUPTION** by John Oates

This is a subject we have been discussing in our meetings with Northern management since summer 2017. We like to effect improvements outside of the Public Eye. Sadly, I'm now writing about this as despite

much talking, fine words and aspirations from Northern, the situation is no better than 18 months ago and far worse than under the previous Northern Rail franchise.

In brief, when there is disruption for whatever reason for more than an hour or two along the Mid Cheshire Line, Northern seem to simply abandon the service and leave passengers to sort out getting to their destinations themselves.

In November this happened twice.

On 9 November a freight train came to a stand around 2130 whilst still partially on the Northenden single line at the Stockport end. The last train to run to Chester was the 2041 from Piccadilly, with the 2140, 2240 and 2341 trains all being cancelled. In the Manchester direction, the last train to get through to Piccadilly was the 1901 from Chester, with the 2001 and 2102 terminated at Altrincham and the 2201 and 2246 cancelled. This left two units stuck at Altrincham. Under previous franchises these would have been used to run services between Altrincham and Chester to keep the service going. However, given previous experience of Northern in this situation, we were not surprised to find the two units were coupled together and taken empty back to Chester. Passengers on platforms ringing up were told there would be no further trains and no replacement transport, though according to Twitter one particularly persistent passenger at Altrincham managed through many phone calls to get Northern to arrange a minibus from Altrincham to Knutsford. The freight train was moved at 2340.

On 29 November a freight train came to a stand on greasy rails between Knutsford and Plumley around 5am. The situation was further compounded by a points failure at Parkside Junction between Manchester and Newton-le-Willows, the effect of which was that the empty stock which comes from Newton Heath Depot in North Manchester to Chester for the second and later services was delayed by over an hour. National Rail Enquiries stated there were delays of around 30 minutes, but what actually happened was the first train that ran from Manchester was the 0941 **3½ hours** after the first service should have run. Services in the Manchester direction were also delayed / cancelled whilst the freight train was retrieved with the 0651 from Chester being held at Mobberley for 70 minutes. Northern stated buses would be arranged. The first of these was allegedly at 0945 from Chester and similarly from Altrincham, though looking at Twitter and speaking to Chester station staff these may not have run. No Northern management arrived on the line to look after passengers, something that would have happened under the Northern Rail franchise when a “CSL2” was called (Customer Service Level 2 – a delay to services of over an hour). So, as usual with Northern, passengers were left to fend for themselves. The staff on the trains and at our few staffed stations did their best, but as is also usual had great difficulty getting through to anyone in authority in Northern to find out what was actually going on and what they were allowed to do.

Last March, I as Chairman of MCRUA wrote to David Brown, Northern’s Managing Director about this lack of customer care from Northern’s back office staff, on that occasion following Northern agreeing with Network Rail to the short-notice cancellation of 5 trains on the evening of Saturday 17 March so Network Rail could complete engineering work. Northern agreed to this, but then failed to effectively notify passengers of the replacement services. The engineering work then overran, which wiped out the following Monday morning peak with services not properly restarting until around 11am with passengers being abandoned. It took Northern almost six months to last September to respond to this letter and this despite me by chance being on a train from Middlesbrough to Manchester on 5 July when David Brown joined it at York sitting in an adjacent seat and when he and I discussed this.

Quite how a Train Operating Company can expect to retain and increase patronage when they treat their customers with such disrespect is beyond us on the MCRUA Committee.

Last week I was at a presentation when David Brown spoke about Northern working really hard to look after passengers in such situations. From our experience on the Mid Cheshire Line the reality is the opposite.

## **2019 CALENDAR TO PROMOTE MID CHESHIRE LINE by Michael Ross**

A 2019 calendar has been published for the Mid Cheshire Line showcasing the iconic 1930s style posters designed by Cheshire artist Nicky Thompson. Nicky has designed us an eye-catching calendar using all of his posters to continue our Marvellous Days Out campaign to promote the Mid Cheshire Line.

The calendar will make a superb Christmas present for those who love our local heritage and railway line. The calendar contains pictures of major attractions like the Lion Salt Works, Anderton Boat Lift and Chester Zoo as well as scenes from Delamere Forest, Knutsford, Hale, Altrincham and Chester. Nicky Thompson has included all of the popular poster designs, like Stockport viaduct, and added a new one showing Manchester Town Hall, with the famous Manchester bees.

Copies of the calendar are available from the Northwich Customer Service Centre, Knutsford Heritage Centre, Chester Visitor Centre and Chester Christmas Market at £9 and from the Crewe Heritage Centre online shop at £10 including postage. Chester Christmas Market has a stall displaying all the posters and Marvellous Days Out products until Wednesday 20 December.

## **MEMBERSHIP MATTERS by Paul Wilkinson**

Members will be aware that renewals fall due on 1st March 2019. A renewal form is attached to/enclosed with this Rail Report. You can renew on line at [www.mcrua.org.uk/membership](http://www.mcrua.org.uk/membership) or by standing order at the same link. We continue to attract new members to MCRUA and thank all members for their continued support.

Members have elected to receive communications from MCRUA either by "post ONLY" (option A), by "email ONLY" (option B) or by "both post and email" (option C). Please note: if you have chosen option A you will not receive any email newsletters which may be issued between issues of the Rail Report. You need to switch to options B or C to receive these. To reduce costs, electronic distribution is preferred. You can change your mailing option by contacting the Membership Secretary at [membership@mcrua.org.uk](mailto:membership@mcrua.org.uk)

We welcome two new members to MCRUA since last Rail Report: R. Camper of Altrincham and G.Hayward of Weaverham.

We apologise for a hiccup with the address labels for the last Rail Report which left out the family name from the address label.

## **CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR TRAIN AND METROLINK SERVICES**

### Train services

Monday 24 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Monday service on the Mid Cheshire Line finishing early. Last trains 20.41 Piccadilly to Chester, 21.02 Chester to Piccadilly.
Tuesday 25 <sup>th</sup> December	No train service.
Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> December	No train service.
Thursday 27 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Thursday train service on the Mid Cheshire Line. .
Friday 28 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Friday service.
Saturday 29 <sup>th</sup> December	Probably a strike day on Northern with three buses each way between Stockport and Chester.
Sunday 30 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Sunday service.
Monday 31 <sup>st</sup> December	Normal Monday service on the Mid Cheshire Line finishing early. Last trains 20.41 Piccadilly to Chester, 21.02 Chester to Piccadilly.
Tuesday 1 <sup>st</sup> January	Modified Tuesday service on the Mid Cheshire Line. The 07.15 Chester to Stockport and the 17.18 and 18.18 Stockport to Chester will not run.
Wednesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> January	Normal Wednesday service on the Mid Cheshire Line.
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> Jan onwards	Normal service.

### Metrolink services

Monday 24 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Monday service with last trams departing the City at approximately 9pm.
Tuesday 25 <sup>th</sup> December	No service.
Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> December	Saturday service with extra trams for Manchester United v Huddersfield Town match.
Thursday 27 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Thursday service.
Friday 28 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Friday service.
Saturday 29 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Saturday service.
Sunday 30 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Sunday service with extra trams for the Manchester United v Bournemouth match.
Monday 31 <sup>st</sup> December	Saturday service. Last trams leave Manchester city centre at approximately 1am.
Tuesday 1 <sup>st</sup> January.	Sunday service.
Wednesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> January.	Normal Wednesday service.
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> January onwards.	Normal service.

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

From Monday 7<sup>th</sup> January to Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> January (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. The Chester-Piccadilly bus is “set down only” at stations from Knutsford onwards. Also between the same dates the 22.40 and 23.41 trains from Manchester Piccadilly to Chester are replaced by buses throughout their journeys (the bus replacing the 23.41 train departs from Piccadilly at 23.46). The 22.40 bus from Piccadilly to Chester does not call at Navigation Road even though the train it replaces now does! Additional buses will run at 23.27 and 00.23 from Knutsford to Chester. The 23.46 Piccadilly-Chester bus is “set down only” at stations from Knutsford onwards. This late night bus replacement continues to happen every 6 weeks.

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

After a successful trial, Virgin Trains has permanently removed evening ticket restrictions on services out of London Euston on Friday evenings. Previously Off-Peak Return tickets were banned on services departing from Euston between 15.01 and 18.44. The large difference between many peak and off-peak fares previously led to huge demand for the first Friday night off-peak trains at about 19.00. This led to many passengers having to stand for hours on trains to destinations such as Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. Virgin Trains said congestion has eased since it began a trial to end Friday afternoon peak restrictions in July. It has now decided to make the change permanent.

The new 26-30 Railcard for those within those ages will be available nationally from midday on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2019. The railcard costs £30 and gives one third off rail fares across the country. The railcard differs from the 16-25 Railcard in that the £12 minimum fare before 10.00 on Monday to Friday will apply at all times of the year. This minimum fare does not apply with the 16-25 Railcard during July and August. Also the 26-30 Railcard will only be available as an App on a mobile phone unlike the 16-25 Railcard which is also available in a paper version.

### **NEW RAIL OMBUDSMAN**

The Rail Ombudsman has been set up to offer an independent, free and expert service to investigate unresolved complaints about train companies and rail service providers who participate in the Ombudsman scheme. The Ombudsman also supports the rail industry to raise standards and improve services for customers. The Ombudsman will investigate a complaint if the Service Provider has not replied to your complaint or if you are not happy with their reply, if the Ombudsman agrees that the complaint is something they can look into. The Ombudsman will try to encourage you to reach an agreement with the Service Provider. If this does not happen they will make a decision based on the evidence they receive. If you agree with and accept their decision the Service Provider must accept it also. Contact details for the Rail

Ombudsman are: Telephone: 0330 094 0362 Email: [info@railombudsman.org](mailto:info@railombudsman.org) By Post: FREEPOST – RAIL OMBUDSMAN.

### **MCRUA CARD ENCLOSED WITH THIS NEWSLETTER**

Members and colleagues will receive a MCRUA card with this mailing. If you are not currently a member of MCRUA please consider joining. If you are a member please pass the card on to someone else who you think might be interested in joining. We need new members in the light of the current problems with the train service. The more members we have the more it will make our voice stronger. If you would like a further supply of the cards they are available from Knutsford station booking office or by email to our Secretary at [enquiries@mcrua.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@mcrua.org.uk).

### **ENGINEERING WORK AFFECTING THE CREWE-LIVERPOOL LINE**

We've received the following information from London Northwestern: Planned re-signalling works will be taking place along the Birmingham-Liverpool route over Christmas and New Year [Speke Junction and Allerton Junction signal boxes are being abolished with control of those areas transferring to the Manchester Rail Operating Centre - Ed]. As a result, London Northwestern services will be terminating at Runcorn from 27 December 2018 until 2 January 2019 and rail replacement buses will be in place between Runcorn and Liverpool South Parkway during this time. Once at Liverpool South Parkway, Merseyrail services can be used by customers who wish to travel further towards the city centre. Our message to passengers is to plan their journey before travelling and to allow more time for the rail replacement section of their journey. There are alternative arrangements being provided by other operators and onwards travel from Liverpool South Parkway is available via Merseyrail.

Rail replacement buses are scheduled to pick up and drop off at the front entrance to Runcorn Station, at the turning circle. Bus bay 1 has been allocated to LNR for picking up and dropping off customers at Liverpool South Parkway. Rail replacement buses are scheduled to arrive at Runcorn on an hourly basis and timetable information will be available online and on location nearer to the time. Trains will be re-scheduled to leave Birmingham New Street slightly earlier during the possession. Rail replacement buses are wheelchair accessible and can accommodate for fully folded bicycles. Non-folding bicycles and large items of luggage are not suitable for travel on rail replacement services. Customers with London Northwestern only tickets will have to buy separate tickets for Merseyrail services. Arrangements have been made for advance tickets to be accepted on London Northwestern Railway and Merseyrail services with one ticket.

Virgin Trains will be operating an hourly service via Warrington Bank Quay and Chat Moss. Northern will be operating a service that starts and terminates at Warrington Central [from the Manchester direction]. Merseyrail will be turning back at Liverpool South Parkway via Hunts Cross. East Midlands Trains will be starting and terminating at Warrington Central [from the Manchester direction].

### **CREWE TO LIVERPOOL LINE by Simon Barber**

Members will know that as well as the Mid Cheshire Line, MCRUA also supports the Crewe to Liverpool line, focussing on the three Mid Cheshire stations of Winsford, Hartford and Acton Bridge. Under the previous train operator, London Midland, we found it hard to establish reliable working relations with the franchise management, so we were pleased when the new franchisee, London Northwestern, appointed Vicky Cropper as its Head of Stakeholder Relations. Many MCRUA members will remember Vicky from her previous Community Rail role at Northern and this month I was able to meet her in her new job. Vicky lives in Cheshire and went to school in Northwich so she - and we - have the advantage that she knows the area well. We met in Hartford and discussed matters relating to all three stations, especially car parking and the train timetables. There is insufficient car parking at all these stations and I gave Vicky photos I'd taken the previous day which showed the extent of the problem. It's no exaggeration to say that London Northwestern will struggle to grow passenger numbers at any of these stations, given their positions relative to the areas they serve, unless more car parking is provided. On timetable topics, each station has a different service pattern but all have some problems such as long gaps between trains, unbalanced services and too-late first services and too-early last services of the day. Vicky was able to show me the planned May 2019 timetable which, I'm pleased to say, is a big improvement on today and even exceeds the minimum franchise

specification in one or two respects. There are some details still to be ironed out, however. Vicky took copious notes during our meeting and whilst it's too soon to see the results, I'm pleased that we have a knowledgeable contact in London Northwestern management and hopeful that our three Mid Cheshire stations will start to get the attention they need. If you are planning to travel on the Crewe to Liverpool line between December 27 and January 1, please see the item elsewhere in this issue about timetable changes while Network Rail replaces the signalling between Runcorn and Liverpool South Parkway.

## **NORTHWICH STATION ACCESS PROBLEMS HIGHLIGHTED ON NATIONAL TV**

Northwich station featured in a piece on ITV national news on 29<sup>th</sup> November when an activist in a motorised wheelchair was unable to board a Pacer train or to cross to the Chester-bound platform. The piece can be viewed here: <https://www.itv.com/news/2018-11-29/more-than-40-of-train-stations-cannot-be-used-by-some-disabled-passengers/> Kidsgrove station is currently having lifts and an accessible footbridge installed. When will it be Northwich's long overdue turn? MCRUA is also keenly aware of the lack of disabled access to the Manchester-bound platforms at Mouldsworth and Lostock Gralam. Comments from members on access issues are welcome.

## **BROOKSIDE GARDEN CENTRE RAILWAY HAS REOPENED**

The miniature railway at the Brookside Garden Centre in Poynton has reopened under new management.

## **METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane**

'Early Bird' and 'Early Bird Plus' fares are being trialled on Metrolink as part of the Greater Manchester Mayor's Congestion Deal, which encourages people to change their travel behaviour to reduce traffic congestion. They are only available on the **get me there** app. You can download the free **get me there** app to your phone from the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#). The fares are only available until Christmas Eve. You must buy your Early Bird travelcard before 7am on any weekday and choose from: **Early Bird - £1** (Unlimited travel on all Metrolink tram services from start of service until 7.30am) or **Early Bird Plus - £3** (Unlimited travel on all Metrolink tram services from start of service until 7.30am PLUS unlimited travel between 1pm and 3.30pm and unlimited travel from 7pm until end of service). The new Metrolink Zonal fares will come into effect from 13<sup>th</sup> January. More information can be found here: <https://www.tfgm.com/public-transport/tram/zonal-fares>. Return fares are being abolished. There will be a choice of single fares or zone tickets, which give you unlimited travel within the selected zones for the rest of the day. If you are travelling from Altrincham to Manchester you will need to select all four zones on the ticket machine. There will also be a fare increase from the same date although some passengers will save money due to the new zone boundaries. Cornbrook will now be in Zone 1 (the city centre zone). The creation of fare zones is a first step towards a London-type system where the zones would also include bus and train journeys. The tram service to Ashton-under-Lyne will increase to every 6 minutes from January. Good progress is being made on 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. Metrolink will start enforcing bye-laws about anti-social behaviour on trams and stations from January 2019.

## **NEWS FROM THE LINE**

Mark Lee-Kilgariff began serving coffee from a 1976 Peugeot van in the station car park at Knutsford under the name "Tatton Perk" in September. Tatton Perk is at Knutsford station car park on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 6.30am to 11am. A new ticket machine has been installed on the Chester-bound side at Plumley, arguably the wrong side because most travellers from Plumley are going towards Manchester. Needless to say, MCRUA has not been consulted about the location of new ticket machines. The Stockport Rail Day will not take place in 2019. The toilets at Manchester Piccadilly station are now free to use. There was previously a 30p charge.

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

Transport for Greater Manchester has identified six potential sites for new railway stations or tram stops in Greater Manchester. It is not yet known where these are. The new Transpennine Express Mark 5A loco-

hailed stock with class 68s is now due to start running on the Liverpool-Scarborough service (via Manchester Victoria) from May 2019.

### **2018 MUSIC TRAINS PROGRAMME by Michael Ross**

The programme finished on 27 November with a daytime Music Train for Bromborough U3A from Chester to the Railway Inn at Mobberley with the Terry Burgin Blues Band. 493 people travelled on seventeen Music Trains in 2018. Ten of these were for everyone and seven were for groups (Bromborough U3A, Chester U3A, Chester Vision Support, Hale U3A (three times) and Hale Civic Trust).

Numbers were down on 2017, particularly at the beginning of the season because of the timetable disruption which clearly discouraged people. By August things were back to normal. But we had to cancel three Music Trains in June and July because we could not be certain of getting people back from Chester on the last train. Nevertheless hundreds of people made extra journeys along the Mid Cheshire Line and enjoyed themselves! Thanks to the musicians (over sixty of them) and their sixteen bands. Thanks to the staff of the venues (Alexanders at Chester, the Golden Pheasant at Plumley and the Railway inn at Mobberley). Thanks, too, to the conductors on Northern and the MCRUA members who acted as hosts.

### **SAPHOS TRAINS PROGRAMME FOR 2019**

Saphos Trains have announced their steam-hauled special train programme for 2019. The full programme can be viewed here: <https://saphostrains.com/>. Their first train in 2019 is on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April "The William Shakespeare" from Preston, Wigan North Western, Warrington Bank Quay, Hartford, Crewe and Stafford to Stratford-upon-Avon. Standard class is already fully booked. The first class "early booking discount price" fare if booked more than 30 days in advance is £99. Eight other Saphos trips in 2019 call at Hartford. Saphos can be reached on 0800 038 5320 or [enquiries@saphostrains.com](mailto:enquiries@saphostrains.com).

### **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:

- 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:

- 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:



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

We welcome **Becky Styles** as our new Northern Communities & Stakeholder Manager. Becky was previously a Conductor Team Manager at Manchester Piccadilly and prior to that a conductor there. Many of you will recognise her from her conductor days and remember her from this – <http://www.mcrua.org.uk/chairmansblog/2012/05/31/olympic-torch-rides-the-mid-cheshire-line/> when she was the conductor on the train which conveyed the Olympic torch. We say farewell to **Liam Sumpter**, who is leaving the position of Area Director for Northern to become Chief Operating Officer for the Scotrail Alliance in the spring.

## IN MEMORIAM

We regret to report the death of former MCRUA member **John Spencer** of Davenham on 4<sup>th</sup> November. John was a former Vice-Chairman of the Rail Passengers Committee for North Western England. Former MCRUA member **John Legg** from Hale died on 26<sup>th</sup> November aged 84. There will be a memorial service at St Peter's Church, Hale on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> January, probably at 12 noon. Final details will be in the Sale and Altrincham Messenger.

## 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).

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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.**

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