

# MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

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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.

\*\*\*\*MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL MEMBERS AND FRIENDS  
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## CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS by John Oates

We are pleased to provide our latest "Rail Report" together with a copy of the Mid Cheshire Line Winter timetable for these receiving this in the post.

**Train Running Performance.** In brief, on both our lines train running performance is currently dreadful and an embarrassment.

Performance on **The Mid Cheshire Line** has been badly affected by cancellations due to driver shortages and continues to be the worst since before 1998. At our public meeting in Knutsford in October addressed by Northern's Regional Director, Chris Jackson, he explained performance was likely to get even worse before getting better due to the number of traincrew needing to be trained on the new trains. He has been proved to be correct. Most recently he has let us know "*With regards to driver cancellations, as you know we are in "peak" training at the moment for Piccadilly and Victoria drivers on new trains as we deliver the biggest training programme in UK Rail. This pauses in December for a few weeks but then continues up until May, albeit with a reducing intensity from March onwards. We are around 68% complete in terms of driver training, and things will stabilize in the early part of 2020. I think this is consistent with the message I provided in Knutsford at the public meeting.*"

Performance on our **Crewe-Liverpool line** has also been poor of late. We do not have the detailed figures that we have for the Mid Cheshire Line, though based on feedback from regular users we know users are suffering. London Northwestern has issued a statement stating "*Working to Get Back on Track – Recently there have been far too many delays and cancellations from this station, and we're sorry. We've already adjusted the timetable to make it more reliable, and worked with Network Rail and other train companies to stop us getting delayed before we get to you. From December 2019, we're making more changes in the West Midlands to help relieve congestion and give you a timetable you can rely on. We hope you notice the difference. Find out more at [lnr.uk/whatsnew](http://lnr.uk/whatsnew)"*

Some good news is that the 4-wheeler "Nodding Donkey" Pacers have almost been retired from service on the Mid Cheshire Line. As I write this they are only used on the 1818 from Stockport and on Saturday trains. Chris Jackson let us know in our Knutsford public meeting we should have none after the December timetable change, with all those in use west of the Pennines withdrawn by mid-February 2020.

The Community Rail Partnership's (CRP's) latest issue of its new quarterly publication, "**Along Mid Cheshire Lines**" was published in November with copies available from staffed stations and other outlets near the line. This issue's main focus is Altrincham and all its many attractions, a town much improved over the last 10 years. Also included is news from along the line. The CRP's volunteer team under the direction of John Hulme has again produced an excellent read. Very many thanks to them and the many others who continue supporting the line whilst the CRP is established as a Community Interest Company

before it can recruit a replacement Community Rail Officer. We hope this will have happened by Spring 2020, though setting this up is more complex than had been anticipated. Some of you will have seen the “green” poster cases appearing at our stations. These are for CRP use, having been paid for and installed by Northern with 15 so far up at stations between Altrincham and Mouldsworth with more coming, including one at Stockport even though it’s not a Northern station. Thanks, Virgin, for agreeing to this and to funding the installation. These “green” cases display posters from the CRP’s “Marvellous Days Out” collection and also at the moment a flyer letting viewers know they can buy these from the Crewe Heritage Centre Shop for Christmas - <https://crewehc.org/shop/> The intention is these posters will be swapped around the poster cases every 6-8 weeks. Thanks are due to our newish Stations Manager, Pete King who arranged for this having spotted it had been outstanding for over 3 years.

I mentioned in the last issue the discussion I’d had with David Brown, Northern’s Managing Director about concentrating on getting the “**day to day**” job delivered well. Below is my letter to David Brown, his response and then our reply to this. Northern has a long way to go to get back to the level of service we were used to under Northern Rail.

### **NORTHERN AND “THE DAY-TO-DAY JOB”**

As noted above and in our previous issue, after discussion with our committee I wrote to David Brown, Northern’s Managing Director following a discussion he and I had had at Northern’s September Community Rail Conference in Leeds.

Dear David,

It was good to be invited to Northern’s September Community Rail Conference in Leeds and useful to have a short chat with you afterwards. You noted in your talk that Northern is equally focussing on getting the “day to day” railway working well, as well as introducing the new trains and the refurbishments. I mentioned that I had some “day to day” questions for you, but as there was no time after your talk, we agreed I would put these in writing to you. It is my intention to incorporate your reply in a forthcoming issue of our “*Mid Cheshire Rail Report*”. Thus, although I am sure you will be asking colleagues for assistance in putting the response together, I would appreciate it if the response came from you.

### **Mid Cheshire “Day to Day” Basics**

#### **Train Running Performance**

The Moving Annual Average (MAA) of Mid Cheshire Line Train Running Performance at the end of the railway’s Period 4 (to 17 August 2019) was down to 76.5%. This is the lowest we believe since before 1998 and compares very poorly with the target of 92% and the highest of 91.6% which was achieved in February 2011. The slump was a particular surprise as in Period 3 Network Rail completed the removal of the long-running set of Temporary Speed Restrictions (TSRs) between Ashley and Hale, known as the Bleeding Wolf restrictions which had been in place since 2005. During Period 4 from what we can see from publicly-available information the line suffered at least 48 Public Performance Measure (PPM) failures due to driver shortages. Could you let us know what work Northern is doing to recover the MAA, including influencing Network Rail, and provide an estimate of the expected recovery including timescales and to what level?

#### **Penalty Fares / Promise to Pay (P2P) Vouchers**

We are very supportive of the introduction of the Penalty Fares regime along the Mid Cheshire Line, as long as it is implemented fairly. The current process of obtaining a P2P voucher (as of 19 September and based on using the Knutsford Ticket Vending Machine [TVM] on the Chester-bound platform) is tortuous and time-consuming to say the least. As at 19 September by my reckoning it takes a passenger requiring a P2P voucher **24 presses of the screen** before obtaining the voucher. This is incredibly time-consuming, taking I estimate at least 3 minutes, by which time there could well be a queue of passengers waiting to use the TVM and with the train not far away. I discussed this with Carolyn Watson at the Conference. She seemed very surprised, so I suggested next time she was on a Penalty Fares line that she tried it for herself. I note that

after my discussion with Carolyn the requirement to select a seat on each train, out and back if a return, including window/aisle, forwards/backwards, wifi/plug socket has been removed, so now 24 presses instead of 28.

I have worked in IT for over 40 years. It seems to me this could be reduced to only 8 or possibly 4 presses, as follows:

1. Touch screen to “wake” TVM
2. Press P2P icon
3. Accept Penalty Fares Notice
4. On the “Popular Tickets” screen include an option to directly input the destination. This then would lead to five presses. Entering the first three letters, or three letter code for the destination, select from “drop down screen” then pressing enter (I understand Northern’s wish to know which destinations/flows are generating P2Ps that are not being redeemed, though it more than doubles the number of presses required).

P2P voucher then issued.

That’s 8 presses instead of 20, or 4 if destination selection is omitted. As mentioned above, the passengers find the current process very laborious.

### **Station Customer Information Screens (CIS)**

We understood Northern to have a franchise commitment to upgrade the CIS at all stations with just the basic CIS, and to install it at stations where there is currently no CIS, this by the end of 2019. No upgrades or new installations have taken place along the line since Northern took over the franchise. Could you let us know what the commitment is, and by when it will be delivered?

### **Tickets not sold by TVMs**

A number of popular tickets along the line are not sold / incorrectly sold by our TVMs.

These include:

- Greater Manchester Wayfarers, and
- Tickets onto Metrolink.

In the latter case, there is much confusion. As an example, a user going to Sale (a popular destination and indeed a stop along our line until the route was transferred to Metrolink) would naturally enter “Sale”. “Sale Metrolink” is offered, and on selection a message shows “Route not available”. A regular user may know that since TfGM zonal ticketing came in Sale is in Zone 3. They may also have worked out that they need to buy a ticket to Metrolink Zones 3 & 4. On doing this, the system then charges a cheaper fare than is expected, and what is printed out is tickets to Altrincham, and nothing for the Metrolink section, leading to annoyance and confusion. There are no Metrolink Zonal maps at stations along the Mid Cheshire Line. Casual users are unlikely to know what to do.

### **Greenbank Station**

I expect you are aware of the sorry saga at Greenbank Station where the historic shelter on the Chester-bound platform was demolished in May 2018 with no local consultation, even though our line is a Community Rail line. It was replaced 6 months later with a much inferior shelter. More than a year on the CIS and poster cases have still to be replaced. The local town council is very unhappy about this, as is Mike Amesbury, the local MP (and of course the passengers who can’t all fit in the new smaller, draughtier shelter). All this is generating consistently poor press for Northern in the Northwich / Greenbank area (Greenbank is covered by Northwich Town Council, and has a footfall similar to Northwich’s of around 240,000). This saga has dragged on since May 2018. Could you let us know what Northern intends to do to recover this situation and by when?

### **Conclusion**

There are more “day-to-day” items, many more, though I’m just providing the above at this stage. Chris Jackson, Raj Chandarana and Rebecca Styles are aware of the many more. I’m copying this to those mentioned in the paragraph above, as well as at her request to Carolyn Watson. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,  
John Oates  
Chairman, Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

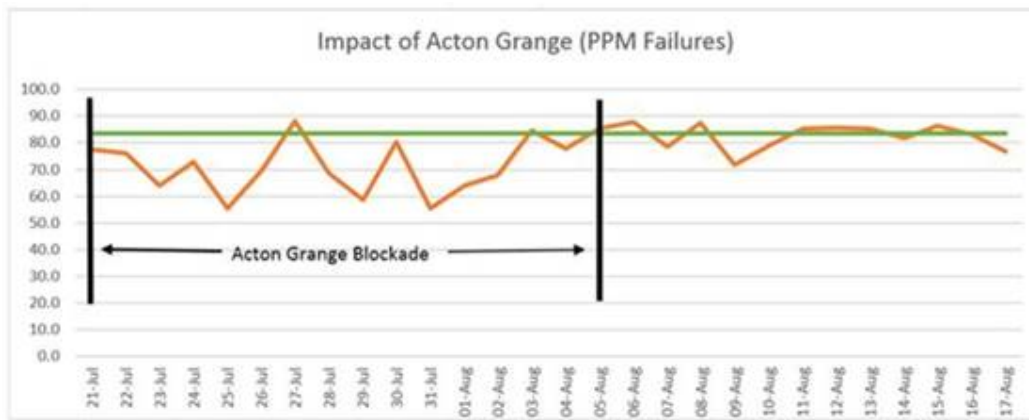
On 30 October I received the following reply from David:

Dear John,

Thank you for your email relating to the Mid Cheshire Line, highlighting a range of issues of concern. I have grouped the two questions in relation to customer information screens under a single heading for ease.

### **Train Running Performance**

In relation to train running performance, you are right to note that the period up to 17<sup>th</sup> August (it was Period 5, not 4) was challenging on the Mid Cheshire line. A key factor was the Acton Grange Blockade which diverted a Virgin service through the Castlefield Corridor each hour. The impact on Central PPM during the blockade period was significant, as you can see from the graph below.



To compound matters further we had a number of other incidents, record heat on 25<sup>th</sup> July followed by an intense period of rainfall which led to flooding around Timperley affecting the Mid Cheshire line and the Whaley Bridge Dam incident. The good news is that in Period 6, which ended on 14<sup>th</sup> September, the Mid Cheshire line PPM was 81.2% which is demonstrating the benefit from the removal of the Bleeding Wolf TSR. We are working closely with Network Rail to examine how we can both work to improve our performance and resilience on the Mid Cheshire line

### **Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs)**

Your observations about our ticket vending machines (TVMs) reflects observations made by other customers and rail user groups. Northern's TVMs not really changed in software capability for the last 10 years. In the past year, we have rolled out a major software update on all our TVMs. This has proved to be a challenging exercise, and it was determined that we would slowly phase in capabilities, to ensure that the new software is robust and can function to optimum capacity.

The first phase of this has seen significant improvements in functionality, including the introduction of:

- Tickets for future dates to travel
- Tickets from any station to any station on the rail network
- Advance purchase fares, including seat reservation where appropriate
- Northern advance purchase on the day of use
- Induction loops

However, this is only the first stage in improving the TVM experience. The current functionality is the baseline in terms of improvements. We are aware that more needs to be done, and we are planning to activate additional functionality in the coming months, to tackle the main issues raised in feedback. These will include improvements in "quick select" and "popular destinations", fixing some "bugs" in the system and make the process more intuitive. We will also be looking at moving some TVMs to a more appropriate

location. We are acutely aware of issues on the Mid Cheshire line, particularly at Greenbank Station, and they are exploring possible solutions to providing a better located TVM for the Chester bound services, possibly at street level due to the lack of suitable power supply on that platform.

We are also looking at how to sell “multi-modal” tickets, particularly on lines which interface with Metrolink. This is an industrywide matter outside London, and Transport for the North have established a work stream around seamless travel in the North. Following the introduction of zonal fares by Metrolink, discussions will take place with colleagues at Metrolink and Transport for Greater Manchester to see how we might be able to cross-sell tickets, though these discussions are at an early stage.

**Station Customer Information Screens (CISs)**

Our committed obligations in relation to Customer Information Screens is to provide 173 new CISs by April 2020. I have inserted below the relevant section of our franchise agreement, which will be of interest to you.

*By no later than 1 April 2020 the Franchisee shall implement:*

- (a) the facilities specified in column 1 of Table 3 at the Bottom Tier Stations, Mid-Tier Stations and Top-Tier Stations; and the number of such facilities to be installed at such Bottom Tier Stations, Mid-Tier Stations and Top-Tier Stations shall be as specified in the corresponding row in column 2 of Table 3,*

*Table 3*

<i>Facility</i>	<i>Number of facilities to be installed at each Bottom Tier, Mid-Tier and Top Tier station</i>		
	<i>Bottom Tier station</i>	<i>Mid-Tier station</i>	<i>Top Tier station</i>
<i>CIS</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>CIS plus PA (text-to-speech at each Bottom Tier Station)</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>

*Bottom Tier: Passenger footfall is less than 100,000*

*Mid-Tier: Passenger footfall at lease 100,000, but less than 250,000*

*Top Tier: Passenger footfall 250,000 and above*

Of the Mid-Cheshire stations, Mobberley will be getting two CISs as part of the Bottom Tier stations commitment, these are due to be installed before the committed Obligation date of 1 April 2020. Additionally, there will be some work done under the Stations Improvement Fund. Your suggestion of introducing Metrolink maps onto our northbound platforms along the Mid Cheshire line is good, and I will ask Raj and Rebecca to look into this with the stations team.

**Greenbank Station**

I am aware of the ongoing issues at Greenbank, including the shelter and CIS. Chris Jackson is due to meet with Mike Amesbury MP towards the end of October. I am sorry for the situation in relation to the removal of the shelter without prior consultation. As a lesson learnt, our property team now work more closely with our Stakeholder and Community team as well as the station managers, to insure that CRPs and other local stakeholders are properly consulted on such matters. In relation to the CIS there remains an issue around the power source, which is also impacting on the TVM, and discussions are taking place with our supplier and also Network Rail. On wider issues around Greenbank, I understand that discussions have begun with the church which adjoins Greenbank Station to look at some wider issues, such as the state of the station car park, its usage by non-railway customers and the wider aspirations of the church. Raj is in the process of convening a meeting with the church and our property team to identify how we might work more collaboratively with the church. I also understand that the church have given consent for a canopy to be erected on the Manchester bound platform as an additional shelter. The stakeholder and stations teams will draw up an action plan with clear timescales to resolve the range of issues at Greenbank, and this will be subject to scrutiny by the Mid Cheshire CRP.

I hope I have covered off the key points you raise, and I know you are working closely with Chris Jackson and the stakeholder, community and stations teams on a wider range of matters.

Yours with best wishes,  
David

Our committee discussed this and on 15 November I wrote back to David as below.

Dear David,

Thank you for your email of 30 October in response to mine of 25 September. Responding in the order of your response:

### **Train Running Performance**

Our comment was about the continuing decline in performance.

Your response relates to one particular period rather than to the Moving Annual Average and the continuing decline in performance. From your close working with Network Rail, please let us know when you expect we will start seeing an improvement in the Moving Annual Average from its poor level of 76%. Passengers are very disappointed with the service provided. Back in 2015/16 the Moving Annual Average was around 86% and prior to that in 2010/11 a very creditable 91%.

### **Ticket Vending Machines**

We look forward to the software improving on the TVMs. Currently, at times the process is not at all customer friendly. You mention Greenbank for the Chester-bound platform where the TVM currently has no power supply. Greenbank's Chester-bound platform has two entrances. If the TVM were to be located at street level it would either be outside the station limits on the main road, such that those entering from the local estate and using the mobility entrance would have no access to it, or it would be at the local estate entrance leaving those from the main road having no easy access to it. This is not a satisfactory solution. You mention multi-modal tickets with Metrolink. Prior to introduction of the Metrolink zonal fare structure in January 2019 multi-modal tickets were available from Mid Cheshire Line stations onto Metrolink from the TVMs. However, this is no longer the case. Given these tickets were previously available from the line's TVMs, we don't understand why discussions are required with TfGM to reinstate them.

### **Station Customer Information Screens (CISs)**

Thanks for providing the detail on this from the franchise agreement. We are pleased to hear Mobberley will be receiving CIS before next April, though disappointed to hear that the Department for Transport considers it acceptable to leave Mouldsworth, Plumley and Ashley with no CIS. Could we be provided with information about what work is to be carried out along the Mid Cheshire Line under the Stations Improvement Fund? We look forward to passengers at stations receiving the suggested guidance on ticketing onto the Metrolink system.

### **Greenbank Station**

Thank you for your apology over the removal of the historic shelter without consultation. We do not understand the point about the lack of a power supply for the CIS on the Chester-bound platform. The platform previously had CIS affixed to the now-demolished shelter. That had power. We are pleased to hear your property team will in future work more closely with your Stakeholder Team.

The sooner the better.

In the last 6 months the Line has also suffered from the removal of the historic seating from the shelter at Plumley, replaced by smaller standalone metal seats. Again this was without consultation and when to our knowledge there was nothing wrong with the wooden seating which dated from the late 1860s. Furthermore, your property team has more recently installed unsightly bright yellow Amazon Lockers at Cuddington, fixed to the wall of the privately-owned station building and without the permission of the building's owner. We hope to see no more of your property team showing no respect for the assets at stations along the line which help to make travel on the Mid Cheshire Line special. We look forward to continuing to work closely with Chris Jackson and his team and to returning to the positive relationship we have had with our train operating companies over the years.

Best wishes,

John Oates  
Chairman MCRUA

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Our view is that this is our railway, Northern Rail ran it before, Northern are currently running it and others will run it in future. We expect much better and will not let poor service continue whilst saying nothing. We doubt our members think otherwise. With the festive season almost upon us, very best wishes from all of us on the committee for the season and for 2020.

**John Oates 1 December 2019**

### **THE POOR SERVICE ON THE LINE. WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT?**

It is unfortunate that we have to say that the current service being provided by Northern on the Mid Cheshire Line is just not good enough and members are asking what MCRUA is doing to improve the situation. There is a lot going on behind the scenes that may not be immediately visible to our members. The Chairman and Officers are in regular contact with managers at Northern, highlighting the line's problems and seeking solutions to the current difficulties. The biggest problems are not always under the control of Northern and both the Department of Transport and Network Rail have much to answer for. However we are trying to keep up pressure on Northern to deal with matters for which they have responsibility. Besides this we are building support for the line by issuing press releases to local newspapers, some of which are rightly critical of Northern. We also in touch with local MPs, senior councillors and local government officials, pushing the case for improvements on the line. The current level of cancellations is quite unacceptable and we are starting a campaign to have cancellations switched to those lines that have a more frequent service. As soon as the election and Christmas is over press releases will start to appear referring to this. We are aware that there are still problems with safeguarding on the school trains and this issue has been raised with Northern and we continue to do this. We continue to campaign at the highest levels, with the support of MPs, to get the two trains an hour service delivered. This should have started in December 2017. On a brighter note, there are now very few Pacer trains on the line and it looks as if Northern will meet the target of not using them on the Mid Cheshire Line by the end of the year. The replacement trains – Sprinters and Super Sprinters – are not any newer but they are more spacious and comfortable, and are all being refurbished. Please do not think that MCRUA is inactive. We are doing as much as we can to make things better and we welcome any offers of help or suggestions from members for how to progress these issues.

### **NEWS FROM THE CREWE-LIVERPOOL LINE by Simon Barber**

Users of the Crewe-Liverpool line will be aware that London Northwestern Railway (LNR), the train operator, introduced a new timetable in May which brought more trains to Hartford and Acton Bridge stations, and the extension of most of the trains southwards beyond Birmingham New Street to Birmingham International, with half continuing to London Euston. There was always a risk that running such long distance services via Birmingham would result in unreliability, because any delays caused by congestion around Birmingham would ripple across the network, and it seems that is what has happened. As a result, LNR has announced more timetable changes in the Birmingham-Coventry corridor from December. LNR has provided this statement:-

*"Since the introduction of the May 2019 timetable, we have been working on a number of improvements to help us deliver a more reliable train service, both in the Midlands and along the West Coast Main Line. December 2019 marks the first stage of this journey, with further enhancements in both May and December 2020.*

*The changes last May represented the biggest overhaul of the timetable for over a decade, with some 2,500 alterations to the existing service. They created lots of new journey opportunities for our passengers, but as we all know, it hasn't been possible to achieve the levels of train performance and reliability that our customers expect, particularly on some of the new longer distance routes. Whilst our preparation for that timetable change was thorough and comprehensive, the day to day operation has proven quite fragile, particularly on the Coventry – Birmingham – Wolverhampton corridor and into Euston during peak periods.*

*Over the next two timetables, we will be making further changes that try to strike a better balance between passenger benefits (e.g. faster journeys and better connectivity) and in-built reliability. That means delivering a train plan which has less complexity, and more self-containment of rolling stock and traincrew, to stop delays spreading through the network."*



These changes do not, in fact, affect our timings by much but LNR believe we will see a return of reliability. Indeed there are some small improvements. For example, at Acton Bridge, the awkward 4 hour gap in northbound services in the evening has been reduced to a 3 hour gap which makes day trips to the south more feasible. We still want to see a shorter gap and will keep making representations on this. The journey times to London on the through trains will be faster, but it will still be quicker to change trains at Crewe, whether onto the Crewe-London direct LNR service or to the Avanti (previously Virgin) service. Also, we will keep up the pressure for a later Saturday evening departure from Liverpool to all our stations. The last departure on Saturdays remains 22.03 (or 21.34 to Acton Bridge) and this is strange when there are later services on weekdays and Sundays. Curiously, a similar pattern operates on the TfW Liverpool-Chester service. Frodsham station will be an alternative for some passengers, and the last service from Liverpool to Frodsham will be 22.20 on Saturdays, but there are later trains on weekdays and Sundays. This may suit the train companies but it is a nuisance for passengers wanting to spend Saturday evening in Liverpool. MCRUA continues discussions with LNR about provision of extra parking at Winsford, Hartford and Acton Bridge. This is being investigated for all three stations and we understand that LNR have a meeting in early January with Cheshire West & Chester Council to discuss the outcome of the feasibility studies they have carried out on all three locations. MCRUA will continue to press the case for this. Finally, it is a relief to report that the RMT dispute and strike, called over the role of conductors on LNR trains, has been settled and the Saturday service will operate normally from 14th December.

### **DECEMBER 2019 TIMETABLE**

This started on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December and the only significant change is that the 16.39 from Piccadilly to Chester now departs on-pattern at 16.41 on Monday to Friday (as it does on Saturday).

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

Thank you for your continued support. Membership subscriptions for 2020 fall due on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

**If you received this Rail Report by Post:** Please check your envelope for your membership number. If it is in the form of:

**19xxx - your membership runs out on 28 February.** We invite you to renew using the enclosed form or do so online at [www.mcrua.org.uk/membership/](http://www.mcrua.org.uk/membership/)

**199xx - you have opted to pay by Standing Order.** Some Standing orders need to be updated to take account of the increase in subscriptions as it is now over 5 years since you started your Standing Order. If this applies to you – a separate letter or email will tell you. We invite you to renew using the enclosed form but **SEND NO MONEY**

**If you received this Rail Report by email,** you will also receive the appropriate renewal form.

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**B:** You can **OPT-IN** to receive this information **BY EMAIL** or

**C:** **OPT IN** to receive this information **BOTH** by post and by email.

You can change your preferences at any time by contacting the **Membership Secretary, 48 Romana Square Altrincham WA14 5QB.** [membership@mcrua.org.uk](mailto:membership@mcrua.org.uk). Please note: To reduce costs, electronic distribution is preferred.

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

#### Train services on the Mid Cheshire Line

Tuesday 24 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Tuesday service on the Mid Cheshire Line finishing early. Last trains 20.41 Piccadilly to Chester, 21.02 Chester to Piccadilly.
Wednesday 25 <sup>th</sup> December	No train service.
Thursday 26 <sup>th</sup> December	No train service.
Friday 27 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Friday train service.
Saturday 28 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Saturday service.
Sunday 29 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Sunday service.



Monday 30 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Sunday service.
Tuesday 31 <sup>st</sup> December	Normal Tuesday service on the Mid Cheshire Line finishing early. Last trains 20.41 Piccadilly to Chester, 21.02 Chester to Piccadilly.
Wednesday 1 <sup>st</sup> January	Normal Wednesday service on the Mid Cheshire Line.
Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> January	Normal Thursday service.
Friday 3 <sup>rd</sup> Jan onwards	Normal service.
<b>Metrolink services</b>	
Monday 23 <sup>rd</sup> December	Normal Monday service.
Tuesday 24 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Tuesday service with last trams departing the City at approximately 9pm.
Wednesday 25 <sup>th</sup> December	No service.
Thursday 26 <sup>th</sup> December	Saturday service from 7am to midnight with extra trams for Manchester United v Newcastle United match at Old Trafford.
Friday 27 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Friday service.
Saturday 28 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Saturday service.
Sunday 29 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Sunday service with extra trams for the Manchester City v Sheffield United match. The Rochdale line is replaced by buses between Newton Heath & Moston and Exchange Square due to engineering work.
Monday 30 <sup>th</sup> December	Normal Monday service.
Tuesday 31 <sup>st</sup> December	Saturday service with trams operating until 2am.
Wednesday 1 <sup>st</sup> January.	Sunday service with extra trams for Manchester City v Everton match.
Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> January onwards.	Normal service.

### **BUSES REPLACE LATE EVENING TRAINS by Andrew Macfarlane**

Due to planned engineering work from Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January to Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January (inclusive) and from Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March to Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March (inclusive) the 23.41 Piccadilly to Chester and 22.52 Chester to Piccadilly trains are replaced by buses. There are two buses replacing each train. A bus runs at 23.41 from Piccadilly to Chester, setting down only from Knutsford onwards and another bus runs at 23.29 from Knutsford to Chester calling at or near all stations. Similarly a bus runs at 22.52 from Chester to Piccadilly, setting down only from Knutsford onwards whilst another bus runs at 23.37 from Knutsford to Piccadilly calling at or near all stations. The bus times for each station can be found in the Journey Planner on the National Rail website or by ringing National Rail Enquiries on 03457 48 49 50.

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

One of the Metrolink ticket machines was removed from Navigation Road in December for use on the new Trafford Park line. Night-time test running has now started on the new line and the line is said to be due to open “in the first half of 2020”. The first of the 27 new trams on order from Bombardier will not now be in service until August 2020 due to delays in sourcing a component. The new batch of trams will bring the fleet size up to 147. The times of Metrolink services can be found by using the Journey Planner on the TfGM website [www.tfgm.com](http://www.tfgm.com).

### **NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane**

The Northern ticket machine at Navigation Road has finally been modified to show local destinations as the “popular destinations” (rather than stations on the Calder Valley line!). A historic CLC platform seat was re-installed at Hale station in late October. The seat was previously at the Brookside Garden Centre. In a change from previous years, Duo tickets are available on the Mid Cheshire Line on Saturdays in December.

### **FARES NEWS**

The average national rail fare increase on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2020 will be 2.7%. Metrolink fares also increase in January by an average of 2.2%, with half of all tickets due to increase by up to 4% and day Travelcards by 10p. The cost of single journeys will be frozen, in a move aimed at helping more people to switch to tram travel to reduce congestion and improve air quality in Greater Manchester. Child and concessionary fares are also to be kept at the current 2019 price. Passengers will be able to pay cheaper ‘Early Bird’ fares (at off-peak prices) before 7am using contactless payment and also Travelcard Carnets (bundles of 10 day tickets) will be available on the Get Me There card. The prices of System One tickets in Greater Manchester (including the CountyCard combined bus and rail ticket) will be increasing from Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> January.

## **NEW £10 ANNUAL CHARGE FOR GREATER MANCHESTER CONCESSIONARY PASSES**

Further details are now available and the web address is [tfgm.com/add-tram-and-train](http://tfgm.com/add-tram-and-train) (or ring 0161-244 1000). Basically holders of TfGM Pensioners' Travel Passes will need to pay the £10 charge by 31<sup>st</sup> January if they wish to continue using the tram and the train to travel free after 09.30 on Monday to Friday or at any time at weekends or on Bank Holidays. Payment will be possible from 5<sup>th</sup> January. If you wish to pay the charge online you will need to set up an account on the Get Me There website [www.getmethere.com](http://www.getmethere.com) and link it to your card. Alternatively you will be able to pay at a TfGM Travelshop or (from 25<sup>th</sup> January) at any shop showing the Paypoint sign.

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

The Lymm Hotel (adjacent to the site of Lymm station) was demolished in October. The hotel was famous for hosting the Brazil football team (including Pele) during the 1966 World Cup competition (when Brazil played their group matches at Everton's ground Goodison Park). The team complained that they were kept awake all night by the frequent steam-hauled freight trains. The 1966 competition was the only time ever that Brazil has not progressed beyond the group stage of the competition. The Lymm line helped to pave the way for England's only ever victory! Northern has announced that due to the late delivery of new stock, class 142 Pacer units will still operate on three routes in the North West of England into 2020. These are Piccadilly to Sheffield, Clitheroe and Blackburn to Rochdale via Bolton and Victoria and Piccadilly to New Mills. Also Northern are now to receive only 17 of the class 323 units currently operating in the West Midlands. The new Avanti West Coast franchise started on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December, jointly operated by First Group (70%) and Trenitalia (30%). The fleet of 56 Pendolino trains will all be refurbished with new seats. The new station at Warrington West, west of Warrington Central, opened with the timetable change on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December. The £20 million station is served by two Northern trains per hour in each direction. Sankey for Penketh station is now only served at peak periods with two trains each way per day. Northern is providing an hourly train service between Salford Central and Bolton on Boxing Day.

## **ALTRINCHAM WINTER LECTURE SERIES**

The Altrincham Electric Railway Preservation Society (AERPS) is again holding its annual Winter Lecture Series at Altrincham Methodist Hall on Barrington Road, which is a short walk from Altrincham station in the direction of Manchester. Lectures start at 7.30pm. Admission is £3.50 (free for AERPS members) which includes refreshments (tea/coffee and biscuits) at a half-time break. The forthcoming programme is:

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020. "Locomotive Sheds of the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway" by Noel Coates.

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2020. "People and Places 4". Images of the pre-1968 steam railway including trains, railway staff, enthusiasts or the general public by Paul Shackcloth.

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020. "Wheels on Reels". Transport films taken with a cine camera and shown using a cine projector by Geoff Lomas.

Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020 (note that this is the first Friday in April). "Great Named Trains" featuring postcards of named trains and video of the engines which hauled them and survive into preservation by Society President Nick Dodson.

## **STEPHENSON LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY PROGRAMME**

The Stephenson Locomotive Society continues to meet at the Friends' Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, very near St Peter's Square Metrolink station. Meetings are generally on Saturdays at 2pm and visitors are welcome. There is a voluntary collection towards the cost of the room hire. The forthcoming programme is:

Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> January. Centre AGM (brief) followed by "21<sup>st</sup> Century Signalling Control Centre – The Manchester Rail Operations Centre" by Christian Wyatt.

Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> February. "Aspects of the Origins and Development of Monorails including Behr, Lartigue and the Manchester to Liverpool Lightning Express Railway" by Tony Wright.

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March. "Indian Summer of the Somerset & Dorset Railway" by Melvyn Roberts.

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> April. "The activities of the Furness Railway Trust" by Tim Owen.

## **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. The subsequent meeting entrance fee is £3 for non-members. There is a fully-licensed bar and free sandwiches are provided at the half-time break. The forthcoming programme is:

Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> January: AGM followed by Jon Penn Film Presentation.

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> February: "Preservation through my eyes" by Peter Dixon.

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March: "American Wanderings – Heading West" by Gordon Davies.

Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> April. "A Swiss Adventure" by Simon Starr.

Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May. "Termini – Part 2" by John Cowlshaw.

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

Mr R Goolding of Northwich

## **IN MEMORIAM**

We regret to report the death of **Jonathan Williams**, the Town Clerk of Middlewich, who died suddenly while on holiday in September. Jonathan was a great supporter of the re-opening of the Middlewich line and he did all he could to help the campaign during his 34 years in the job.

## **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.eastmidlandsrailway.co.uk](http://www.eastmidlandsrailway.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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## MID-CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Email: [railofficer@midcheshirerail.org.uk](mailto:railofficer@midcheshirerail.org.uk)

Postal address: 4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port CH65 0BE Visit: <http://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk>

**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 - £8.00, Family - £11.00, Voluntary body - £20.00 and Corporate - £100.00.

You can join 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.**

You can change your mailing option by contacting the Membership Secretary at [membership@mcrua.org.uk](mailto:membership@mcrua.org.uk).