

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

No. 95

SUMMER 2016

ISSUED FREE

The Newsletter of the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association, the Voice for Users of the Manchester-Stockport-Altrincham-Knutsford-Northwich-Chester and Crewe-Winsford-Hartford-Liverpool Lines.

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

***** SUMMER TIMETABLE STARTS ON SUNDAY 15TH MAY *****

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS by John Oates

We're delighted to provide our latest "Rail Report" enclosing the Mid Cheshire **Summer Timetable** commencing on Sunday 15 May. Apart from some minor differences, the times are as the previous timetable.

At time of writing we are now 5 weeks into the **new Northern franchise**. This is run by Arriva Rail North (part of German Railways) as opposed to the partnership between Serco (a UK company) and Abellio (Dutch Railways) and is now known as "Northern" as opposed to "Northern Rail". We are looking forward to having discussions with Northern once the proposed "2 trains an hour" timetable from December 2017 is drafted. Through the **Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership (MCCRP)** we have already met with **Karen Booth**, Northern's new **Interim Communities and Sustainability Director**. We've discussed Northern's revised approach to CRPs with increased funding with MCCRP to have follow-up meetings with Karen to agree on plans for delivering much more. Very exciting.

We've been told about Northern's revised approach to **Station Adoption**. We understand the detail is still being worked on and we'll know more by the end of June. Those who volunteer along our railway lines and at stations make a **huge difference**. Whether they are called station adopters, station adoption groups, station friends, station partnerships or rail user groups - these people give their time, their passion and their expertise. The work that they do helps improve the passenger experience, reduces fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, helps maintain and preserve stations, supports service and station improvements and encourages people to use their railway. **Volunteers are the eyes and ears** on our lines and the link between communities and the railway and they are very important. CRPs like Mid Cheshire would not be so successful without our Mid Cheshire Line volunteers. Whatever the new franchise brings it is important that our volunteers feel **valued and appreciated**, it is also important that community rail volunteering is open to everyone – so volunteers should not be out of pocket unless they choose to be. MCRUA will be working closely with partners over the next few weeks and months to ensure that our volunteers continue to feel appreciated and are valued.

Also, through MCCRP and with assistance from **Cheshire West & Chester Council** and our friends in **North Cheshire Rail Users Group (NCRUG)**, Sally is setting up a CRP for the Chester to Warrington line with a view to it being formally brought into being this coming autumn and being handed over to local stakeholders.

Train Performance on the Mid Cheshire Line has surprisingly **continued its decline** with a **Passenger Performance Measure (PPM) Moving Annual Average (MAA)** low at the end of Period 13 (31 March 2016) of 83.79%, way adrift from the target of 92.2% and the excellent figure of 91.57% we reached in February 2011. Whilst trains are rarely more than 5-8 minutes late, that sort of lateness leads to passenger annoyance as well as missed connections at Chester, Stockport and Piccadilly, and bus connections at Altrincham and elsewhere. The reasons remain the same:

- **increased passenger loadings** with certain trains struggling to get everyone and off at intermediate stations and stay on time due to insufficient carriages
- intermittently **awaiting** for Virgin to **despatch** Manchester-bound trains at **Stockport**
- **delays** overall on the very busy section between **Edgeley Junction** (just south of Stockport) and **Piccadilly**
- much **increased freight activity** along the line, and
- four **Temporary Speed Restrictions** along the line introduced due to track condition / subsidence which whilst they don't slow our passenger trains much, are slowing the freight trains meaning they can be late leaving the single line sections at Northenden and Navigation Road.

We understand Network Rail have instigated a new approach to investigating the 4 poorest performing lines of route in the North West, one of which is the Mid Cheshire Line.

Many of you will be missing our **Special Train** this spring as we've been unable to organise it. This appears to be a problem for special train organisers in general around the country. It seems that the well-chronicled difficulties with West Coast Railway Company (who ran around half of British Special Trains) being twice suspended in the last 12 months have added a significant load to those others operating trains. Also, we hear that the train companies who provide the drivers have been struggling to know whether they will have drivers available as Network Rail are being very late notifying them whether these drivers are needed for engineering trains. This is very frustrating both for you and us. We are doing what we can to get our special trains running again.

Meanwhile, the Community Rail Partnership with MCRUA's help is trying to again run the **Mid Cheshire Steam Day** in 2017, last run in 2008 then put on hold due to the downturn in the economic cycle. In order to keep fares low for family groups, this needs sponsorship of around £15-25,000. The previous sources of this sponsorship are no longer available due to changed economic circumstances. The significance of 2017 is the Sunday passenger service increases to hourly from December 2017 and running a stopping steam train in between an hourly passenger service as opposed to a two-hourly one will not be possible. If you happen to know somebody or bodies, corporate or personal who might be willing to fund or part-fund the Steam Day, please let them know about this, asking them to contact either Sally, our Community Rail Officer, or me. It would be brilliant to run the event again. Those of you who remember the previous events will know what a lot of excitement they generated and have seen the thousands of people who travelled and came to watch the trains.

Lastly, we're delighted that **Judie Collins** from Altrincham agreed a couple of months ago to be co-opted to our committee having attended a number of committee meetings as an observer. We're looking forward to seeing many of you at our **AGM** on Monday 27 June in Plumley (see below) and are particularly delighted that following the formal AGM, **Alex Hynes, Managing Director of Northern** has agreed to speak, then take questions. After such a wet winter and cold spring, let's hope we're in for a great summer getting out and about along our Crewe-Liverpool and Mid Cheshire Lines.

From the Secretary:

TAKE NOTE: The Annual General meeting of the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association will take place on **MONDAY 27 JUNE 2016** in the Golden Pheasant, Plumley at 7.30pm, followed by a presentation by Alex Hynes, Managing Director of Northern. This year we have reviewed our Constitution and have made minor amendments, which are tabled to seek its adoption at the AGM. A copy of the minutes from the 2015 AGM and the Constitution can be found on the MCRUA website. Copies will be available at the meeting or from the Secretary by email. If you don't have access to email and would like copies please contact the Secretary.

From the Membership Secretary:

Subscriptions for the membership year (1st March 2016 - 28th February 2017)

We appreciate your continued membership, which provides MCRUA with the strength of over 500 members in its discussions with relevant parties to continue to improve services and stations on our line.

Please take a moment to look at your envelope. We have introduced membership numbers to assist in the renewal process. These five digit numbers start with two digits indicating your current subscription year.

If your number begins 16xxx, you have already subscribed for 2016 and need to take no further action.

If your number begins 169xx, you are paying by standing order and an automated payment was made by your bank on 1st March 2016. You need to take no further action.

If your number begins 15xxx, you have subscribed for 2015 and now need to subscribe further to continue from 1st March 2016. A renewal form is enclosed.

We are trying to record our membership numbers more accurately. If you take a family membership, please indicate the total number of members in the family. Thanks.

Like many organisations, MCRUA is reviewing its costs and increasing the use of electronic mail. Whilst we will continue to offer printed Rail Reports, we are now adding an option where you can indicate you would prefer to receive the Rail Report and other mailings electronically. If you wish to take up this option, please tick the box on the renewal form or drop an email to membership@mcrua.org.uk

GOOD VALUE FARES FROM MID CHESHIRE by John Oates

Often with a bit of planning travel by train can be very good value. Here are some ideas to start off what might be an opportunity for others to add their ideas to build a more comprehensive list.

Northern Duo. If 2, 4 etc. are travelling after the morning peak, remember on the Mid Cheshire Line a Northern Duo often allows the 2nd out of a party of 2 to travel for half price.

Greater Manchester Wayfarer. Valid from Northwich and stations on the Mid Cheshire Line towards Manchester, this can be a very good value way to get to stations in Greater Manchester and nearby Derbyshire. This way is often cheaper than buying direct tickets.

London Midland offers. It's always worth watching London Midland's website for their regular offers from stations on the Crewe-Liverpool Line to others they serve. Remember that as well as Birmingham and stations to Euston, London Midland covers the West Midlands, and down to Worcester and Great Malvern.

Arriva Trains Wales Advance tickets. Often ATW have very good value Advance Purchase tickets, though unlike Cross Country and Virgin these rarely start from stations only served by other operators. Advance Purchase tickets attract the 34% Railcard discounts where these are valid. An example is my regular trip to Blaenau Ffestiniog (for my voluntary work with Ffestinog Travel), where tickets to/from Chester save me around £3 a trip compared to buy on the day tickets, though they're not available from Mid Cheshire Line stations. With Advance Purchase tickets, if you're "splitting tickets", be careful to provide plenty of time for connections, in case part of a journey is disrupted.

Two Together Railcard. If 2 of you regularly travel together, and 1 or both are not eligible for other railcards, consider this railcard. It gives 34% discount on most tickets after 9.30am Monday to Friday and anytime at weekends and on Bank Holidays. It's £30 and easily obtainable on line (and from ticket offices – Ed). So it pays for itself after £90 in train tickets in a year.

Splitting tickets.

This is where research can really pay. However, as mentioned above be careful to allow for one of the legs to be disrupted if you're using "Advance Purchase" tickets as technically each leg is a separate contract, so there is no responsibility for train operators to honour subsequent legs.

Here are some ideas:

Going to Liverpool from the western end of the Mid Cheshire Line. Think of buying a ticket to Chester, then another from Chester onwards. The Merseyrail Day Saver is £5.00 available Monday – Friday after 9.30am and

anytime on weekends and Bank Holidays. However, the Day Saver attracts no railcard discount, so for those with railcards a normal ticket to Liverpool is £4.85. BUT, that to Edge Hill which involves going through Liverpool and changing at Lime Street from Low Level to the main station is only £3.30

Going to London from the eastern end of the Mid Cheshire Line. The time restrictions on the use of Off-Peak Return tickets (formerly known as Saver tickets) to/from Euston are much greater than they were under British Rail. The latest Virgin train on which an Off-Peak Return can be used from Euston on Monday to Friday is the 15.00 from Euston. After that the next train on which an Off-Peak Return can be used is after 18.45. However if you don't mind changing at Sheffield there is a Manchester Stations or Stockport to London Terminals Off-Peak Return walk-on fare "Route Chesterfield" for £118, which enables you to arrive in London St Pancras on any train arriving after 10.01 and you can then return on any train up to and including the 16.26 from St Pancras. There are trains from St Pancras to Sheffield at 15.26, 15.58 and 16.26 (you can find details of the fare on the useful BR fares website www.brfares.com, which shows all of the fares between Manchester and London if you put in "Manchester Stations" to "London Terminals").

Living on the Wirral and going to Southport? A return to Southport is £6.45 from Hooton, but £13.30 from Neston for a similar distance!

Similarly good ideas

Going to Crewe from Knutsford (Peter).

Until the Northwich to Sandbach line opens up, here's an option to consider:

Knutsford to Crewe:

Anytime Single: £16

Anytime Day Return: £16.50

Or you could try:

Knutsford to Greenbank:

Anytime Single: £4.70

Anytime Day Return: £6.50

Off Peak Day Return: £6.10

Walk the 1 mile along a single road to Hartford (15 mins to half an hour depending on how fast you walk).

Hartford to Crewe:

Anytime Single: £4.50

Anytime Day Return: £8.50

Off peak Day Return: £5.10

Combined anytime single: £9.20 (£6.80 saving)

Combined Anytime Day Return: £15 (£1.50 saving)

Combined Off Peak Day Return: £11.20 (£5.30 saving)

Going to Yorkshire (Edd)

Off-Peak Return tickets from Mid Cheshire Line stations to Yorkshire stations including Huddersfield, Leeds and York are only valid if you start your outbound journey after 07:44. Therefore, if you need to travel on the 06:58 Chester to Manchester from stations west of Mobberley to Yorkshire it might be cheaper to buy an Anytime Day Return to Mobberley and then an Off-Peak Return from Mobberley to Yorkshire, as the train stops at Mobberley at 07:46.

Also works to Lancaster (Harry).

From Winsford/Hartford/Acton Bridge (Simon Barber).

If you're continuing beyond the London Midland network (e.g. changing onto Virgin at Crewe) check the price from Crewe to your destination first. Then check the price from Winsford, Hartford or Acton Bridge to your destination. Sometimes the through ticket costs the same price so you can buy just the one ticket. But where there are special prices available from Crewe (or Stafford), e.g. Advance tickets, these are rarely offered from these

local stations and it can be cheaper to buy the Advance plus a local ticket to Crewe or Stafford. You won't find Advance tickets if you just search for a ticket from Winsford etc. If you are travelling to the south-west (Bristol or beyond), the fastest service is via Birmingham (requires a change at Birmingham). The cost on this route can be cut by splitting tickets at Cheltenham, where all trains call, so splitting works well. If you prefer a slightly slower, more scenic route (still on decent trains), consider travelling via Shrewsbury/Hereford/Newport. There is a hourly service from Crewe to Newport, change there for Bristol or the SW. Tickets for this route are cheaper – simply specify that you will travel 'via Hereford'. This also works if travelling from the Mid Cheshire Line via Chester – there is a regular service from Chester to Newport, too.

FARES & TICKETING NEWS

The popular **Wayfarer** ticket did not increase in price from 2nd January and is still £12 for adults, £6 for anyone aged 60 or over and £23 for groups of up to 2 adults and up to 2 children. Wayfarer tickets can be purchased from booking offices and Paypoint outlets and from the conductor if boarding at an unstaffed station or at a station where the ticket office is closed. The **GM Rail Ranger** ticket increased in price from 2nd January to £5.40 for adults and £2.70 for children (aged 5 to 15). The **Greater Manchester Traincard**, which includes rail travel in the TfGM area plus City Zone Metrolink, increased from 2nd January to £29.10 for the weekly, £99.30 for the monthly and £937.80 for the annual ticket.

THROUGH TICKETS TO METROLINK STATIONS

Through fares are available from any National Rail station to any Metrolink station. These fares can be found on the useful website www.brfares.com. It is disappointing that these through fares are not shown on the National Rail website Journey Planner (which does not recognise Metrolink stations) nor are they promoted by the rail industry. Many users of the Mid Cheshire line are probably completely unaware that such fares exist and buy separate tickets for each leg of their journey. Railcard discounts are not available on these through fares but of course Wayfarer tickets are valid on both rail and Metrolink services after 0930 on Monday to Friday and all day at weekends and on Bank Holidays in the area covered by the ticket (from Northwich towards Manchester in the case of the Mid Cheshire line).

COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER'S REPORT by Sally Buttifant

Exciting times – the new franchise has started and with it comes more investment in to community rail. More investment means more responsibility and we are currently negotiating the service level commitment with Arriva Rail North. It is a hectic time of course for the new franchisee with new policies to be drawn up and they are also working hard to gain an understanding of community rail, station adoption and local lines.

Back along the Mid Cheshire Line I am working with partners and volunteers trying to organise volunteer days at Northwich and Knutsford. I am involved in the national Station to Station event celebrating the Queen's Birthday and am working hard trying to organise events at Chester station on Saturday 11th June and Manchester Piccadilly on Sunday 12th June. I am also supporting Station to Station events at Knutsford, Stockport and Ellesmere Port. Please come along if you can – we will be celebrating with hopefully cake, railways and freebies.

You can keep up to date with the UK Wide Station to Station events via:

Twitter - [@S2SQC2016](https://twitter.com/S2SQC2016)

Facebook - www.facebook.com/S2SQC2016

Website - www.queenscelebration.com

Website – www.midcheshirerail.org.uk

I am also working with colleagues to support the new rail safety week initiative, which is being held in the week of 26th - 30th September:

One Industry, One Vision- "Building Safety Together"

Rail Safety Week is an industry lead initiative focusing on rail safety for all. Whether your career lies within the rail industry, or whether you use the railways to get from A to B – Rail Safety affects us all. Rail Safety week aims to address, engage, promote and bring rail safety to the forefront of people's minds across a dedicated week. Working in partnership with leading names in the rail industry, health and safety conferences, site briefs and school safety based events will be held across the UK in order to promote the vital importance of rail safety to each and every one of us – "Building Safety Together"

I hope to involve the community rail partnership in this worthwhile new initiative. So as usual lots going on & as usual I couldn't manage without all the volunteers who give their time & expertise so freely. The new franchise reminds me too that we have been promised extra services and investment because of the efforts of volunteers with the passenger count exercise and all those who work together through MCRUA and the CRP for improved services and stations.

FORTHCOMING BUS REPLACEMENTS DUE TO PLANNED ENGINEERING WORK

From Monday 16th May to Thursday 19th May (inclusive) and from Monday 27th June to Thursday 30th June (inclusive) the 22.48 train from Chester to Piccadilly is replaced by a bus. An additional bus runs at 23.30 from Knutsford to Manchester Piccadilly. This tends to happen on a 6-week recurring cycle.

STEAM ON THE MID CHESHIRE LINE

After a break of a year, the Railway Touring Company is again planning to run steam via the Mid Cheshire line on the "North Wales Coast Express" on Sundays 21st August and 4th September. The train will start from Crewe diesel-hauled and run to Manchester Piccadilly with the steam locomotive on the rear. It will then reverse and the steam loco will haul the train via Stockport, Altrincham, Northwich and Chester to Holyhead and back. The train picks up at Altrincham (1120 approx) and Chester (1200 approx). Haulage will be either by no. 45690 Leander, a Jubilee class 4-6-0 built for the LMSR in 1936 or no. 46115 Scots Guardsman, a Royal Scot class 4-6-0 built in Glasgow in 1927. Full details can be found on the Railway Touring Company website at www.railwaytouring.net or by phone to 01553 661500.

WINSFORD, HARTFORD & ACTON BRIDGE SERVICES by Harry Boardman

The replacement London Midland Direct Award Franchise started on the 1st April and will run until the 30th September 2017. This will then be replaced by a new West Midlands Franchise. MCRUA felt it was important to submit a robust response to the DfT consultation for the new West Midlands Franchise arguing the case for better services and better facilities for the above three stations in Mid Cheshire.

Points brought out in our response submitted in April include:

- lack of sufficient car parking at all three stations.
- patchy service provision, particularly at Acton Bridge.
- lack of northbound services to Warrington and beyond.
- earliest London arrival from Hartford is now 0941, it used to be before 0900.
- Acton Bridge would be the railhead for many passengers south of Warrington if it had a decent train service and sufficient car parking.
- poor bus connections.
- a high proportion of locals drive 20+ miles to Crewe due to the poor infrequent train service and lack of availability of car parking at their local station.
- there is no signed cycle space on the current Class 350 trains used.

- poor connections for long distance passengers returning through Crewe.
- last departures too early for evenings out by train.
- clock face hourly / half hourly timetable required.

We look forward to the response from the DfT to our input to the consultation in the subsequent production of the Invitation to Tender (ITT) and hope it recognises life north of Crewe through Mid Cheshire. The ITT is due to be sent out by them to the three selected bidders for the franchise in Summer 2016. We will then be seeking meetings with the bidders to discuss our requirements in more detail before the successful bidder is chosen to run the new franchise. With thanks to Simon Barber our Treasurer for input to the above and his submission of our full Franchise Consultation response to the DfT, a copy of which can be found on the MCRUA website.

Winsford Station

When I met with London Midland back in March I again raised the outstanding issue with regards to insufficient car parking spaces and inadequate signage on the car park. The reply was *“Is this still a problem?”* So I decided to visit Winsford again and speak with their people on the ground. Well yes it is and it could get worse. The car park is full soon after 7.00am and with limited additional parking on the adjacent public house car park people are sometimes being turned away. The owning brewery apparently are now not happy with the arrangement and are saying the previous landlord agreed it without their full support so it is expected that unless a better solution can be found then this privilege could be withdrawn. Is it possible that more of the land in this area plus part of the large public house car park could be purchased to make a second station car park? There is also now a threat after all the effort in getting buses back into the car park that this could cease because of indiscriminate parking by rail passengers especially when the ticket office is not staffed which has caused problems with the buses driving round the car park. Whilst better signage, as previously agreed, would help it won't stop the problem. What is needed is more allocated car park spaces, and soon, otherwise all the good work previously done could be undone. To which their response was *“As you know, the majority of London Midland car parks are charged, which enables us to provide enforcement of considerate car parking through our management contractor (e.g. at Hartford). Winsford is one of our few free car parks, so this mechanism for enforcement is not available to us. We have no plans to introduce charging at Winsford during the Direct Award Franchise. However, if local stakeholders asked us to, it is something we could consider.”*

As I have previously explained, expansion of car parking would normally be delivered in one of two ways:

1. *Funded commercially by the train operator by agreement with Network Rail and the DfT, with the capital investment being repaid over a number of years through parking charges.*
2. *Funded by a local authority or other third party who may choose either to charge or provide free parking – either way the cost needs to be funded from somewhere.*

We have no plans to expand capacity at Winsford during the period of the Direct Award Franchise. However, I would recommend you to feed your ideas into the DfT refranchising consultation for consideration as part of the next franchise (MCRUA has already done this).

I am not aware of plans to withdraw parking at the adjacent public house but would be very happy to meet with them to discuss if this is in prospect.

It is clear from the London Midland response that there will be no action taken until the new franchise is in place post October 2017 at the earliest. I will now be making Winsford Town Council aware of the latest position and stance by London Midland.

Hartford Station

Since completion of the major works the station is now looking a lot smarter. However to finish the station off there is still a requirement to complete the external painting of the main building. This is something I have been chasing up with London Midland since last September. Their last response was; *“Repainting of the station remains on the agenda but I do not have dates at this stage. It was always envisaged that this work would be done as part of our end-of-franchise dilapidations contract, so I apologise if we have given you the expectation that this would happen sooner. We remain committed to seeing the facilities at Hartford improved for our passengers. It will not all happen overnight but, bear with us and I am confident we will get to the point of having a facility we can be proud of.”* Unfortunately there is still no sign of the external fabric of the building

being painted and the franchise ended on the 31st March to be replaced by the London Midland Direct Award Franchise.

Acton Bridge Station

Now for some good news stories. I called in to look at the station in early April and noticed the painting of the main building and the external stairs from the car park to the road still hadn't been done. I once again chased this up with London Midland and can advise that this work has been completed at last. However I am still waiting to hear what they are going to do with the Permit to Travel ticket machine as it is constantly out of order. More good news is that having taken up with Network Rail the replacement of the broken wooden fencing on the bridge with steel palisade fencing they have finally agreed to replace it with wooden fencing as soon as is possible. I will of course be keeping an eye on this. When I visited the car park was full with cars also parked along the entrance drive, which would make it very difficult should Network Rail require access to trackside in anything larger than a 15cwt Van. However I have been told by London Midland that although Network Rail are now more amenable to giving up land for the car park extension it will not be done during the current franchise as there won't be any cost benefit to them and that we should include this in our consultation response to the DfT for the new West Midlands franchise. MCRUA has already done this.

Train Running

There are no planned changes to the present timetable during the current franchise held by London Midland. Despite repeated requests we have not been successful in getting any later trains on Saturday and Sunday, earlier stopping trains on a Sunday or additional stopping trains at Acton Bridge and Winsford. The additional outstanding requirements are logged with London Midland and also included our input to the DfT submission for the new West Midlands franchise. On a more positive note I have been assured by London Midland that as soon as the Class 350 / 200 series of trains with 3+2 seating have all been upgraded to 110mph running they will be removed from the Liverpool – Birmingham route. I will be watching this with interest.

MID CHESHIRE RAIL LINK CAMPAIGN (EX-MIDDLEWICH RAIL LINK CAMPAIGN)

by Harry Boardman

Improving Rail Connectivity in Mid Cheshire

At the January meeting it was agreed to include a station at Gadbrook Park and change the name of the campaign. A new Chairman, Stephen Dent and Secretary, Samantha Moss were also elected. Thanks were expressed to Dave Roberts for his tireless work for the campaign over the past 20 years or so. It was also agreed to move away from being a pressure group to working in partnership with local authorities. The Mid Cheshire Rail Link Campaign is calling for the return of passenger trains to the Sandbach to Northwich line, the reinstatement of a station in Middlewich and a new station at Gadbrook Park, a site that is alongside the line and has extensive traffic congestion issues. Returning passenger trains to this route would be the first new rail link into Crewe in preparation for HS2. Reinstating this local link and thus re-connecting Mid Cheshire to the main line at Crewe puts residents first by greatly improving local transport in Mid Cheshire. The project has complete political support at all levels. In parliament Fiona Bruce the local MP continues to ask questions about this project. All other MPs in the area affected by this reinstatement support the project. Knutsford, Northwich, Sandbach and Middlewich Town Councils are now all calling for delivery of the project. Both Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester Councils also support the reinstatement. We believe the campaign has more support than the hugely successful and popular Borders Rail Campaign. Services on this line would give Mid Cheshire a direct connection to Crewe now (and thus London), provide Mid Cheshire with direct trains to Manchester Airport (as soon as the Western Rail Link's connection at Mobberley is operational) and provide a connection to Metrolink at Altrincham. Knutsford (population 13,191) is the busiest intermediate station on the line, with over 500,000 passengers per year in 2013-14 (ORR data). There is clear evidence of demand for increased train services in Mid Cheshire; usage on the Mid Cheshire Line has increased by 168% over the period of the previous Northern Rail franchise. The population of Middlewich is 13,595 and, once opened, Middlewich station is likely be very well used with an estimated 200,000 journeys per annum (The Railway Consultancy report 2009 refers).

This project has recently received a great deal of local and national media attention receiving coverage on the

BBC website, Radio Manchester, Radio Stoke and Signal radio. The Guardian Media Group, which covers Winsford, Middlewich, Northwich and Knutsford, is now running a campaign for the re-opening. In November, the national magazine 'RAIL' ran a two-page spread on the project and in December, an article appeared in Cheshire Life. The recently launched Northern Powerhouse project has changed the transport landscape. New funding streams are available allowing councils to now efficiently use the new resources available. Flexibility is now required to adapt quickly to these changed circumstances and deliver this project. HS2 brings many possibilities and, by being innovative, thinking creatively and challenging the convention that this project must be tied to HS2, this passenger route can be re-instated now. With teamwork and by respecting and working well with others, we can collectively achieve the best outcome for residents and communities. As project lead, Cheshire East will have responsibility for delivering this project which has no political opposition, a cost benefit ratio of 5:1 (2009 study) and which analysis in the last edition of the national publication 'RAIL' magazine described in November as 'surely one of the easiest on anyone's list of rail re-openings.'

Business Plan

The business plan now being prepared by Stephen Dent the Chairman will be very different from the 2009 consultancy report as it has less emphasis on just opening Middlewich Station and would be concerned with the economic advantages to the sub-regional economy including its importance to Gadbrook Park, Northwich and Knutsford. The first drafts have already been circulated for comment. Having met with Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester transport officers along with Tatton Estate Management and Gadbrook Park personnel we are grateful for their input to the Business Plan. It is pleasing to report that things are now moving along in a much more businesslike manner and we are more hopeful of success with all the support being provided to the aims of the campaign.

SPECIAL TRAIN WHICH MAY BE OF INTEREST TO MEMBERS

Proving that it is still possible to organise special trains (albeit at fairly short notice), **Retro Railtours** are running "The Retro Canterbury Belle" on Saturday 9th July. The class 68-hauled train starts from Leeds and picks up at Huddersfield, Stalybridge, Reddish South, Stockport (0715 approx), Crewe (0800 approx) and Stafford (0830 approx). The train calls at Clapham Junction and then Canterbury (probably East) for a three and a quarter hour stopover. Fares are £79 standard class, £119 first class and £199 Premier Dining. Those alighting at Clapham Junction pay £10 less. Details are on the Retro Railtours website at www.retrorailtours.co.uk or by phone to 0161-330-9055.

FREIGHT NEWS

The Immingham to Fiddler's Ferry Power Station coal trains ended abruptly before Christmas. Scottish & Southern Energy then announced that 3 of the 4 generating units at Fiddler's Ferry would probably be closing as from 1st April 2016. In the event that did not happen and the power station will be staying open for at least another year until 31st March 2017 at least and probably beyond then. Route learning with a light engine has continued for the new Knowsley (Kirkby) to Wilton (Teesside) domestic refuse flow operated by DB Cargo as they are now called (how many drivers need training?). There are two paths a day each way for the trains, which will be routed via Wigan Wallgate, Warrington Bank Quay, the Hartford curve, Northwich, Altrincham, Stockport, Denton Junction, Ashton Moss North Junction, the Brewery curve, Rochdale and the Calder Valley route. As the Chairman has mentioned above, freight traffic on the Mid Cheshire line has increased considerably with around 15 freight trains currently running on the line in any 24-hour period. This will increase with the start of the Knowsley to Wilton traffic.

MUSIC TRAIN NEWS by Michael Ross

Our 2016 programme started excellently with a full house for the 'Chester Folk Festival' Music Train. With three bands we had music playing in both carriages. *'A real treat last Wednesday. The Bands were great, the music was good and we really had a good time. The Golden Pheasant coped extremely well with a total of 82 customers and Sally made sure we all caught the return train in good time'*.

Wednesday 18 May – Chester to Plumley and at the Golden Pheasant

With guitar, double bass, mandolin, banjo and dobro the **Mossley Hill Grasshoppers** are playing and singing on the Music Train from Chester to Plumley and at the Golden Pheasant. The **Mossley Hill Grasshoppers**, are

successors to the Northern Connection String Band, who were popular Music Train performers. “The Grasshoppers entertain their audiences with a blend of foot tapping mountain music – from bluegrass, rockabilly, country and old-time to modern covers with a lively twist! The band has a wealth of experience and is great fun to be around. “ Last year their performance was summed up as “good music in the style that suits the Music Trains and the pub - with happy passengers singing along as well.”

There is no charge for the Music Train, though there is a collection on the way back for the band and you will need a train ticket, which you can buy from the conductor – except at Chester where you need to buy your ticket from the station ticket office or the ticket machine. No need to book – just get into the rear carriage. (Music Train leaves Chester at 19:04 and return leaves Plumley for Chester at 22:08).

More music trains – our programme of Music Trains from Chester to Plumley continues every month until October. Music Trains from Altrincham/Knutsford to Alexanders in Chester will run on 27 July and 14 September.

Wednesday 15 June – Chester to Plumley and at the Golden Pheasant with Deportees

Wednesday 13 July – Chester to Plumley Music Train and at the Golden Pheasant - with Nelson Peach

Wednesday 27 July – Altrincham/Knutsford to Chester and Alexanders – with Marts ManJazz3 on the train and So What Now at Alexanders

Watch the website www.midcheshirerail.org.uk for details.

TAKE THE TRAIN ON THE MID CHESHIRE LINE - LEAFLETS AVAILABLE FOR YOUR STATION by Michael Ross

Ticket office, ticket machine or on the train - where do I buy my ticket? Which is the best or cheapest ticket for my journey? Look at the Take the Train pages on the Community Rail Partnership's website www.midcheshirerail.org.uk. There is detailed information for your station about which tickets you can buy and how to buy them. Also advice on travelling on the Mid Cheshire Line and tips for days out as far afield as the Settle-Carlisle line (currently closed north of Appleby) and the Ffestiniog Railway - which you can do in a long day from any station on the Mid Cheshire Line. *You can download a leaflet showing train times, fares and other details for your station.*

NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

The new World War One Memorial between platforms 10 and 11 at **Manchester Piccadilly** was unveiled on Wednesday 4th May. Station Road, Stockport, in front of the main entrance to **Stockport** station, closed as a through road as from 9th January. A hotel is being built immediately outside the station. A Stockport Station Masterplan was unveiled on 31st January. This envisages a new footbridge across the south end of the station with a possible tram train station on the Edgeley side. The 20mph speed restriction approaching Northenden Junction from the Stockport direction is due to an embankment slip, which is currently being worked on. This year's **Stockport Rail Show** is due to take place on Sunday 31st July. MCRUA remains concerned about the lack of disabled access to and from the Chester-bound platform at **Northwich** station and we are supporting Northwich Town Council and others in lobbying to rectify this unsatisfactory situation. As from 1st April, Carrillion now has the Facilities Management contract for Northern (instead of ISS) so they are now responsible for station cleaning and minor repairs. Existing staff were TUPE'd across to Carrillion, who have brought in their own management. **Stockport Beer Festival** is again taking place at Stockport County's football ground, a short walk from Stockport station, on June 2nd, 3rd and 4th. Further details can be found at <http://stockportfestival.org.uk/>.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS

Manchester United Football Ground Halt was closed temporarily in the wake of the Stade de France bombings in Paris but reopened as from Saturday 23rd January. Northern are to lease another 12 class 319 4-car electric trains to help compensate for the loss of the 17 class 323 3-car electric trains, which are transferring to the West Midlands over the next few years. The following unstaffed stations in Greater Manchester are due to be staffed under the new Northern franchise: Blackrod, Bryn, Flowery Field, Irlam, Mills Hill and Westhoughton. The **Ian Allan bookshop** on Piccadilly Station Approach is to close on 30th June after the landlord increased the rental charge. **Warrington Central** and **Birchwood** stations transferred from First TransPennine Express to Northern

as from 1st April. Also Northern now operates the Manchester Airport to Blackpool North service and all trains to Barrow-in-Furness and Windermere. Work was carried out on three bridges on the **Middlewich line** during the February engineering blockade between Wilmslow/Alderley Edge and Crewe for work on Holmes Chapel viaduct, an encouraging sign. This included the bridge over the Trent & Mersey Canal.

METROLINK NEWS (PART 1)

Our Secretary, Paul Wilkinson writes

The agenda papers for the TfGM Metrolink Capital Projects Sub-Committee (for the meeting on Friday 15 April) included:

Tram Management System (TMS)

The next major phase for TMS will be the commissioning of twin track operation through St Peter's Square at the end of the planned July/August 2016 blockade. All designs have been approved for the TMS works and the blockade dates confirmed. The final phase for the Second City Crossing (2CC) section will take place in late December 2016 / early 2017. This will link the new St Peter's Square Stop with the second city crossing. The testing of trackside TMS equipment will commence in late 2016, with final commissioning in Dec 2016 / Jan 2017. Timperley to Altrincham migration will be the final phase of the TMS Phase 3 programme of works and the final commissioning is planned for the end of autumn 2016. The migration to TMS control is only up to the boundary with Network Rail and trams will continue to operate under Network Rail control beyond this point. The tram location system will be installed on Network Rail assets to enable tram tracking and the commissioning of the Passenger Information Displays at Timperley, Navigation Road and Altrincham stops.

COMMENT: Timperley to Altrincham TMS including the information screens was listed as end of summer in previous meeting notes – so it continues to slip further behind. This is thought to be due to the complexities of running on Network Rail maintained track.

St Peters Square: (SPS)

TfGM continues to work closely with Manchester City Council (MCC) to ensure coordination with adjacent developers and third party stakeholders throughout the length of the works. This includes TfGM managing the delivery of the new Water Feature construction located in St Peter's Square (SPS) on behalf of MCC. Works continue throughout the SPS site in preparation for the blockade of trams running through the square (it will be closed from 26 June – 28 August 2016 (inclusive) after which 1CC will fully re-open for passengers). The installation of the new tracks for 1CC and 2CC is almost complete in the SPS site, including the new diamond configuration close to Princess Street. Pre-cast concrete platform units have now been placed for the northern platform – these will eventually be clad in york stone and granite. Works have also commenced for the relocation of St Peters Cross.

COMMENT: Thus the dates of the blockade are confirmed – replacement buses again from Cornbrook and Deansgate–Castlefield to Piccadilly Railway Station. Potentially it looks like the Second City crossing from St Peters Square to Victoria will open in Spring 2017. First mention of a water feature in the Square!

Trafford Park Line

The Trafford Park Metrolink route has been a long-standing Greater Manchester investment priority. The scheme would extend Metrolink services as far as the Trafford Centre. Any future potential to extend onward to Port Salford would be the subject of a separate costing and business case development exercise. The current forecast cost and funding requirements is £350 million and will be funded primarily from the Earnback deal, along with a local capital contribution. The proposed alignment diverges from the existing network at the Pomona stop, passes under the Trafford Road Bridge and follows the line of Trafford Wharf Road, Warren Bruce Road, Village Way, Park Way and Barton Dock Road terminating at a stop at the Trafford Centre. An application for a Transport Works Act Order was submitted to the DfT on 11 November 2014. 47 objections were received to the application. A public inquiry commenced on 7 July 2015 where objectors were able to give their evidence. The inquiry adjourned on 5 August and was formally closed on 8 December 2015. A number of third party agreements have been signed and 18 objections have now been withdrawn. Land has been purchased as part of this process. Discussions are continuing with the remaining objectors to reach agreements where possible, including with one final objector, where written representations were made to the Inspector but negotiations continue. Any outstanding objections not resolved by agreement will be determined by the Inspector. Following

Train Running Information - TrainTracker	03457 48 49 50 and then Option 1.
Northern Rail Customer Services	0800 200 6060
Transport Focus (complaints appeals)	0300 123 2350
TfGM Bus, Rail and Metrolink Enquiries	0161 244 1000 (0700-2000 Mon-Fri, 0800-2000 Sat/Sun)
Metrolink Customer Services	0161 205 2000 (seven days a week)
Merseytravel Public Transport Enquiry Line	0151 236 7676 (08.00 to 20.00 every day)
National Public Transport Enquiry Line	0871 200 22 33 (07.00 to 22.00 every day)

USEFUL WEBSITES

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

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

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

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

www.tfgm.com (previously the GMPTE website, includes a link to the North West Journey Planner which shows tram times and also the Metrolink timetables [A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I and J])

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

CHAIRMAN John Oates, “Swallowfield”, Slade Lane, Mobberley, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 7QN.
Tel: 01565-873059 (home), 07860-513309 (mobile),
Email: john.oates@mcrua.org.uk

VICE-CHAIRMAN & WEBMASTER John Hulme, Brow Cottage, Leighs Brow, Barnton, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 4HT.
Tel: 01606-76092, Email: john.hulme@mcrua.org.uk

SECRETARY Paul Wilkinson. Email: secretary@mcrua.org.uk

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY Paul Wilkinson, 60 Romana Square, Altrincham, WA14 5QG.
Email: membership@mcrua.org.uk

TREASURER Simon Barber Email: simon@antrobus.net

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

Michael Ross, 80 Lache Lane, Chester, Cheshire, CH4 7LS. Tel: 01244-683477, Email: mkk.ross@btinternet.com

Harry Boardman, 19 Willow Grove, Barnton, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 4LZ.

Tel: 01606-782222, Email: harry@hacabo.co.uk

Chris Lodington Email: chrislodington@hotmail.co.uk

Mike Battman Email: battman@ntlworld.com

Richard Bragg Email: rj.bragg@ntlworld.com

Middlewich Rail Link Campaign Sub-Committee. Chairman: Stephen H Dent, 77 Sutton Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 0DA. Tel: 01606 834575 (home), 07710 288824 (mobile).

Email: stephen@ndent.freemove.co.uk

MID-CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER – Sally Buttifant

Tel: 01244 976788 or 0773 652 3863

Email: railofficer@midcheshirerail.org.uk

Location: 2nd Floor, Nicholas House, 1, Black Friars, Chester, CH1 2NU

Postal address: 4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port CH65 0BE

Visit: <http://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk>

FRIENDS OF ALTRINCHAM INTERCHANGE – Please contact Andrew Macfarlane.

MCRUA MEMBERSHIP

Membership of MCRUA costs £2 for younger persons (under 21), £6 for individuals, £8 for families, £14 for voluntary bodies and £25 for corporate bodies. If you wish to join please return the form below to MCRUA, 60 Romana Square, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 5QG. Please make cheques payable to “Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association”. Please also send any subscription renewals to the same address. You can now join or renew your membership online via our website - www.mcrua.org.uk - clicking on to membership or you can arrange to set up a Standing Order if you send an email to membership@mcrua.org.uk.

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

Please renew my membership subscription to Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

Name		Family (number?)	Individual
Address		Renewal	New member
Town		Please delete as appropriate	
Postcode			
Email address		Prefer email communication?	Yes / no

MCRUA Membership Secretary, 60 Romana Square, Altrincham WA14 5QG

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF ADDRESS

5/16