

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

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ISSUED FREE

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

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

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS by John Oates

We're pleased to provide our latest "Rail Report" enclosing the **Mid Cheshire Autumn "Leaf Fall" Timetable** commencing on Monday 2 October. Some trains going towards Manchester are leaving up to 2 minutes earlier than in the current timetable. Since our last *Rail Report*, we and others have put a lot of effort into the consultation for the **draft May 2018 Mid Cheshire Line timetable**, called by many the "two trains an hour timetable". Since there is so much to say, I've written about it separately – see below.

Marvellous Days Out Campaign. This has been wonderful publicity for Mid Cheshire. Many of you will have seen the news item on *North West Tonight*, seen the 3 pages in *Cheshire Life*, visited the exhibition at the Lion Salt Works or read about this in the local press or at the Makers' Market in Knutsford. I've written about this separately below, as again there's so much to say.

Our new Tatton MP, Esther McVey arranged for representatives from MCRUA and local businesses The Hut Group (Gadbrook Park, Northwich) and Tatton Estate Management (the largest private landowner in Cheshire East) to meet in Knutsford with Paul Maynard, MP, the Rail Minister to discuss the **Mid Cheshire Rail Link** (the Knutsford, Northwich, Middlewich, Sandbach, Crewe line) and the proposed **Airport Western Link**. It's fair to say we had a good discussion with Paul which lasted over an hour. We discussed the history of both schemes, where each was up to, together with the likely benefits arising from the schemes, the work done on these to date and the difficulties of progressing the schemes, especially as the resultant benefits flow across local government boundaries. Plenty of publicity ensued in both the Knutsford and Northwich areas, including from Esther - <https://youtu.be/EBEpuYLCL2M>. It was interesting hearing from The Hut Group of the difficulties they have recruiting staff due to the dreadful traffic problems around Gadbrook Park and how a station adjacent to the site could greatly assist. We'll be following this meeting up over the next month.

We've had a number of instances of **replacement buses** along the Mid Cheshire Line this year in connection with planned engineering work, RMT Strike Days and unplanned disruption. We've had complaints from a number of you about these services not operating to plan, or in the case of unplanned disruption of it being very difficult to find out what is actually going on. We've taken these up with Northern management with whom we formally meet every 4-6 months. We're looking forward to hearing their proposals on how they will improve on this situation.

Our **Crewe-Liverpool Line** continues to go through franchise renewal with the franchise suffering from what I call "end-of-franchise-itus", i.e. no developments are happening. This is likely to continue into 2018. However, we have seen proposals for improved services, especially at Acton Bridge. I recently travelled from Hartford to Smethwick Galton Bridge and back (for onward connection to Worcester). The ticket office was closed on both

occasions due to staff shortages and no tickets were checked on the trains I used. They must have some interesting reading in the back cab! All trains were on time. Sitting on Hartford station waiting reminds you very quickly how busy the West Coast Main Line is. Train after train after train.... A trainspotter's paradise. Acton Bridge is even busier!

The anticipated improvement in Mid Cheshire Line **Train Performance** I wrote about in the last issue sadly proved to be short-lived. In the last few months, the service has further deteriorated, though to put it in context most trains run and few are over 10 minutes late, most of these being 5-9 minutes late. This would be counted as "on time" if this were an "Inter-City" or a "Class 1" service such as the Manchester to North Wales services. However, 5-9 minutes is enough for our passengers to miss their connections at Chester along the North Wales Coast, to miss eastbound trains towards Sheffield and Doncaster at Stockport, and to miss the Hull services from Piccadilly. The fault for this continued deterioration lies almost entirely with Network Rail who seem to be struggling to cope with all the maintenance requirements of the infrastructure along the line, as well as the many repeating signalling and points faults. We do wonder whether they've had guidance "from above" to concentrate their efforts elsewhere rather than on "local lines" like ours.

For those of you who have opted to receive email communication, we sent our first email update in August. We've had some very favourable comments about this. We asked for more volunteers to help with aspects of what we do along our lines. We were very pleased to receive offers from local volunteers to help with our stations at Ashley and Delamere. Primarily, this will involve keeping our posters cases up to date and our leaflet dispensers topped up, as well as keeping an eye on the station overall and reporting faults as they need fixing. Not very time consuming and best covered by people who live nearby. More offers of assistance will be very welcome. Contact me, Sally, our Community Rail Officer or any of our committee members – contact details on the back page. It's autumn, well almost. A great time to get "out and about" now the scholars are back and the daytime trains less crowded. No excuse needed!

MAY 2018 MID CHESHIRE LINE "TWO TRAINS AN HOUR" TIMETABLE by John Oates

Most of you will know that following a lot of hard work carried out by ourselves, our passenger counters (on over 1800 trains) and others, that the franchise specification for the new Northern franchise included a large increase in services over the Mid Cheshire Line. The new timetable was due to be introduced from December this year, but had to be postponed until May 2018 due to infrastructure improvements suffering delays in completion leading to the extra units Northern was expecting being delayed as their current train operators could not cascade them to us in time. Last June, Northern provided the proposed timetable from May 2018 to stakeholders along the line for a restricted consultation. MCRUA was included.

Sundays – this timetable was exactly as we were expecting, that is a doubling of services such that the trains will run hourly, rather than once every 2 hours. We believe this will lead to a much increased level of patronage on Sundays. Remember, it's not that long ago that the line only had one service every 3 hours on Sundays and that only between Chester and Altrincham. This was very poorly patronised. Following much lobbying from ourselves, our members and other stakeholders, patronage increased dramatically when Northern Rail took the decision at their own expense and risk to amend the service to one every 2 hours running all the way from Chester to Piccadilly and indeed extended on to Southport. Patronage increased so much that the trains had to be extended from 2 to 4 carriages.

Mondays to Saturdays – we thought the draft proposals were awful!! We immediately provided this information and the reasoning to Northern long before the closure of the consultation period. Other stakeholders took very similar views, leading to Northern receiving detailed submissions from stakeholders including Cheshire West & Chester Council, Northwich Town Council and Knutsford Town Council, as well as from MCRUA. These submissions and the related analysis took up a lot of time from our volunteers. We were invited to meet with Northern's main timetable planner this side of the Pennines in early September. He had analysed all the submissions received and working with Network Rail had been able to draw up revised

proposals. We were very pleased with the new proposals, though at this stage they are only proposals as Network Rail need to formally accept these, and they can only do that once they've received any related submissions coming from other train companies, both passenger (unlikely) and freight (possible). This means the timetable should be agreed by mid-November, at which stage we'll be able to say more about it – there's no point in letting people know of the revised plans, when they may yet not happen due to the demands of other train companies, such as the need to run a lot more freight trains (we already have over 25 a day on Mondays to Fridays between Greenbank and through Altrincham). As mentioned, we are very hopeful to be receiving good news in November, in which case this will be in our December *Rail Report* published to coincide with the launch of the winter timetable. Once again, very many thanks are due for the serious efforts put into the submission by our volunteers as well as by councillors and local government officers. Local involvement at its best. Northern has listened.

OUR “MARVELLOUS DAYS OUT” PROJECT by John Oates

Many of you will have heard about this wonderful project through the media or from seeing the publicity locally. This is a Community Rail Partnership (CRP) project which has progressed with a lot of support from partners, including MCRUA. It started in autumn 2016 when a “one-off” poster was produced to promote the Lion Salt Works Museum at Marston, equidistant from both Lostock Gralam and Northwich stations. Sally was so impressed with the poster that she commissioned Ellesmere Port-born, Chester-based artist Nicky Thomson of Lemon Drop Creative to produce three more for stations along the Line. Many of you will have seen them – for those internet-connected, have a look at MarvellousDaysOut.org.uk.

We loved them, so much so that discussion immediately turned to expanding the project to cover more of the Mid Cheshire Line. With a strapline of “Meander The Mid Cheshire Line for a Marvellous Day Out” the project is about attracting new audiences to take the train and have a *marvellous day out* exploring attractions along the Line. And being innovative as usual the project involves a touring art exhibition as well as posters and postcards for sale.

Grant funding was applied for (together with another project, which we'll let you know about later) from the Northern Seedcorn Fund and the DCRDF pot – the Designated Line Community Rail Development Fund - and received. Our own John Hulme together with his son, Ian joined the project to work on the accompanying booklet and develop a website.

The above is a very brief summary of what happened up to July. A formal launch of the art at Lion Salt Works took place in August with Pete Waterman as guest speaker. The Press turned up and we had superb publicity both from this (<https://youtu.be/ZB8mvzrMkt0>), the BCC, ITV and Manchester Evening News websites, Cheshire Life, elsewhere and the launch of the website.

But that was just the beginning! Since then we've been deluged with orders for posters and postcards. Marketing Cheshire very kindly stepped in to help out through their sales site, and MCRUA volunteers have become involved with tubing posters, moving stock around and many other tasks. The project is all about promoting Mid Cheshire as a destination both for those of us who live here and for those from elsewhere. There is no doubt it has achieved this to a far greater extent than we ever expected, and this is only the start. We'll be providing updates on the project in future *Rail Reports*. Meanwhile, if you have some time to spare, could you give us help with moving the travelling exhibition around (it's currently at The Plaza, Stockport, then going to Altrincham), packaging the posters and transporting them and the booklets to places that want them. Please let Sally or any of us on the committee know. We'll be delighted to receive your help.

OCTOBER 2017 TIMETABLE by Andrew Macfarlane

As John Oates has mentioned above, the usual temporary “leaf fall” timetable begins on Monday 2nd October with many (but not all!) trains towards Manchester retimed to run 2 minutes earlier. This means as usual that the 09.31 from Northwich to Manchester becomes the 09.29 so those using a Wayfarer ticket have to also buy a single to Lostock Gralam. Holders of “Two Together” railcards are also affected as these cannot be used before 09.30. The off-peak day return from Northwich to Manchester is however not affected because like all Off-Peak Day returns from stations south of Hale it is a code B3, valid from 09.00 on Monday to Friday.

TWO CLUB 55 OFFERS by Andrew Macfarlane

Both TransPennine Express (TPE) and Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) currently have Club 55 offers for travel on their networks. The TPE offer started on 18th September and runs until 19th November for outward travel. Standard class fares are £21 return to anywhere on their network in England and £31 to anywhere on their network in Scotland (there is a 20% reduction for railcard holders). First class fares are £41 return in England, £61 to Scotland. Return travel must be within a month of outward travel. Travel is not permitted before 09.30 on Monday to Friday, but is any time at weekends. More details are at: <https://www.tpexpress.co.uk/special-offers/club-55>. The ATW offer began on 6th September. The fare is £26 return (£1 off with a railcard) and the last day for outward travel is Wednesday 1st November. Travel is not permitted before 09.30 on Monday to Friday but is anytime at weekends. The return journey must take place within 8 days of the outward journey. All return travel must be completed by Wednesday 8th November 2017. Travelling on a Saturday enables longer through journeys to be achieved, e.g. to Swansea via the Central Wales line and returning via Cardiff (break of journey) and Hereford except that this is not possible on Saturday 28th October due to a major sporting fixture in Cardiff. Further information on the ATW club 55 offer can be found at www.arrivatrains.wales/55. Both Club 55 offers are “walk on”. Tickets can be purchased on the day of travel and do not have to be booked in advance.

OTHER FARES NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

Northern have kindly provided us with details of the fare changes from 3rd September 2017. Anytime day return fares within the TfGM area increased by up to 20p where these were priced at £4.90 or below. The useful BusCard Extra add-on to rail and Metrolink season tickets was withdrawn. The Countycard however remains available covering all buses and trains in the TfGM area plus Metrolink in the City zone. From 31st July there is now a bus and Metrolink day ticket available at peak periods for £8 although this is currently only available on the Get Me There card and can only be purchased from bus drivers by those who have a Get Me There card (these are available free of charge from bus station Travelshops including Altrincham). As many members will know, Over 60s passes issued by TfGM can be used on the train to Glossop and Hadfield because those stations are in the TfGM area (despite being in Derbyshire). Greater Manchester residents with the Over 60s pass must now touch in and touch out at the smartcard readers at the beginning and end of their Metrolink journeys (not if changing trams) because the passes are now being scanned by inspectors. I make no apology for again plugging the website www.brfares.com, which provides a comprehensive summary of all available rail fares and their restriction codes including through fares between rail and Metrolink stations. **National Railcards** are now also available in digital format but we understand that there have been a number of teething problems with this. The current plan is for a 3.6% increase in regulated rail fares in January unless the Chancellor of the Exchequer changes this in his autumn budget.

CAN YOU HELP US?

The Committee is keen to improve communication with members. The recent August email newsletter was well received and we would like to make this a regular feature in between issues of the Rail Report (currently published in May, October and December). We are looking for a volunteer to draft the email newsletter and to send it out to those members who wish to receive email newsletters. It would enable us to keep you better informed and to report things to you on a more regular basis. We would help the editor by providing suggestions

for items to cover and links to web pages which provide more information. If you can help, please contact our Chairman John Oates at john.oates@mcrua.org.uk. Thank you.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT by Paul Wilkinson

Members of MCRUA who receive this *Rail Report* are paid up members until 28 February 2018. A renewal form for 2019 will be published with the December edition of the MCRUA *Rail Report*. Members can receive the *Rail Report* as a printed copy by post or OPT IN to receive it electronically by email. Members are encouraged to supply email addresses as this saves MCRUA money in printing and postage. We are considering more regular email updates to complement the *Rail Report*, which is published three times a year in May, October and December – coinciding with timetable changes on the railway.

If you have changed your email address in the last 12 months, have you let us know? Do you want to OPT IN for electronic copies? Or OPT OUT and remain with printed copies? Drop an email to membership@mcrua.org.uk. This email address can also be used for any membership related queries. The printed *Rail Report* will continue to be available to members and any email newsletters will be sent to all members for whom we have an email address. Changes to the Data Protection Act are due from May 2018 but we are waiting clarity as to what changes are being made. When the situation becomes clear all members will be asked whether they wish to receive the *Rail Report* by post or by email and whether they wish to receive email newsletters (regardless of whether they receive the *Rail Report* by post or email).

AN EMAIL TO THE CHAIRMAN

This is from MCRUA member John Natrass and is dated 4th June 2017:

Dear John,

This is just a note from one of your (no doubt many) “dormant” MCRUA members, to thank you, Andrew Macfarlane and other contributors, for the excellent “Mid Cheshire Rail Report” you mail out from time to time, and in particular for the latest Summer 2017 issue. I always find it interesting reading, more so this time with the reported prospect of a half-hourly service on at least part of the line next year. I have no doubt that MCRUA has been campaigning for this for ages. I do not underestimate the time and dedication that MCRUA officers and committee give, working with the train operator and other bodies behind the scenes to maintain and improve the service, on behalf of MCRUA members and everybody else who uses the line.

Thank you and best regards,

John Natrass

MUSIC TRAINS REPORT by Michael Ross

This is the tenth season of Music Trains on the Mid Cheshire Line. Ten Music Trains have been arranged for the public and nine for groups. Compared with 2016 when we averaged 40 people per train the average so far, after fifteen Music Trains, is 46. One Music Train had to be cancelled because of a strike on Northern.

There are three Music Trains still to come. The November Music Train will be a new development as it will be after the end of the usual season. Until now we haven't run in winter because on an evening Music Train neither the outward nor the return journey would be in daylight. And in bad weather waiting on Plumley Station platform would be miserable. (Another reason is to give the organiser a break). However, this request is for a daytime Music Train and so can be fitted in.

Music has been varied with three new bands booked (Espionage, Port Sunlight Sea Dogs and Terry Burgin Blues Band). Aileen Bellamy has joined the team of hosts (Simon Barber, Sally Buttifant, John Hanson David Miller, John Oates and me). Working with conductors and Northern Control in Manchester has gone well. All the venues (Golden Pheasant at Plumley, Railway Inn at Mobberley and Alexanders in Chester) are keen to welcome us and serve us enthusiastically. The 2016 Music Train programme has been shortlisted (along with

seven others) in the ‘Best Community Engagement Event’ category of the national ACORP awards. The results will be announced in Derby on 5 October.

STATION LEAFLETS by Michael Ross

Station Leaflets are prepared for each station on the Line and updated each time there is a timetable or fares change. They give ‘Train Times, Fares and Travel Tips’ – all fitted onto two sides of A4. They are backed up by web pages giving more details, particularly of days out from the Line to such destinations as the Welsh Highland Railway and the Settle and Carlisle Line.

The Knutsford Station leaflet was delivered to every house in Knutsford at the end of June – 6,800 copies. The response has been favourable but its effect on passenger numbers is difficult to quantify. This was a trial run. The intention was to follow up in January 2018 with deliveries in more towns but in view of the impending timetable change in May 2018 it is now planned to hold back until then. Instead, printed copies will be prepared in October and January for the stations with ticket offices and online copies will continue to be available for all stations.

FORTHCOMING BUS REPLACEMENTS DUE TO PLANNED ENGINEERING WORK

From Monday 2nd October to Thursday 5th October (inclusive) and from Monday 13th November to Thursday 16th November (inclusive) the 22.48 train from Chester to Piccadilly is replaced by a bus throughout its journey. An additional bus runs at 23.30 from Knutsford to Manchester Piccadilly. This continues to happen on a 6-week recurring cycle.

FREIGHT NEWS

Trains of imported coal are currently running from Redcar to Fiddlers Ferry Power Station via the Calder Valley, Stockport and the Mid Cheshire Line, operated by GB Railfreight. Coal trains are also running to Fiddlers Ferry from York Yard South, operated by Freightliner. Fiddlers Ferry is said to have a three-year contract to supply the National Grid.

SKELTON JUNCTION TO GLAZEBROOK LINE

A report to the Transport for Greater Manchester Committee meeting on 15th September outlined current thinking on this proposal. The initial plan would be to create a walkway/cycleway on the trackbed by 2020 but a structural assessment is needed into the cost of repairing and maintaining the Cadishead viaduct over the Manchester Ship Canal, which needs a considerable amount of work doing on it to bring it up to the required standard.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION ON NORTHERN

Further strikes took place on Northern on 8th, 9th and 10th July, on 1st and 4th September and are due to take place on 3rd and 5th October in the ongoing dispute over Driver Controlled Operation. There is currently no sign of a resolution to this long-running dispute and the disappointing thing is that no organisation appears to be interested in securing a settlement. A reduced train service has been running between Altrincham and Chester only on strike days augmented by a rail replacement bus service between Stockport and Chester and rail replacement buses between Altrincham and Stockport only. Confusingly, the train and bus timetables are shown in totally separate timetables on Northern’s website. Also it is puzzling that Northern think that it is acceptable not to put posters up at every station showing the revised bus and train timetable on each strike day.

NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

Martyn Hett, one of the victims of the terrorist attack at Manchester Arena on 22nd May, was a regular commuter on the train between Stockport and Altrincham. A memorial planter is to be sited on platform 3 at Altrincham in his memory, funded by Northern. The plants themselves are being funded by the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership. **Navigation Road** station (the rail platform) is one of 25 rail stations in the TfGM

area to be upgraded in the near future. The work, funded by TfGM, will see the installation of better customer information screens, a more comprehensive public address system and a Help Point. A £6 car parking charge has been introduced by Northern at **Knutsford** station (the charge was previously £3). The increased charge has seen most users desert the car park, which now often only has one car in it. There is a process whereby rail users can claim back a partial refund of the car parking charge but it is very convoluted and difficult. A £2 car park charge was due to be introduced at **Northwich** station in late September, payable by card or mobile phone only. There were fears locally that this could lead to rail users choosing to park in unsuitable local roads to avoid the charge, which in this case cannot be offset against the price of a rail ticket and is in effect a fare increase for those who need to drive to the station. The charge could lead to people choosing not to use the train at all. Northern are saying that the charge should deter non rail users from parking there and thereby free up spaces for rail users. They say that the money generated by the car parking charges will enable them to further invest in modern facilities for staff and customers and that improving car parks is a key part of the project including relining and redefining spaces. It will be interesting to see the effect of the charges on the usage of the car park at Northwich! A new, improved ticket vending machine was installed on the Manchester-bound platform at **Knutsford** station on 13th September. The **London Midland** franchise becomes the **West Midlands** franchise as from the December timetable change and will be operated by Abellio (Netherlands Railways), East Japan Railway and Mitsui.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS

Ordsall Chord. Work is progressing well on the Ordsall Chord, which is due to open with the timetable change on Sunday 10th December. Initially it will only be used by an hourly Northern Calder Valley service from Leeds via Manchester Victoria to Manchester Oxford Road. This service is due to be extended to Manchester Airport from May 2018. **New freight traffic.** A new flow of waste traffic has started, operated by GB Railfreight on behalf of Biffa, from Collyhurst Street (Miles Platting) to Roxby Gullet (Scunthorpe) and is routed via the Calder Valley route. **Bolton.** The new platform 5 at Bolton was commissioned during a blockade in August and is currently the only down (Preston-bound) platform in use at Bolton while platform 4 is being refurbished including work on the platform edging. **May 2018 timetable.** **Styal** station is due to regain an hourly train service as from May 2018 and **Flixton** station is due to gain an hourly Sunday service from the same date. **Class 142s.** The class 142 Pacer trains are due to be sold to Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). Funding has been granted for the new station at **Warrington West**. The station car park will have 268 spaces. **Sankey for Penketh** station will only be served at peak periods once Warrington West opens.

METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

Keolis Amey took over the operation of Metrolink from 15th July. A new Metrolink timetable is planned to start in January. It is proposed that Sunday services will operate until 23.30 (an hour later than currently), a very welcome move. Also all trams will run back to the depot in service and the Metrolink service from Manchester Airport is scheduled to be extended to Manchester Victoria from January. There is to be a fare increase of an average of 5.93% in January, the first increase since January 2014. A new Metrolink map is to be produced with different colours for each line/service to replace the present much-criticised single-colour map. Work is progressing at Crumpsall on a new bay platform for the tram service to the Trafford Centre, due to begin in 2020. The new substation at Brooklands is due to be commissioned in September/October.

ALTRINCHAM WINTER LECTURE SERIES

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

Friday 13th October “Steam in and around Warrington in the 1960s”, a digital presentation in black and white by Phil Braithwaite.

Friday 10th November “The Cheshire Lines Committee as it was”, a digital presentation by Trevor Booth.

Friday 8th December “BR Steam and Diesel in the 1960s”, a digital presentation by Geoff Coward.

Friday 12th January “Railway Rambling across the UK in the 1950s and 1960s (including many local scenes)” a digital presentation by Ken Widd.

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

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

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

STEPHENSON LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY PROGRAMME

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

Saturday 4th November. Dr Malcolm Garner “The 1968 Hixon Rail Disaster”.

Saturday 2nd December. Roy Chapman “The East Lancashire Railway’s Castleton Extension Project”. This meeting is being held at Sale United Reformed Church lounge, Montague Road, Sale M33 3BU at 2pm and includes seasonal refreshments.

8E RAILWAY ASSOCIATION PROGRAMME

The 8E Railway Association continues to meet at the Gladstone Club, off Station Road in Northwich, which is 5 minutes’ walk from Northwich station in the direction of the town centre, on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm. Admission for first-time guests is free, the subsequent meeting entrance fee is £3. Sandwiches are provided free of charge at “half time”. The forthcoming programme is:

Tuesday 10th October. Les Nixon “Miscellany of pre-BR Steam”.

Tuesday 14th November. Trevor Booth “The Cheshire Lines Committee as it was”.

Tuesday 12th December. AGM followed by a slide presentation of railways around Chester.

Tuesday 9th January. John Cashen. “West Country Memories of the 1960s and 1970s”.

A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

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

Ms I Buckley of Ellesmere Port Mr N Gilbert of Ashley
Mr D Goatman of Knutsford The Abel family of Knutsford

IN MEMORIAM

We are very sorry to report the death of **John Hobbs**, a former Chairman of the North Cheshire Rail Users’ Group and a Vice-Chairman of the East Lancashire Railway Preservation Society, on 6th September after a short illness. John helped out on the Mid Cheshire Steam Train between Altrincham and Chester which ran on three

occasions in the mid-2000s. He was one of the prime movers in the campaign to re-open the Halton curve to provide a service between Liverpool and Chester via Runcorn, Frodsham and Helsby but sadly did not live to see the new train service become a reality. He was able to unveil a plaque to mark his many achievements at a ceremony at Runcorn East station on 27th July. MCRUA member **Norman Spilsbury**, a noted local historian and railway photographer in the Altrincham area, died on 24th June aged 86. **Ronnie Oliver**, a very long-standing member of staff on the line who worked in the booking office at Knutsford station from 1992 until his retirement in October 2014 sadly died on 24th June aged 66.

MID CHESHIRE LINE PEOPLE

We welcome **David Brown** as the new Managing Director of Northern. His appointment was announced on 15th June but he actually joined Northern in September from his previous job at Transport for the North. David is no stranger to the Mid Cheshire Line, having spoken at a MCRUA public meeting in Plumley in the early 1990s. We welcome **Aline Frantzen** as the Managing Director of the new Metrolink operator Keolis Amey Metrolink (or KAM) replacing Chris Coleman. Aline came from Yarra Trams in Melbourne. **Danny Vaughan** is now the Metrolink Director of TfGM replacing Peter Cushing.

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 Midland ticket sales (to buy any rail ticket)	0121 634 2040
Northern ticket sales (to buy any rail ticket)	0800 200 6060
British Transport Police for non-emergencies	0800 40 50 40 or text 61016.
Network Rail (to report infrastructure faults)	03457 11 41 41 or 0207 557 8000
Train Running Information - TrainTracker	03457 48 49 50 and then Option 1.
Northern Customer Services	0800 200 6060 (24 hours per day, 7 days per week)
Transport Focus (complaints appeals)	0300 123 2350
TfGM Bus, Rail and Metrolink Enquiries	0161 244 1000 (0700-2000 Mon-Fri, 0800-2000 Sat/Sun)
Metrolink Customer Services	0161 205 2000 (seven days a week)
Merseytravel Public Transport Enquiry Line	0151 236 7676 (08.00 to 20.00 every day)
National Public Transport Enquiry Line	0871 200 22 33 (07.00 to 22.00 every day)

USEFUL WEBSITES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MCRUA MEMBERSHIP

There are five classes of membership of the Association:

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

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