

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

No. 108

SUMMER 2020

ISSUED FREE TO MCRUA MEMBERS

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.

***** TRAIN TRAVEL IS CURRENTLY FOR ESSENTIAL JOURNEYS ONLY *****

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS by John Oates

We are pleased to provide our latest "Rail Report". This would normally coincide with the beginning of the summer timetable for our Mid Cheshire and Crewe to Liverpool lines. However, the normal timetable release dates have been temporarily (we hope) supplanted by the "Key Worker" timetables. We have delayed publication of our summer edition from its normal early May date whilst we've been trying to get more clarity on potential upcoming timetable changes. I've written about this below.

We hope you're keeping well and safe in these strange and for many, difficult times.

The **Crewe-Liverpool line "Key Worker" Timetable** started with a standard hourly service calling at all the stations usually served by the normal timetable. This, for example, led to the service at Hartford reducing from half-hourly to hourly, whilst an interesting side-effect was that **Acton Bridge** had what we think was its **best-ever service** with services each way, every hour. For Acton Bridge, though, all good things don't last forever! The **Revised Key Worker Timetable** is now an hourly Birmingham-Liverpool 'Key Worker' service instead of two an hour in the normal timetable. This means that **Winsford** gets more or less its normal service, **Hartford** gets half its normal service, and **Acton Bridge** gets hourly in the peaks and two-hourly between the peaks which is similar to normal, but it no longer has the short-lived hourly all day 'best ever' service. We hear that the term "Key Worker" can be defined differently by different parties, though many including Northern are using the Government definition at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

The **Mid Cheshire Line** has fared far worse with what was a Monday-Saturday hourly service with Monday-Friday peak hour extras replaced with a basic two-hourly service with later starts and earlier finishes. This means the Monday-Friday service is currently at 38% of its normal level, way below the level seen in much of the rest of England where it is up to 70% of normal service levels. I've written more about this in a separate article, below. Most importantly, if you or people you know are able to help us lobby by providing evidence of greater "key worker" potential use along the line, please provide the detail requested in my article below to Northern with a copy to us in MCRUA.

It seems a long time since normality, though as I write this it was only three months ago. MCRUA and our friends in the CRP (which also includes quite a number of us users as volunteers) have been as busy as we can be, though activities at stations have been curtailed. We hope the latter may change soon, as we understand it recently has on Merseyrail.

We would normally be holding our **Annual General Meeting** around this time. We've decided to postpone it until the autumn due to the COVID-19 situation. We'll be announcing the arrangements in our autumn *Rail Report*. With the AGM postponed, our Treasurer has produced an interim report below. Meanwhile,

our committee meetings continue to be held on a regular basis, now using Zoom. Agendas are circulated in advance, many committee members are able to take part electronically and draft minutes are circulated soon after meetings.

It seems a very long time ago, but regular readers may remember in our *Winter Rail Report* the correspondence with David Brown, MD of Northern about our dissatisfaction with **Northern's approach to the "Day to Day Basics"**. Following what we considered to be his rather unsatisfactory response of 30 October, we wrote back to David on 15 November. The main aspects covered were:

- Train Running Performance
- Ticket Vending Machines
- Station Customer Information Screens, and
- Greenbank Station.

By February no response had been received. Soon afterwards, we heard David had left Northern. We won't miss his un-customer focused approach!

As many of you know, in late-February the Department for Transport's Operator of Last Resort (OLR) business took over the operation of Northern. We are very pleased that most of the senior management are retained, including Regional Director, Chris Jackson and our Communities & Sustainability Manager, Rebecca (Becky) Styles. More recently Raj Chandarana, Central Region's Stakeholder Manager has left, his role being temporarily covered by Owain Roberts, who we know from his time at TfGM and from him living locally just north of Altrincham.

We are progressing those outstanding points through Chris, Owain and Becky, though options have been restricted during "lockdown".

One of these outstanding points related to the removal and destruction of the **historic seating** in the Manchester-bound platform shelter at **Plumley**. Prior to lockdown, Chris Jackson had committed to have a replica made and installed at Northern's expense. We are delighted to report that this was made by a local joiner whilst under lockdown, and as soon as it was allowed, installed in Plumley. The end result is summed up by local Plumley resident, Isobel Chetwood - *"The seating looks stunning – beautifully crafted and I'm sure will last for many years to come. It is very much in keeping with a village railway station."* There are some good pictures on the *Guardian Series'* website - <https://www.northwichguardian.co.uk/news/18465526.replica-bench-created-plumley-railway-station/> Chris Jackson has produced a great result from a very poor situation. Thanks also go to the joiner for such superb work, and to Becky who went to Mobberley, lying on the ground in the shelter there taking pictures and measurements of that original bench from all angles, then providing them to the carpenter. Thanks also go to the other Plumley residents involved, to Plumley, Toft & Bexton Parish Council and to the Community Rail Partnership. A great result through persistence. Once we're fully out of lockdown, we'll arrange a celebration.

Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership (CRP) News

The volunteers for the CRP, many of whom are regular Mid Cheshire Line users, have been busy in lockdown, though inevitably with a different focus.

At long last, the **Mid Cheshire Rail Walks** have been **reprinted**, a project originally started when the previous print runs of 60,000 started running out in 2013. All of the walks in the three booklets were re-walked before lockdown by volunteers Gavin and David from Knutsford, noting minor changes to the walks as necessary, and as necessary with revised wording and pictures. There's also a brand new walk to the Salt Works Museum. Other volunteers proof read all of the wording, checked and made changes to the maps, and a further volunteer liaised with the printers in Crewe such that another 15,000 of each booklet were produced by the end of March. Due to lockdown, these have had to remain in store at the printers as we could not until very recently access the storage in Altrincham. These will be distributed along the line to stations and publicity outlets as soon as normal travel is again allowed, but in the meantime can be accessed

as “flipbooks” through the CRP website <https://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk/> in the *Quick Links* section on the right hand side of the home page, or directly as follows:

- Cheshire West - <http://www.flipgorilla.com/p/26183111565910438/show>
- Cheshire East - <http://www.flipgorilla.com/p/26183111565910439/show>, and
- Greater Manchester - <http://www.flipgorilla.com/p/26183111565910437/show>.

Very many thanks to all the volunteers involved.

Since our last publication there have been two further issues of the CRP’s **Along Mid Cheshire Lines** publication. Again all volunteer produced (apart from the use of a local printer), the Christmas issue featured “**All Change at Altrincham**” as well as other news and snippets from along the line. As before, the 5000 copies printed distributed at stations, on trains and at nearby information centres were quickly “snapped up”, so much so that a Spring issue was produced featuring “**Comings and goings at Stockport**” plus snippets, etc. This had just started being distributed as “lockdown” came in. It will now be further distributed as more normal travel resumes. Copies can be downloaded from our website from the Quick Links section, or directly through <https://www.mcrua.org.uk/along-cheshire-lines/> If you’ve not seen them, take a look, let us know what you think and with further good ideas of what to cover and we’ll pass this to CRP.

Other CRP news is that a **Community Interest Company (CIC)** was formed in May, unsurprisingly called “Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership CIC” (company number 12611555), the initial three directors being our member John Hulme, Brian Barnsley of Community Rail Network (used to be known as ACoRP – the Association of Community Rail Partnerships) and me. The CRP now becomes formally based at Northwich Town Council offices by the cemetery with even closer working with the team there coming. The intention is the board will be expanded as we progress and with Brian then stepping down. The banking arrangements are almost set up, then the CRP’s funds will be transferred in from the current holders, Cheshire West & Chester Council.

The CRP’s programme of **Music Trains** for 2020 – arranged and hosted on their behalf by MCRUA volunteers - was planned before lockdown began. However, very sadly though unsurprisingly, the programme has now been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some lockdown restrictions are being reduced at the time of writing, the train service is still not open for non-essential travel. Even when that limitation is removed musicians cannot perform in face masks and any social distancing will mean that very few people will be able to attend or get into the venues. And we can expect that the over-60s, in particular, among our audiences and performers will be cautious about taking part in the next few months. Mike Ross, the Music Trains organiser and his colleagues, very much hope to bring them back in 2021.

We are all looking forward to resuming “normal working”, whatever that ends up being. If you or contacts are able to help us lobby for a return to a more normal Mid Cheshire Line timetable, please let us know on enquiries@mcrua.org.uk Meanwhile, fond memories of more normal times can be found here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ4BsoNaFy4> Why so many passengers at Plumley? A returning Music Train ☺

Mid Cheshire Line “Key Worker” timetable

We understand that Northern are concerned to not publish a timetable they end up not being able to run due to staff either ill or self-isolating. However, we note elsewhere on Northern there were improved services from May and also hear that from July in “South Manchester” (the name for the collection of lines of route that Mid Cheshire comes under) there will be minor improvements on the Hadfield line and east Manchester services.

We have had much liaison with Northern senior management about this, highlighting our dissatisfaction and reminding them that unlike many lines of route there are **mainly no alternative public transport options**. We understand that Northern shared their high level timetable aspirations for uplifts with the Transport for the North Officer Reference Group and that Cheshire East sit on that (also representing Cheshire West & Chester) as well as Transport for Greater Manchester. We hear that they made no comments about the

service remaining at its poor once every two hours level on the Mid Cheshire Line, though did provide input on other lines of route.

Meanwhile, assisted by the above definition and by (previously) regular rail users from Northwich, Knutsford, Mobberley (me) and Altrincham, we put together a list of known “Key Workers” flows on the Mid Cheshire Line. This was sent to the three authorities asking them for comments on whether these were taken into account in their discussions at TfN. Informally, we have heard back that TfGM were letting Northern decide for their “South Manchester” services, whilst we’ve had no response from either of the Cheshire authorities.

Some of you will have seen our press release about this in the *Guardian Series* of newspapers in Cheshire. This has generated feedback with examples from disgruntled and worried passengers, a number of whom are key workers and we’ve been supplying these directly to Northern management.

If you know of those who are or may become inconvenienced by the current poor two-hourly service, with its late start and lack of peak hour extras, please encourage them to set out their concerns directly to Northern on enquiries@northernrailway.co.uk, where we are told it will be logged and provided to Northern management. Our experience is this is far more effective than phone contact where the logging may not take place. Please also send a copy to us on enquiries@mcrua.org.uk and we will add it to our volume of evidence.

Briefly, the examples we know of are: -

Health & Social Care

Lostock Gralam – Social Care staff from Greenbank

Mobberley – Social Care staff for Barclay Hall from the Manchester direction

Altrincham – Social Care staff from the Northwich area for a care home in Sale

Altrincham – Media City staff from Knutsford (including Phil McCann)

Food and Other Necessary Goods

Staff for:

Morrison’s Distribution Centre, Gadbrook Park – Northwich from various stations along the line

Asda, Northwich – from various stations along the line

Sainsbury, Northwich – from various stations along the line

Tesco, Northwich – from various stations along the line

Aldi, Knutsford – from various stations along the line

Booths, Knutsford – from various stations along the line

Sainsbury, Altrincham – from various stations along the line

Tesco, Altrincham – from various stations along the line

Sainsbury, Stockport – from Altrincham

Transport Workers

Network Rail Signaller: Hale to Mobberley

Northern Staff: Knutsford to Manchester, Stockport to Altrincham

Utilities, communication and financial services

Barclays, Radbroke Hall – Knutsford from many stations along the line

Education -

Primary School Years 1 & 6

Teachers – not known

Scholars – none

Secondary Schools, Sixth-Form Colleges and Further Education Colleges

Only a minor return for Years 10 & 12 from mid-June and that only for partial weeks or days of weeks.

Once a fuller return, which may be from September

Teachers and Scholars for:

The Kings School, Chester – Cuddington and stations towards Chester
Hartford CoE High School - Greenbank through from Mouldsworth and also from Navigation Road
St Nicholas High School – Greenbank through from Mouldsworth and also from Navigation Road
The Grange School, Hartford - Greenbank through from Mouldsworth and also from Navigation Road
University of Chester Academy, Northwich – Knutsford through to Northwich and also from Greenbank
Knutsford Academy – Navigation Road through to Knutsford and also Lostock Gralam through to Knutsford
Altrincham Grammar School for Boys - Northwich through to Hale and also from Stockport
Altrincham Girls Grammar School – Northwich through to Hale/Altrincham and also from Stockport
Loreto College - Northwich through to Hale/Altrincham and also from Stockport
Wellington School, Timperley – Navigation Road from Knutsford onwards
Trafford College, Timperley - Northwich through to Navigation Road and also from Stockport
Stockport College - Northwich through to Stockport
Cheadle Hulme School - Knutsford through to Stockport.

REPORT FROM THE TREASURER by Simon Barber

Our AGM is inevitably delayed this year, so I've been asked to write a few words about MCRUA's finances for the Rail Report until I can report the full picture in the usual way at the meeting.

Fortunately the picture is that MCRUA has a healthy balance sheet and is not stretched financially. We do have to take care because for the past few years, every year, we have spent more than our income by £300-500. This is partly because we have been unable to run a railtour for a few years owing to the changes in the rail private hire business; the train operators that we used to partner with don't operate from bases convenient to Mid Cheshire any more, and a successful railtour, as well as being a great day out for members, used to make a decent sum for our funds too. Of course, railtours carry risk and it is possible to lose money too!

The other reason for spending more than our income has been a slow decline in our number of members. This might be because there have been no railtours, but MCRUA's membership size is vital to our campaigning efforts. Our most reliable source of income, and the biggest source too, is membership subscriptions and we encourage everyone to renew promptly. If you live in a household of more than one, why not do as I have done and join as family members? It only costs a little more but MCRUA can count the extra members in your household, and every member increases our influence with the railway industry, with council officers and with politicians. MCRUA can sustain running at a loss for a while longer, so we are not losing sleep over the annual deficit, but to help our finances and to help our influence, please help us to maintain or increase the size of our membership again. Thanks to all our members for your support.

MAY 2020 TIMETABLE

Any timetable changes which had been due to take place from Sunday 17th May have been postponed until the late summer/early autumn because of the pandemic.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS by Paul Wilkinson

2020 Membership update (data correct as at 11 June 2020) - **Thank you for your continuing support.**

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 ran out on 28 February. We invite you to renew using the enclosed form. If you received this Rail Report by email, you will also receive the renewal form if appropriate

20xxx - you have recently joined or already renewed. Thank you for your continued support.

Members who receive this Rail Report **by email** will also be invited to rejoin if not already done so.

CURRENT TIMETABLE FOR THE MID CHESHIRE LINE

We know that many of our members do not have access to the internet so this information will hopefully be of value to you. This timetable is likely to remain in force until September 2020 but please check times before you travel. Just again to emphasise that as at mid-June it is essential journeys only

on public transport and face coverings have been compulsory since 15th June (apart from children under the age of 11, people who have trouble breathing and anyone whose condition means they are unable to wear one). Trains are now usually formed of four coaches to enable social distancing.

Monday to Saturday

Manchester Piccadilly	0709	0841	1041	1241	1441	1641	1841	2041
Stockport	0718	0852	1052	1252	1452	1652	1852	2054
Navigation Road	0734	0907	1107	1307	1507	1707	1907	2109
Altrincham arrive	0736	0909	1109	1309	1509	1709	1909	2111
depart	0736	0910	1110	1310	1510	1710	1910	2112
Hale	0739	0913	1113	1313	1513	1713	1912	2114
Ashley	0743	0916	1116	1316	1516	1716	1916	2118
Mobberley	0747	0920	1120	1320	1520	1720	1919	2121
Knutsford	0752	0925	1125	1325	1525	1725	1924	2126
Plumley	0756	0929	1129	1329	1529	1729	1929	2130
Lostock Gralam	0800	0933	1133	1333	1533	1733	1932	2134
Northwich	0805	0937	1137	1337	1537	1737	1937	2138
Greenbank	0810	0943	1143	1343	1543	1743	1942	2143
Cuddington	0815	0948	1148	1348	1548	1748	1947	2148
Delamere	0820	0953	1153	1353	1553	1753	1952	2153
Mouldsworth	0826	0958	1158	1358	1558	1758	1957	2158
Chester arrive	0838	1010	1210	1412	1610	1810	2010	2212

Monday to Saturday

Chester	0651	0902	1102	1302	1502	1702	1900	2102
Mouldsworth	0703	0914	1113	1313	1513	1713	1912	2114
Delamere	0708	0918	1118	1318	1518	1718	1917	2119
Cuddington	0713	0923	1123	1323	1523	1723	1922	2123
Greenbank	0718	0927	1127	1327	1527	1727	1926	2128
Northwich	0723	0933	1133	1333	1533	1733	1932	2133
Lostock Gralam	0726	0936	1136	1336	1536	1736	1935	2136
Plumley	0730	0939	1139	1339	1539	1739	1938	2140
Knutsford	0735	0944	1144	1344	1544	1744	1944	2145
Mobberley	0740	0949	1149	1349	1549	1749	1948	2150
Ashley	0743	0952	1152	1352	1552	1752	1952	2153
Hale	0747	0956	1156	1356	1556	1756	1956	2157
Altrincham arrive	0751	0959	1159	1359	1559	1759	1959	2201
depart	0751	1000	1200	1400	1600	1800	2000	2201
Navigation Road	0753	1002	1202	1402	1602	1802	2002	2203
Stockport arrive	0808	1016	1216	1416	1616	1816	2016	2218
Manchester Piccadilly	0817	1030	1230	1430	1630	1830	2030	2233

Sundays

Manchester Piccadilly	0904	1100	1306	1506	1706	1906	2106
Stockport	0920	1111	1317	1519	1717	1917	2118
Navigation Road	0934	1127	1332	1534	1731	1931	2133
Altrincham arrive	0936	1129	1334	1536	1733	1933	2135
depart	0937	1129	1334	1537	1734	1934	2135
Hale	0939	1132	1337	1539	1736	1936	2138
Ashley	0943	1136	1341	1543	1740	1940	2142
Mobberley	0947	1139	1344	1547	1744	1944	2145
Knutsford	0952	1144	1349	1552	1749	1949	2150
Plumley	0956	1149	1354	1556	1753	1953	2155
Lostock Gralam	1000	1153	1358	1600	1757	1957	2159
Northwich	1005	1157	1402	1605	1802	2002	2203
Greenbank	1010	1203	1408	1610	1807	2007	2209

Cuddington	1015 1208 1413 1615 1812 2012 2214
Delamere	1020 1213 1418 1620 1817 2017 2219
Mouldsworth	1026 1219 1424 1626 1823 2023 2225
Chester arrive	1039 1230 1435 1639 1834 2034 2235

Sundays

Chester	0904 1058 1259 1504 1707 1905 2059
Mouldsworth	0915 1110 1310 1515 1718 1916 2110
Delamere	0920 1116 1316 1521 1723 1922 2116
Cuddington	0925 1120 1320 1525 1728 1926 2120
Greenbank	0929 1125 1325 1530 1733 1931 2125
Northwich	0935 1131 1331 1536 1738 1937 2131
Lostock Gralam	0938 1134 1334 1539 1741 1940 2134
Plumley	0941 1138 1338 1543 1745 1944 2138
Knutsford	0947 1143 1343 1548 1750 1949 2143
Mobberley	0951 1148 1348 1553 1754 1953 2148
Ashley	0955 1151 1351 1556 1758 1957 2151
Hale	0958 1155 1355 1600 1802 2000 2155
Altrincham arrive	1002 1159 1359 1604 1805 2004 2159
depart	1002 1159 1359 1604 1806 2004 2159
Navigation Road	1004 1202 1402 1607 1808 2006 2202
Stockport arrive	1019 1216 1417 1628 1829 2021 2217
Heaton Chapel	- 1222 1425 - - 2025 -
Levenshulme	- 1226 1428 - - 2028 -
Manchester Piccadilly	1032 1236 1435 1640 1838 2038 2228

METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

The new Trafford Park Metrolink line opened on Sunday 22nd March as a shuttle running every 12 minutes from Cornbrook to the Trafford Centre. The service will be extended to run between Crumpsall and the Trafford Centre when the new trams which are on order enter service. From 6th April Metrolink services were reduced to operate every 20 minutes due to the virus with double trams being provided where possible to enable social distancing. They were increased back to every 12 minutes from 26th May (still every 20 minutes on Sundays). The tram service will be increased to every 10 minutes across the system from Monday 22nd June. T68 tram no. 1023 was moved from Trafford depot to the Crewe Heritage Centre for storage on 19th March 2020. The tram will be on display at the heritage centre when it reopens. It is being stored there until the tram is able to be moved to its permanent home at the Heaton Park Tramway. T68 no. 1007, also destined for Heaton Park, remains stored at Trafford depot. Funding (of between £500 million and £1 billion) has been granted for an extension of Metrolink from East Didsbury to Stockport.

NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

The last class 142 Pacer train to be used in service on the Mid Cheshire Line (so far!) was on the 17.18 Stockport to Chester train on Monday 30th December 2019. One of the new Northern class 195 trains visited the Mid Cheshire Line on Friday 5th June when it ran empty from Newton Heath depot to Chester and returned empty from Chester to Huddersfield. ASLEF members agreed to a new deal on Sunday working on Northern in January 2020 and Sunday services returned to normal as from 26th January after a lengthy period with many cancellations. **Altrincham** station won the TfGM award at the 2019 Cheshire Best Kept Stations awards, the first time that the station has won such an award. A plaque was unveiled by the Mayor of Trafford on platform 4 at Altrincham on 13th February 2020.

LETTER FROM MEMBER ANDREW THELWELL

Gentlemen,

I have just read the winter edition (just delivered) and wanted to take the time to send my thanks for the work the group is doing overall and also for the effort put into the newsletter. Since joining MCRUA I have

found both the level of information, and the commitment of everyone concerned to be exemplary. I note that you felt the need to reassure people in the newsletter that the committee is active ...rest assured that you didn't need to reassure me.

I am hopeful that in the new political environment, with the promises currently being made about the railways and 'powering up the north' your task will be a little less thankless than it has been over recent years. The railways are a critical enabler of both business and society at large and you, and all other active officials and members, should be congratulated for keeping the importance of the Mid Cheshire line in the public eye. At this time of year, I wanted to reach out and let you know that your work is appreciated. I hope that you both have a wonderful Christmas and very best wishes for 2020 (with no pacer trains).
Kind regards, Andrew Thelwell

FARES NEWS

Saver Half Single (SVH). Avanti West Coast have withdrawn this useful ticket type from the May 2020 fares change. The ticket was available online only for one leg of a journey if an advance purchase single had been bought for one leg and no advance ticket was available for the other leg. The popular **Wayfarer ticket** increased in price from January 2020 to: Adult £14.40, Group (4 persons, no more than two of whom are adults) £28.80, English National Concessionary pass holders (including pensioner passes and all disability passes) £9.50 and children (aged 5 to 15) £7.20. Metrolink fares increased from 26th January. Off-peak day travelcards increased by 10p so the one for all four zones is now £4.90. A reminder that there are no evening peak fare restrictions on Metrolink.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

As you may have heard, Pacers are making a temporary comeback. The Department for Transport is allowing Northern to use 13 Class 142 Pacer trains along with 20 class 144 Pacers in passenger service until 31st December 2020 to enable greater social distancing on board trains. They must be coupled to a "compliant" unit which offers full disabled access except that they will be able to be used singly or in pairs on the Southport to Stalybridge/Alderley Edge service due to delays in the introduction of the class 769 trains (class 319 electric trains with a diesel engine installed). The Government recently announced funding for a feasibility study into reopening the Rochdale-Heywood-Bury line. A feasibility study into reopening the Skelton Junction to Glazebrook line was announced in March 2020. Class 323 electric trains have been maintained at the Transpennine Express Ardwick depot since the December 2019 timetable change. OLR (the Operator of Last Resort) took over the Northern franchise on 1st March 2020. We welcome **Nick Donovan** as the new Managing Director of Northern, which is now under direct Government control.

FREIGHT NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

Freightliner began using class 70 locomotives on the Greater Manchester binliner trains via the Mid Cheshire Line in February but then stored the whole of the class in April due to a downturn in traffic due to the virus. The Greater Manchester binliners then reverted to class 66 haulage. Freight traffic has remained at normal levels on the Mid Cheshire Line through the pandemic with the Liverpool Docks-Drax biomass, the Greater Manchester binliners to Runcorn, the Merseyside binliners from Knowsley to Wilton and the "hoppers" from Tunstead to Lostock all running normally. The Liverpool to Drax trains were briefly diverted via Piccadilly when paths became available due to fewer passenger trains operating because of the virus but were then switched back to the Mid Cheshire Line (apart from when the line has been blocked for engineering work). It is not clear why these trains have not continued to run via Piccadilly but it may be to do with pathing over the Diggle route (it is not possible to reach the Calder Valley route from Piccadilly without reversal) or the trains struggling with the climb over Diggle. **Fiddler's Ferry power station** near Widnes closed on 31st March 2020. There is said to be 15 years' worth of fly ash to be removed by rail to New Biggin/Kirkby Thore (north of Appleby). No coal remains on site. The power station provided a considerable amount of traffic for the railway during its long lifetime. The "low level" line through Warrington and on towards Liverpool may be used for "Northern Powerhouse Rail", formerly known as HS3, although it would require significant realignment to achieve higher speeds. The main building at the **Dean Lane** refuse transfer station at Newton Heath has been demolished and is being rebuilt. Rail traffic from there has temporarily ceased but will hopefully resume when the new building opens.

RAILFUTURE PROPOSAL FOR NEW FREIGHT TERMINAL AT CARRINGTON AND A NEW CURVE AT ADSWOOD by Andrew Macfarlane

Campaigning body Railfuture has come up with an interesting proposal to take freight trains away from the Castlefield corridor through Oxford Road and Piccadilly. They propose building a new container terminal at Carrington (which would at least partially replace the Trafford Park terminals) and reopening the line from there to Skelton Junction (Timperley). They also propose a new curve in the Adswood area (across the site of the former Adswood tip) to link the Northenden Junction to Hazel Grove line with the main line at Cheadle Hulme. This would enable container trains from Carrington to reach the main line without reversal. There would be a triangular junction with the Northenden-Hazel Grove line to enable stone traffic from the Peak District to head south without the current detour via Guide Bridge. Railfuture proposes electrification of the line from Cheadle Hulme to Carrington. The Carrington terminal would be able to handle 775 metre-long trains which Trafford Park cannot currently handle without splitting the train. The proposal is an interesting one which would free up capacity to run additional passenger trains through Oxford Road. Currently the hourly freight path through Oxford Road uses two passenger paths due to the length and low speed of container trains. The full report on the proposal can be found on the Railfuture website here: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2302>.

IN MEMORIAM

We regret to report the death of longstanding member **John Taylor** from Timperley on 5th October 2019. John was a regular passenger on our special trains. Member **Robert Fysh**, who latterly lived at the Woodend care home in Bowdon, died on 10th March 2020. Robert lived in Timperley for many years and he was an employee at the Beyer Peacock locomotive works in Gorton, Manchester in his younger days. A memorial service will be held for Robert when circumstances allow. Longstanding member **Don Ross** died on 21st February 2020 aged 92. Don had latterly been living in Northwich but he had lived in Knutsford for most of his life, being particularly known for his long association with the Liberal Club in the town. **Guy Harkin**, the former Vice-Chairman of the Greater Manchester Transport Authority and a longstanding Bolton councillor died on 11th January 2020.

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
Avanti West Coast 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	0800 200 6060 (0800-2100 Monday to Sunday)
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 (0800-2100 Monday to Sunday)
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.eastmidlandsrailway.co.uk (to buy any GB rail ticket using a credit or debit card)

www.tfgm.com (includes a Journey Planner 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.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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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. 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.**

You can change your mailing option by contacting the Membership Secretary at membership@mcrua.org.uk.