

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

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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.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS by John Oates

We are pleased to provide our latest "Rail Report" and, for those receiving this newsletter by post, a pocket timetable leaflet for the train service from 14th September to 12th December. We hope you are keeping well and safe.

As we move into the "new normal", we've seen an improvement to the very poor Mid Cheshire Line "Key Worker" timetable.

The timetable was increased from its basic "Key Worker" one train every two hours service on Monday 14 September, though with a small enhancement from Monday 31 August. In brief, services are now mainly hourly in the peaks with many trains strengthened to 4 coaches and trains starting earlier and finishing later. The service remains at once every two hours off peak. I'm pleased to let you know that Northern provided us with early notice of their proposed changes. We analysed these, identifying that with schools starting to reopen from 3 September and the timetable not being uplifted until 14 September, there could be a problem for the flow between Stockport, Altrincham and Knutsford. Northern sorted this by introducing from 31 August an 0818 train from Stockport to Chester, with this returning to Manchester as the 1002.

Our analysis of the proposed timetable from 14 September identified a particularly serious problem with there only being a 1502, then a 1702 from Chester, i.e. no 1602. The 1602 is a well-used train, especially from Greenbank (1627) with scholars especially from The Grange, Hartford as far as Altrincham, and then at 1644 from Knutsford with returning workers towards Trafford, Stockport and Manchester. On liaison with Northern, we suggested the stock for the 1002 from Chester be left there then later being used to work the 1602. Northern agreed to this.

Subsequent to this analysis, it quickly became clear there was a problem with there being no 1541 from Piccadilly towards Chester. The previous train, the 1441 calls at Navigation Road (1507), Altrincham (1510) and Hale (1513), all realistically too early for scholars to catch with 3pm finishes at Wellington School (Navigation Road), Altrincham Girls Grammar School and Loreto College (Altrincham) and Altrincham Grammar School for Boys (Hale). I'm delighted to say that after discussion with Northern from 21 September the 1441 service was retimed after Stockport leaving all stations 6 minutes later such that most returning scholars have a good chance of making the train, not having to wait 2 hours for the following train. The service cannot be held back for more than 6 minutes as it is followed by a Peak District to West Midlands freight train which needs to be on time due to restrictions later on its route. This change was publicised by our friends at the Knutsford and Northwich Guardians <https://www.knutsfordguardian.co.uk/news/18725727.rail-service-boost-northwich-knutsford-students/> and through that was picked up by the parent and scholar social media groups. There was also a problem quickly identified from 14 September with the 0709 Piccadilly-Chester as far as Greenbank being only 2 carriages and full and standing. Both Northern and we picked this up and from 16 September this service was increased to 4 coaches by reducing the length of a train on another line.

We've seen from documents published by TfGM that many lines will still not be returning to the normal timetable from the next timetable change of 13 December. For the Mid Cheshire Line, we understand the

services missing will be the peak hour extras. If this is so, this will fix the problem of having no 1541 for scholars returning into Cheshire from Navigation Road, Altrincham and Hale. However, there will still remain the problem of arrivals in Knutsford in the morning from the Chester direction being at 0735, then 0844. Knutsford Academy and The Studio start at 0845 with the gates opening around 0835, it being a 10-15 minute walk away. Thus, the 0844 arrival is too late and the 0735 too early. An hour before school in a potentially cold, wet, windy Knutsford is not what any parent would want their children to have to cope with in the early months of the year. We've already discussed this with Northern, but it seems there's little they can do not having enough carriages to run the current services mainly as 4-coaches and also the peak hour extras.

It will not surprise you to know we have now had to cancel our **Annual General Meeting** this year. Regular readers will know much of what would have been discussed at the AGM as much has already reported in these *Rail Reports* (older *Rail Reports* can be viewed through our website, with the previous issue being loaded on the latest issue being published). If members have questions / observations that they might have considered for our AGM, please send these to enquiries@mcrua.org.uk and we'll be back in touch.

Even though travel is below normal levels, we still have regular contact with Northern and others using the Zoom system. A number of developments have taken place since our June *Rail Report*. Greenbank station at last again has the real time train departure system replaced on the Chester-bound platform after it was "temporarily removed" three years ago. What's more, it's a TV screen modern system, rather than the older systems elsewhere along the line (though some stations still don't have any at all).

As we look forward to the autumn, though inevitably with a look towards the "new normal", take care and enjoy all that is lovely in mid-Cheshire.

MID CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP (CRP) NEWS by John Oates

Following the formation of the Community Interest Company (CIC) which now acts as the official body behind the CRP, the handover from Cheshire West & Chester Council is complete save for the final transfer of outstanding monies. This will probably have been completed by the time you read this.

The CRP was delighted when Knutsford Town Council proposed that Cllr Andrew Malloy, the current Town Mayor join the CIC as a Director. The CIC Board met, approving this and Andrew is now formally a CIC Director. As such, the Board now has four Directors, John Oates (from Mobberley) as Chair, John Hulme (from the Northwich area) concentrating on Marketing, PR and Finance, Brian Barnsley from the Community Rail Network (CRN) and Andrew (Knutsford).

At the last meeting of the CRP's Steering Group, the recruitment of a replacement Community Rail Officer was approved. That recruitment is now launched for a 5-days a week post based formally at Northwich Town Council's offices and with both home office working as well as working along the line. The advertisement has been widely circulated in the local media and by CRN. Details are on the CRP website under news - <https://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk/news/new-cro-officer/> with a closing date of 31 October 2020.

Even without a CRO, the CRP continues to achieve much as you'll read about elsewhere, though the CRP is looking forward to a new CRO being in place which should really help with strengthening local contacts throughout our mid-Cheshire communities and with the distribution of CRP publications.

Sadly, and unsurprisingly the CRP has had to cancel the Music Train programme for the whole of the 2020 season. Hopefully, things will be back to normal from next spring.

CHESHIRE'S WONDERFUL WILDLIFE by John Hulme

The Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership launched its latest Marvellous Days Out project, Cheshire's Wonderful Wildlife, at Tatton Park on Friday 2nd October 2020 with special guest David Briggs, the Lord-Lieutenant of Cheshire.

This new outdoor exhibition comprises a walking trail around a gallery of 12 iconic railway posters by acclaimed Cheshire artist Nicky Thompson portraying Cheshire's Wonderful Wildlife.

It follows on from the successful Marvellous Days Out posters already on our Mid Cheshire Line stations.

Following a route around the 50 acres of gardens at Tatton Park, children will be encouraged to draw their own favourite animal poster and the route is accompanied by a free 24 page full colour booklet written by the CRP.

The railway platform art will eventually be displayed along the Mid Cheshire Line where the booklets will become available at our staffed stations.

The exhibition runs from 3rd October to 15th November 2020.

Further details of the Gallery in the Park and a digital flip book of the Cheshire's Wonderful Wildlife booklet can be found at marvellousdaysout.org.uk

Garden entry tickets must be pre-booked at tattonpark.org.uk. National Trust members are admitted to the gardens free.

DECEMBER 2020 TIMETABLE by Andrew Macfarlane

We understand that Northern plans to re-introduce the hourly service on the Mid Cheshire Line from the start of the December timetable on 13th December. However, as John has mentioned above, the peak hour extra trains will not run. The Sunday service will remain every two hours.

OLD FRIENDS RETURN TO THE MID CHESHIRE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

As you may have seen/experienced from Monday 14th September our old friend the class 142 Pacer has returned to the line! I suspect that this will not be universally welcomed by all passengers, particularly on the busy 15.02 Chester to Piccadilly. Nine of the twenty-four daily trains on the Mid Cheshire Line are operated by a class 142 coupled to a class 150 Sprinter. Class 142s no longer operate to Sheffield due to the introduction of new class 195s on that service hence their transfer to the Mid Cheshire Line. The class 142s have been retained by Northern due to delays in bringing the class 769 bi-mode units (conversions of class 319 units with a diesel engine) into service. Northern currently have dispensation to use the 142s until 31st December but this may be extended. 142s are scheduled to be coupled to a class 150 on the 05.56 Chester to Piccadilly and also on the diagram beginning with the 06.51 Chester to Piccadilly. This then forms the 08.41 Piccadilly to Chester, the 11.02 Chester to Piccadilly, the 12.41 Piccadilly to Chester, the 15.02 Chester to Piccadilly, the 16.41 Piccadilly to Chester, the 19.00 Chester to Piccadilly and the 20.41 Piccadilly to Chester.

METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

Firstly a correction to the item in the previous newsletter about the Metrolink extension from East Didsbury to Stockport. I should have said that funding had been requested (rather than granted) for this. If funding approval is given, construction work could start in 2025. The first of the 27 new Metrolink trams from Bombardier is now said to be due to arrive in October 2020. There have been construction delays due to the virus. The free WiFi on Metrolink came to an end in June as a cost-saving measure (which has saved £1.3 million) and because young people were gathering at tram stops to use the WiFi. The section of the Bury line between Whitefield and Bury was converted to TMS operation (line of sight) from Monday 24th August. Trams now have to stop at Hagside Crossing (between Radcliffe and Bury) and proceed at 10mph over the crossing. Such is progress? The whole of the Bury line is now signalled under TMS so any of the 120 Metrolink trams can now operate the Piccadilly-Bury service. Since 24th August trams have run later with last services leaving Manchester around 23.30. The Altrincham-Bury through service remains suspended with all trams running from platform 1 at Altrincham to Piccadilly station. First and last tram times can be found on the TfGM website at <https://tfgm.com/public-transport/tram/tram-times>.

FARES NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

There may be a 1.6% increase in regulated rail fares in January 2021 but the Government may decide not to go ahead with this (hopefully). Northern are experimenting with flexible season tickets in Yorkshire (the Leeds-Harrogate line is one line where they are being trialled). These are more suited to those who are not going into work every day and they will hopefully be extended to our side of the Pennines.

NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

A new ticket vending machine was installed on the Chester-bound platform at **Hale** on 17th August. The car park at **Greenbank** station is to be resurfaced. A new ticket vending machine was installed inside the waiting shelter on the Chester-bound platform at Greenbank in September. Network Rail announced in May that the platforms at **Ashley** are to be extended so that longer trains can be accommodated. However since then the length of the Manchester-bound platform at Ashley has actually been reduced so it is not clear what is happening there. It was announced on 15th July that a funding bid had been submitted for a new station in **Cheadle** between Altrincham and Stockport. The previous Cheadle station on that line closed in 1917.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

Northern had planned to withdraw the train service from **Manchester Piccadilly to Rose Hill Marple via Hyde** completely from Monday 14th September to Sunday 13th December. Local councillors then arranged for West Coast Railways (Carnforth) to run the service (between Guide Bridge and Rose Hill) for a week from 14th September. In the event this didn't happen because Northern had a slight change of heart and chose to run three trains each way per day to Rose Hill for schoolchildren. Northern plan to introduce a service every 90 minutes on the Rose Hill line from 26th October and an hourly service from 14th December. The episode is a worrying example of what could happen to any service in the present circumstances. It was announced on 10th September that plans by Grand Central to start an open access service between **London Euston and Blackpool North** from May 2021 had been dropped due to the virus. This cancellation came at a late stage after staff had been recruited and class 90 electric locos and Mark IV stock had been re-liveried.

The famous **Stockport-Stalybridge service** restarted on Saturday 19th September after a gap in the service due to the virus. The train leaves Stockport at 09.45 and arrives at Stalybridge at 10.05. It only operates once a week on a Saturday in one direction only. There was a major failure of the **Manchester South signalling centre** on the evening of Wednesday 16th September. Disruption lasted until normal working was resumed on Monday 21st September. Luckily the Mid Cheshire Line service was not affected. Network Rail are replacing two bridges on the **Middlewich** line at Whatcroft. The Middlewich line was used for diversions of Crewe to Holyhead and vice versa Avanti West Coast services from 15th to 23rd August when the Crewe to Chester line was blocked for work on the Middlewich Road bridge at Crewe. **Liverpool-Norwich service**. On 19th August it was announced that the plan for TransPennine Express to operate part of this service between Liverpool and Nottingham from December 2021 had been dropped and the whole service would remain with East Midlands Railway. The service may still be split at Nottingham. **Northern** plans to restore 95% of its services from December.

FREIGHT NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

The Freightliner class 70s are back on some of the Greater Manchester binliner services (they often work the mid-morning service from Bredbury and the late evening service from Brindle Heath). Two new freight flows are due to start from North Wales in the fairly near future. These are slate waste from Llandudno Junction yard to Earles Sidings (near Hope Derbyshire), which may run via the Mid Cheshire Line and stone from Penmaenmawr to Theale (near Reading), operated by GB Railfreight, which will pass through Chester. A new flow of stone started on 25th August from Dowlow (south of Buxton) to Washwood Heath (Birmingham) operated by GB Railfreight for the construction of phase 1 of HS2. This train runs via Altrincham and the Middlewich line. HS2 plans to run up to 15,000 trains of aggregates over the next decade taking up to 1.5 million lorries off the roads. I checked the Realtime Trains website on a recent weekday and there were 51 paths for freight services passing Northenden Junction during the 24 hours. Not

all of these run every day of course but it demonstrates the quantity of freight trains now using the Mid Cheshire Line, an amazing increase on only a few years ago.

MID CHESHIRE LINE PEOPLE by Andrew Macfarlane

We say farewell to **Richard Allan**, the Deputy Managing Director of Northern, who is moving on in early October to become the Managing Director of Chiltern Trains. We wish him well in his new position. **Chris Ormiston**, who worked part-time for cleaning contractor ISS at Altrincham, left on 21st July to take up a full-time job with ISS on the Buxton line. We thank him for his good work at Altrincham (which helped the station to win the award mentioned last time) and wish him well for the future. We welcome his successor **Nicky** to Altrincham.

IN MEMORIAM by Andrew Macfarlane

We regret to report the sudden death of **Chris Dale**, the Chairman of TravelWatch NorthWest for the last 12 years, on 22nd June. Chris, who lived in Macclesfield, will be much missed for his great knowledge of all things public transport, his friendliness and his sense of humour.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS?

If you have any suggestions or comments on MCRUA's work please send these to secretary@mcrua.org.uk.

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).

YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

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

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

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY Paul Wilkinson, 48 Romana Square, Altrincham, WA14 5QB.
Email: membership@mcrua.org.uk

TREASURER Simon Barber Tel: 01606 801606, Email: simon@antrobus.net

NEWSLETTER EDITOR Andrew Macfarlane, 25 Prestbury Avenue, Timperley, Altrincham, WA15 8HY.
Tel: 0161-928-9394, Email: andrew.macfarlane6851@gmail.com.

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@outlook.com

Harry Boardman 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

Judie Collins Email: judieco@hotmail.com

Mid Cheshire Rail Link Campaign Sub-Committee. Chairman: Stephen H Dent. Telephone: 07710 288824. Email: stephenhdent@outlook.com.

MID-CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Email: railofficer@midcheshirerail.org.uk

Postal address: c/o Northwich Town Council, 78 Church Road, Northwich CW9 5PB.

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

FRIENDS OF ALTRINCHAM INTERCHANGE – Please contact Andrew Macfarlane.

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

MCRUA MEMBERSHIP There are five classes of membership of the Association:

Individual under 21 years - £2.00, Individual 21 years and over - £8.00, Family - £11.00, Voluntary body - £20.00 and Corporate - £100.00.

You can join online at www.mcrua.org.uk/membership. 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.