

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. We are also on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Mid-Cheshire-Rail-Users-Association-MCRUA-124008736132899>.

AN HOURLY TRAIN SERVICE WILL RUN ON THE MID CHESHIRE LINE FROM 17TH MAY

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS by John Oates

Welcome to our latest *Rail Report* coinciding with the introduction of the **Summer Timetable from 16 May** – Northern are again not printing timetable leaflets. Sadly, neither is the Community Rail Partnership though this is understandable as the previous one it printed only lasted for a few weeks before again being reduced to every two hours due to COVID. We have uploaded the timetables at – <https://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk/timetables/> together with those for our **Crewe-Winsford-Hartford-Acton Bridge services** provided by London Northwestern. The Mid Cheshire Line returns to an approximately hourly service without the peak hour extras and with most services reduced to two carriages from four. We have no indication of when the peak hour extras will be returning or of how long this timetable will last, all of which no doubt depends on how we all progress in the fight against COVID.

We are very sorry to find ourselves reporting the death of **Richard Bragg**, our Committee member from Knutsford. Richard had been ill for some time though had battled on. John Hulme represented both MCRUA and the CRP at his funeral on 9th April. Our thoughts are with Richard's wife, Julia and family and friends. John has written about Richard below. We will miss Richard's contributions at Committee Meetings.

MCRUA's immediate **Short-Term Campaign** is to get the **full hourly service together with peak hour extras** returned, as well as the implementation of the long-promised **Sunday hourly service** up from the current service of one every two hours. This was due from December 2017. As most of you know, we have a number of **longer-term campaigns** which have been running for many years. We have written about these separately below. You can view a version including a map for the **Airport Western Link** on our website here – <https://www.mcrua.org.uk/campaigns/>

When our new Community Rail Officer, Sarah Morgan joined the **Community Rail Partnership** last November her immediate priorities were to build up contacts with all the CRP volunteers along the line as well as preparing the CRP for Department for Transport (DfT) Accreditation. Whilst the increased contact with volunteers has inevitably been restricted due to COVID, we are delighted to let you know the CRP achieved **DfT Accreditation from 1 April 2021**, quite an achievement. Mid Cheshire CRP is now one of only around half of English CRPs now accredited. Well Done, Sarah! Read more about the CRP in Sarah's report below.

Michael Ross, our **Music Trains** Organiser is sorry to let you know that currently no Music Trains are planned for this summer for the obvious COVID-related reasons. Hopefully, restrictions will ease enough for us to be able to start up again by the autumn – maybe in a modified format.

We await the deliberations of the **Manchester Rail Recovery Task Force**. For those not subscribed to our email e-letters in between *Rail Reports*, this task force was established by DfT and Network Rail following

the “May 2018 North West Timetable Meltdown” to put forward recommendations for producing in the shorter-term a more reliable railway without infrastructure improvements. Three options A, B and C were put forward (as well as “do nothing”). We know many of you made submissions by the due date, as did MCRUA. We expect some form of outcome to be announced following the “purdah” period prior to the May elections. Option C is by far the most favourable for the Mid Cheshire Line and also the most favourable overall to provide more reliable train services in and around Manchester. There is currently an impediment to “two trains an hour” on the Mid Cheshire Line, this being three “user-worked” (farm) crossings which need upgrading. Network Rail have assured the CRP that if Option C is chosen the crossings will be upgraded before the date of the implementation of the revised timetable, currently planned for May 2022.

That’s it from me. Enjoy reading the articles below in our *Rail Report*. If you have questions or comments, please use the enquiries form on our website – <https://www.mcrua.org.uk/contact-us/> or email or write to any of our committee members – details on the back page.

Have a great summer!

COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER’S REPORT by Sarah Morgan

Station activities

Station Friends Groups have been advised that station activities can now recommence with written permission from Rebecca Styles at Northern (Rebecca.Styles@northernrailway.co.uk). Several groups have now recommenced activities and the Friends of Altrincham Interchange have been particularly active with new planters and poem displays. A new volunteer has also started at Ashley station this month and has received a safety briefing. Northern have provided hi-vis vests for station adopters and have offered to provide safety briefings for groups which have not received safety guidance previously. If anyone would like to join a local Station Friends group on the Mid Cheshire Line, please get in touch (contact details are below).

Accreditation of the Community Rail Partnership

Accreditation of the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership (CRP) has now been approved by the Department for Transport through the Community Rail Network. This will need reassessing for renewal on an annual basis and the Line Plan will be reviewed regularly by the Partnership.

Accreditation enables the CRP to access additional funding from the CRN and will also offer the opportunity for the partnership to formally take on additional stations, subject to agreement by the Train Operator.

New Funding opportunities – Access Fund updates

The fund has now closed to applications to allow Northern time to process the applications received. Several funding applications have been submitted for the Mid Cheshire Line and we await the outcome of these applications.

Northern have confirmed that they are not able to consider applications for tactile paving or Harrington humps under this scheme due to the high costs of these works, but we are aware that some of the platform edgings have recently been repainted following concerns being raised about these having worn away.

Although enquiries were made about the costs of removing the stepped access at Mouldsworth, it was not possible to acquire quotations in time for an application to be made.

Petty Pool College have asked for the CRP to consider how the timetable information could be made more accessible for Delamere and this will be explored with MenCap and Northern.

Northwich Station

The CRP and MCRUA attended a workshop where several options for making the station accessible for wheelchair users were discussed. A report will now be drawn up by CW&C with costings for the preferred options. Since this meeting, the CRO has also developed links with the Cheshire Disabled People's Panel and looks forward to working with this group to continue the work to improving accessibility.

The wildlife art trail at Vickersway Park in Northwich is being progressed in partnership with the CWT and Northwich Town Council and will build the connection from the station to the park, which also connects with a [Rail Walk](#) from Northwich Station.

Knutsford Station

Renovation works are taking place at Station House, which is privately owned, and the CRP is liaising with the building owner and Network Rail regarding the ongoing works which will be a great improvement to the

station. The CRO is also looking into improvements at and around the station including the potential installation of heritage boards, signage and new map boards. The Station Friends group are also working closely with the CRP on station improvements which will support the Knutsford In Bloom entry for the town. It has not been possible to run the Music Trains over the last year, but the organiser of the events, Michael Ross, is liaising with the organisers of the Knutsford Music Festival to bring Music Train musicians to the festival. The CRP has also sponsored the [Knutsford Music Festival](#) to promote the Mid Cheshire Line to those attending the festival.

Cheshire Best Kept Stations

The Mid Cheshire Line Awards are now due to be presented at stations on 27th May. Details of the winners are on the [Cheshire Best Kept Station Website](#)

Sustainable Transport Task Force

Cheshire West and Chester have set up a new Task Force with the following objective: -

To identify and make recommendations to the Council on ways to create high quality places and communities that support town centre economies together with general health and wellbeing through the improved delivery of ambitious inclusive walking, cycling, public transport and integrated transport projects in Cheshire West and Chester. We have made initial enquires about working with the Task Force and look forward to supporting with this.

Covid Recovery

Covid Rail recovery is the hot topic at the moment and focusing on leisure travel is going to be a key focus area, as well as promoting flexible commuter options for those returning gradually to working in the office.

The CRP is awaiting the green light to encourage rail travel and will be working on promoting the fantastic leisure destinations on the Mid Cheshire Line as well as working on joint promotions with other Community Rail Partnerships which share stations at Chester, Stockport and Manchester Piccadilly. We are now on Instagram @midcheshirecrp and on Twitter @CrpMid, so please give us a follow and tag us when you are taking a trip out on or around the line.

MAY 2021 TIMETABLE by Andrew Macfarlane

A new national rail timetable starts on Sunday 16th May. As John Oates has mentioned above, the train service on the Mid Cheshire Line reverts to the normal hourly timetable and early and late trains are reinstated. There are two trains towards Chester in the morning peak which are just over half an hour apart, the 07.08 Piccadilly to Chester and the new 07.41 Piccadilly to Chester. Sunday services remain unchanged at every two hours. Avanti West Coast will be running two trains per hour between Manchester Piccadilly and London Euston until September (instead of the usual three trains per hour). The new timetable for the Mid Cheshire Line is below.

MONDAYS TO FRIDAYS FROM 17TH MAY TO 10TH DECEMBER 2021

Manchester Piccadilly	0614	0708	0741	0840	0941	1040	1141	1241	1341	1440
Stockport	0623	0718	0751	0852	0952	1052	1152	1252	1352	1452
Navigation Road	0638	0734	0807	0907	1007	1107	1207	1307	1407	1507
Altrincham	0640	0736	0810	0910	1010	1110	1210	1310	1410	1510
Hale	0643	0739	0814	0913	1013	1113	1212	1313	1413	1513
Ashley	0647	0743	0819	0916	1016	1116	1216	1316	1416	1516
Mobberley	0650	0747	0824	0920	1020	1120	1219	1320	1420	1520
Knutsford	0655	0752	0828	0925	1025	1125	1224	1325	1425	1525
Plumley	0700	0756	0833	0929	1029	1129	1228	1329	1429	1529
Lostock Gralam	0703	0800	0836	0933	1033	1133	1232	1333	1433	1533
Northwich	0708	0805	0841	0937	1037	1137	1236	1337	1437	1537
Greenbank	0713	0810	0846	0943	1043	1143	1242	1343	1443	1543
Cuddington	0718	0815	0851	0948	1048	1148	1247	1348	1448	1548
Delamere	0723	0820	0855	0953	1053	1153	1252	1353	1453	1553
Mouldsworth	0728	0826	0900	0958	1059	1158	1257	1358	1458	1558
Chester	0742	0838	0912	1010	1114	1210	1309	1412	1511	1610

Manchester Piccadilly	1541	1640	1741	1841	1940	2040	2140	2242	2341
Stockport	1552	1652	1752	1852	1952	2054	2152	2257	2354
Navigation Road	1607	1707	1807	1907	2008	2109	2208	2313	0008
Altrincham	1610	1710	1810	1910	2010	2112	2211	2315	0011
Hale	1613	1713	1812	1912	2013	2114	2213	2318	0013
Ashley	1616	1716	1816	1916	2016	2118	2217	2321	0017
Mobberley	1620	1720	1819	1919	2020	2121	2221	2325	0020
Knutsford	1625	1725	1824	1924	2024	2126	2226	2329	0025
Plumley	1629	1729	1829	1929	2029	2130	2230	2334	0030
Lostock Gralam	1633	1733	1832	1932	2032	2134	2234	2337	0033
Northwich	1637	1737	1837	1937	2037	2138	2238	2342	0038
Greenbank	1643	1743	1842	1942	2042	2143	2243	2347	0043
Cuddington	1648	1748	1847	1947	2047	2148	2248	2352	0048
Delamere	1653	1753	1852	1952	2052	2153	2253	2356	0053
Mouldsworth	1658	1758	1857	1957	2057	2158	2305	0001	0058
Chester	1711	1810	1909	2010	2110	2214	2315	0014	0109

Saturday times can vary by a few minutes from the times shown above.

SUNDAYS FROM 16TH MAY TO 5TH DECEMBER

Manchester Piccadilly	0904	1100b	1306	1506	1706	1906	2106		
Stockport	0920	1112	1318	1518	1716	1917	2118		
Navigation Road	0934	1127	1332	1533	1731	1931	2133		
Altrincham	0937	1129	1334	1536	1733	1934	2135		
Hale	0939	1132	1337	1538	1736	1936	2138		
Ashley	0943	1136	1341	1542	1740	1940	2141		
Mobberley	0947	1139	1344	1546	1743	1944	2145		
Knutsford	0952	1144	1349	1551	1748	1949	2150		
Plumley	0956	1149	1354	1555	1753	1953	2155		
Lostock Gralam	1000	1153	1358	1559	1757	1957	2159		
Northwich	1005	1157	1402	1604	1801	2002	2203		
Greenbank	1010	1203	1408	1609	1807	2007	2209		
Cuddington	1015	1208	1413	1614	1812	2012	2214		
Delamere	1020	1213	1418	1619	1817	2017	2219		
Mouldsworth	1026	1219	1424	1625	1823	2023	2225		
Chester	1039	1230	1435	1639	1833	2034	2235		

b – 1101 from 19th September.

MONDAYS TO FRIDAYS FROM 17TH MAY TO 10TH DECEMBER

Chester	0556	0648	0802	0902	1002	1102	1202	1302	1402	1502
Mouldsworth	0607	0700	0813	0913	1013	1113	1213	1313	1413	1513
Delamere	0613	0705	0818	0918	1018	1118	1218	1318	1418	1518
Cuddington	0617	0710	0823	0923	1023	1123	1223	1323	1423	1523
Greenbank	0622	0715	0827	0927	1027	1127	1227	1327	1427	1527
Northwich	0628	0720	0833	0933	1033	1133	1233	1333	1433	1533
Lostock Gralam	0631	0723	0836	0936	1036	1136	1236	1336	1436	1536
Plumley	0634	0727	0839	0939	1039	1139	1239	1339	1439	1539
Knutsford	0640	0733	0844	0944	1044	1144	1244	1344	1444	1544
Mobberley	0644	0738	0849	0949	1049	1149	1249	1349	1449	1549
Ashley	0648	0742	0852	0952	1052	1152	1252	1352	1452	1552
Hale	0652	0746	0856	0956	1056	1156	1256	1356	1456	1556
Altrincham	0656	0750	0900	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600

Navigation Road	0658	0752	0902	1002	1102	1202	1302	1402	1502	1602
Stockport arrive	0712	0808	0916	1016	1116	1216	1316	1416	1516	1616
Levenshulme	-	-	0923	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manchester Piccadilly	0726	0817	0930	1030	1130	1230	1330	1430	1530	1630
Chester	1602	1702	1801	1900	2001	2102	2200	2252		
Mouldsworth	1613	1713	1813	1912	2012	2113	2213	2304		
Delamere	1618	1718	1818	1917	2017	2118	2218	2310		
Cuddington	1623	1723	1823	1922	2022	2123	2223	2314		
Greenbank	1627	1727	1827	1926	2026	2127	2227	2319		
Northwich	1633	1733	1833	1932	2032	2133	2233	2325		
Lostock Gralam	1636	1736	1836	1935	2035	2136	2236	2328		
Plumley	1639	1739	1839	1938	2038	2139	2239	2331		
Knutsford	1644	1744	1844	1944	2044	2145	2244	2337		
Mobberley	1649	1749	1849	1948	2048	2149	2249	2341		
Ashley	1652	1752	1852	1952	2052	2153	2252	2345		
Hale	1656	1756	1856	1956	2056	2157	2256	2349		
Altrincham	1700	1800	1900	2000	2100	2201	2300	2353		
Navigation Road	1702	1802	1902	2002	2102	2203	2302	2355		
Stockport arrive	1716	1816	1916	2016	2116	2217	2316	0012		
Manchester Piccadilly	1730	1830	1930	2030	2134	2233	2327	0026		

Saturday times can vary by a few minutes.

SUNDAYS FROM 16TH MAY TO 5TH DECEMBER

		Y	X						
Chester	0904	1056	1058	1259	1504	1709	1905	2059	
Mouldsworth	0915	1107	1110	1310	1515	1720	1916	2110	
Delamere	0920	1113	1116	1316	1521	1725	1922	2116	
Cuddington	0925	1117	1120	1320	1525	1730	1926	2120	
Greenbank	0929	1122	1125	1325	1530	1735	1931	2125	
Northwich	0935	1128	1131	1331	1536	1740	1937	2131	
Lostock Gralam	0938	1131	1134	1334	1539	1743	1940	2134	
Plumley	0941	1135	1138	1338	1543	1747	1944	2138	
Knutsford	0947	1140	1143	1343	1548	1752	1949	2143	
Mobberley	0951	1145	1148	1348	1553	1756	1953	2148	
Ashley	0955	1148	1151	1351	1556	1800	1957	2151	
Hale	0958	1152	1155	1355	1600	1804	2000	2155	
Altrincham	1002	1156	1159	1359	1604	1808	2004	2159	
Navigation Road	1004	1158	1202	1402	1607	1810	2006	2202	
Stockport arrive	1019	1213	1216	1417	1628	1829	2021	2217	
Heaton Chapel	-	-	1222	1425	-	-	2025	-	
Levenshulme	-	-	1226	1428	-	-	2028	-	
Manchester Piccadilly	1032	1226	1236	1435	1640	1838	2037	2228	

Y – runs from 19th September

X – runs until 12th September

RICHARD JOHN BRAGG a tribute by John Hulme

We are saddened to report the passing of Richard Bragg a long-time MCRUA Committee Member from Knutsford. Richard read Law at Hull University and went on to become a Lecturer in Law at Manchester University where his expertise was Consumer and Contract law.

Richard was a passionate railway enthusiast, with a particular interest in the East Lancashire Railway, and became active on the Mid Cheshire Line as a passenger counter after retirement. When Richard joined the MCRUA Committee he provided much legal knowhow and was the author of our current constitution.

Richard was active in Knutsford both within MCRUA and in public representing the user in pushing for our two trains an hour campaign, the withdrawal of Pacers and the inadequacy of services for scholars. He will be greatly missed by the MCRUA Committee and those in Knutsford where he was a volunteer at the railway station.

A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Richard was held at The Birches Crematorium at Lostock Green, Northwich on Friday 9th April 2021. MCRUA sends its condolences to his wife Julia, children, and grandchildren.

MCRUA's LONG RUNNING CAMPAIGNS

At MCRUA, we believe our principal role is to campaign for better train services, better trains and better stations for the travellers of Mid Cheshire and indeed for all areas served by our two railway lines - the Mid Cheshire Line and the Crewe-Winsford-Hartford-Liverpool line. We have had some success over the years, with the re-instatement of twice-hourly train services at Hartford (until curtailed by the Covid-19 crisis), the elimination of most four-hour timetable gaps and the start of new Sunday services at Acton Bridge, and of course the replacement of the Pacers. We also have three long-running campaigns, which are still active though they may not always be visible to our members. In this article we offer a status report on each of these.

Two Trains an Hour and Hourly Sunday Services on the Mid Cheshire Line

This is a campaign that we all thought we had won in 2015, when this level of service was specified as part of the Minimum Train Service Requirement for the Northern franchise which includes the Mid Cheshire Line. Northern was required to - and by contracting, agreed to - operate hourly trains on Sundays and two trains an hour on weekdays starting in December 2017.

The Sunday service has not started because, unlikely as it may sound, Sunday working was not part of the drivers' working week. Northern was relying on volunteers to operate the service, and there were not enough. Amazing as it seems to those of us outside the railway industry, the train operator had contracted to deliver a service despite knowing that they had not got the resource to do it. Northern has negotiated new contracts with train crew since then but these are not yet fully in force. We expect the hourly Sunday trains to start when these contracts are in force from the [December 2021 timetable change](#).

The second hourly train on weekdays was required to run limited stop between Manchester and Northwich. Northern committed in their contract to extend it to Greenbank, and we were pushing them to extend it to Chester. It would not be fair to say that Northern didn't try. The service start was delayed by Network Rail's late completion of the Bolton line electrification, which tied up diesel trains and prevented improvements to diesel lines like ours. But Northern did eventually plan a two trains per hour service between Manchester and Greenbank, with one being limited stop. For MCRUA, John Oates and Simon Barber met Northern's senior timetable planner to review their proposed timetable. We saw it and offered comments on the calling pattern, the times of the first and last trains, and peak hour departure times. All seemed set fair for service start in 2018, but then Network Rail refused permission saying that the rail network was too congested and they could not offer Northern the train paths for the service. It was odd that Network Rail had not said so previously and instead had led Northern to plan the service in detail. Northern could do nothing about this but suggested instead a limited stop service between Altrincham and Chester which would provide two trains an hour at the principal Mid Cheshire stations, with faster journeys to Altrincham and Chester. Although very disappointing that these trains would not provide a faster service to Manchester, this would still be a worthwhile improvement. However, Network Rail intervened again and refused Northern permission to operate this service, saying that there were farm occupation crossings on the line that due to recently introduced revised safety standards needed upgrades before more passenger trains could run. Again, Network Rail had not mentioned this before and nor had they taken steps pro-actively to upgrade the crossings, despite knowing since 2015 that the extra trains were a franchise

commitment. Network Rail now has a plan to upgrade the crossings but say it has been delayed by Covid. We continue to press Network Rail via the CRP about this and are hopeful that the Altrincham-Chester extra service will be able to start. However, if the changes suggested under Option C of the Manchester Rail Recovery Task Force are chosen, these extra services would instead be provided by Transport for Wales through their North Wales to Manchester service running via the Mid Cheshire Line calling at Northwich, Knutsford, Altrincham and Stockport rather than travelling via Warrington. If Option C is chosen, these services are anticipated to start from the May 2022 timetable change.

We should add that since the 2015 franchise contract was placed, the Department for Transport (DfT) has taken back control of Northern and the franchise contract is therefore no longer in force. The train service that operates in future may not be the same as expected. MCRUA continues to watch this very closely and to maintain contact with all those who may influence the future service pattern - including MPs, borough councils and transport authorities.

The Mid Cheshire Rail Link Campaign, also known as The Middlewich Line

The Mid Cheshire Rail Link campaign (a sub-committee of MCRUA) is campaigning for the re-opening to passengers of the freight railway line between Northwich and Sandbach stations, with new stations at Middlewich and Gadbrook Park (at Rudheath, near Northwich) and through trains from Mid Cheshire to Crewe. This is making progress, slowly. The idea caught the attention of previous Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, who spoke in its favour and asked Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership ("the LEP") to commission a feasibility study.

There is a defined process for rail re-openings, which has multiple stages and is inevitably lengthy. The LEP commissioned WSP consultants to do a feasibility study, which was completed two years ago and recommended progress to the next stage... which the DfT accepted, and so the LEP commissioned a Strategic Outline Business Case, which was completed in March 2020 and sent to the DfT for the next decision. After many months the DfT decided to ask the LEP to update the SOBC and re-submit it. In parallel with this the DfT had announced a fund, 'Restoring Your Railway', which exists to fund studies into re-opening closed railways. This is often misunderstood as a 'reversing the Beeching cuts' fund, but it isn't; it's only to part-fund studies and as mentioned this is a multi-stage process. The LEP did not apply for money from the first two tranches of 'Restoring Your Railway' because the Middlewich re-opening was already more advanced than the studies that the fund was meant to support. However, a third tranche of funds has been announced and DfT suggested that the LEP apply for funds from it to cover the re-work of the Strategic Outline Business Case. This has been done... but the DfT has delayed announcing any decisions on spending this tranche of funds! A decision on funding is not now expected until July, by which time it will be 16 months since the last report was submitted to them. Truly, you need epic persistence and the patience of a saint to win campaigns such as this; our friends at North Cheshire Rail Users Group campaigned for 40 years to secure the re-opening of the Halton Curve to passenger trains!

Manchester Airport Western Link

The Manchester Airport Western Link is the name for the 3.5 mile connection between the existing Manchester Airport rail station and Mobberley on the Mid Cheshire Line, which was proposed by British Rail in the early 1990s before privatisation. This was part of the original Manchester Airport rail link project. Only the eastern part (Heald Green to Manchester Airport) was built owing to economies in the run-up to privatisation, but provision was made at Manchester Airport station for future completion of the Western Link, and Manchester Airport agreed to protect the necessary route across their land - which they still do.

The link provides a shorter and more direct route between Mid Cheshire and Manchester Piccadilly, via the airport, 6 miles shorter than the present route via Stockport. Because the Mid Cheshire Line is well connected to other lines, many places could benefit from this. In particular, it would provide a far shorter route from Chester and North Wales to the airport. It would be a remarkable 21 miles shorter than the present route from Chester which is via Warrington Bank Quay and the Castlefield corridor. Today's journey time of 84 minutes from Chester to the airport on the TfW through service could be cut to about 40 minutes via the Mid Cheshire Line and the Western Link.

For stations from Mobberley westwards, this would provide a much faster route to central Manchester. In fact the distance from Mobberley to Piccadilly via the Western Link is the same as it was on the previous, now Metrolink, route via Sale. If we assume that passenger traffic on the Mid Cheshire Line returns to the growth rates we saw up to 2016 (when disruption caused by strikes started), and that the opening of the new link would generate more traffic and cause some other services to be diverted over the Mid Cheshire Line (e.g. Manchester to North Wales trains), we could easily imagine stations such as Knutsford meriting four trains per hour by the time the link is opened. The current thinking is that half of these would take the new link and the other half take the Altrincham route.

The Western Link has benefits for Greater Manchester. By transferring Mid Cheshire trains to a new route, capacity would be freed up at Stockport. Manchester Airport station would become a through station with some existing services extending westward to Cheshire and into Wales, which would increase its operational capacity. Of course, Greater Manchester may pursue its plans for tram trains in parallel. Maybe through trains from Cheshire to Manchester will run via the new link, and tram trains would operate from Knutsford to Altrincham, Manchester and Stockport? The Altrincham to Stockport railway could be integrated with Metrolink as a tram train service (not a full Metrolink conversion as it would continue to be a route for rail freight).

Rail planners and consultants are well aware of the proposed link but it lacks a major sponsor. We believe this is because the proposed route crosses the boundary between two transport authorities - Greater Manchester and Cheshire East - meaning that the benefits are split between two boroughs (and beyond), and neither has taken the lead. The Western Link is included in Transport for the North's (TfN's) 'long list' of potential rail interventions.

The recent report by Peter Hendy (at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/union-connectivity-review-interim-report>) acknowledges the Western Link idea and its potential benefit in providing economic links between the towns of north-east Wales and north-west England as well as Manchester Airport. There are many cross-border economic links with many people crossing the England-Wales border for work. The report argues that these links should be improved and running train services to Manchester Airport and Manchester via the Western Link is one of the ideas proposed. At the time of writing the report is with the government for consideration.

At MCRUA, we are grateful for all support for the Western Link. We campaign to keep it in the public eye and get it built.

FRIENDS OF ALTRINCHAM INTERCHANGE by Judie Collins and Ian Stuart

Among the Friends groups along The Mid Cheshire Line there are three stations in Trafford which have one such group covering Altrincham (Tram, Train and Bus), Navigation Road (Tram and Train) and Hale (just Train). Whilst the trams are busiest during term time they provide the best way (discounting pandemic restrictions) to get into the city centre throughout the day and into the evenings. The trains are also especially busy during term time and the hourly service is a key transport link for a dozen mid Cheshire towns and villages all the way from Stockport through to Chester.

Within Friends of Altrincham Interchange, all three Trafford stations have enthusiastic groups of volunteers which are well supported by both MCRUA and Sarah Morgan, our new CRO based in Knutsford. Friends of Altrincham Interchange work with Northern, TfGM and Network Rail as well as Metrolink and Trafford Council. The group has remained busy throughout lockdown with the newly created Poetry Noticeboards (on platform 4 and in the booking hall), Artwork and gardening, the latter having resulted in a number of new planters on platform 4. Thank you to Bev Robinson's team for all the hard work they have done. Regular readers will have learned about the impressive work done by Jon Leigh at Hale who receives excellent on site support from Elaine. Two years ago a memorial planter was set up on platform four for Martyn Hett, who died in the Manchester Arena bombing. Martyn was a regular traveller on the Mid Cheshire Line as he travelled between his home near Stockport and his job in the centre of Altrincham. There are now plans for a project linking the Interchange with 'The Bravest Little Street in England' celebrations later this year. We are always looking for new volunteers who we make welcome at our bi-

monthly meetings (under normal circumstances) so, whether or not you live in the immediate area, if you appreciate the work being done by FoAI, why not get in touch through our Facebook page.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS by Paul Wilkinson

MCRUA MEMBERSHIP 2021 Thank you for your continuing support.

Please check your membership number shown on address label /email address line. If it starts:

20xxx your membership has run out on 1st March 2021. A renewal form is attached.

21xxx your membership has been renewed, thank you - do nothing.

The membership year runs from 1st March each year. The subscriptions for 2021 remain unchanged. 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 - £25.00

Corporate - £100.00

It is recognised that costs of running MCRUA are rising – principally the distribution of the Rail Report in printing and distribution. We continue to offer the Rail report as a printed document sent by post. To reduce costs, members can **OPT-IN** to receive electronic distribution of the Rail Report and other notices. You can change your mailing option (postal, email or both) by contacting the Membership Secretary at: membership@mcrua.org.uk.

Thank you to all those members who have added a donation when renewing their membership. It is appreciated.

LATE NIGHT ENGINEERING WORK IN JUNE by Andrew Macfarlane

Now that we have a full train service again (apart from the peak hour extras!) we again have the last trains in each direction replaced by buses every six weeks due to planned engineering work. This happens from Monday 7th June to Thursday 10th June when the 22.52 train from Chester to Piccadilly and the 23.41 train from Piccadilly to Chester are each replaced by two buses. The buses which start from Chester and Piccadilly stop to set down only after Knutsford. Buses also start from Knutsford to both Chester and Piccadilly calling at all stations.

FREIGHT NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

A 90-megawatt Energy from Waste (EfW) plant is under construction at Lostock Works, Northwich on the site of the former coal-fired Lostock power station, which closed in 2000. Planning permission for the plant was granted in 2012 and one of the conditions of the planning consent was that a rail link had to be built into the site. This will of course be fairly easy to provide because the adjacent Lostock soda ash plant is already rail connected. However it is not clear whether any use will be made of the rail link into the EfW plant. Until recently the plant's operators FCC Environment were saying that all of the feedstock for the plant (potentially up to 728,000 tonnes per year) would be brought in by road, which would of course bring additional noise, pollution and danger to local roads. Recently a public announcement was made that rail is now being considered. It would surely be ludicrous to build a rail link into the site and then not to use it. Let's hope that common sense prevails. The plant is due to start operating in late 2023. TATA Chemicals Europe is to build a new sodium bicarbonate plant at Winnington (near Northwich). As far as we know this will not provide any rail traffic. The remaining two coal-fired units at Drax power station in Yorkshire were taken out of use at the end of March. A plan to replace these units with gas-fired generation has now been dropped and it is unclear what the plan now is. If the two units are converted to burn biomass it could mean even more biomass trains using the Mid Cheshire Line en route from Liverpool Docks to Drax (there are currently six per day). Vegetation clearance has started at Llandudno Junction yard in preparation for the start of slate waste traffic from there to Earles Sidings (near Hope Derbyshire). This traffic may be routed via the Mid Cheshire Line. Freightliner ran a 3,600-tonne "Jumbo" stone train from Tunstead (Peak Forest) to Wembley via the Mid Cheshire Line and the Middlewich line on the night of 16th March. The train was hauled by 70017 with 66620 dead inside and consisted of 39 loaded wagons. It was 600 metres long. On arrival at Wembley, the train was split with half going to Paddington New Yard and half to Stewarts Lane (Battersea). The stone was for HS2 construction and road building. A second jumbo train ran on 27th April. This was hauled by 70006 and weighed 3,950 tonnes. A third jumbo train ran on 5th May, the heaviest yet. This consisted of 44 wagons weighing 4,234 tonnes containing 3,100 tonnes of aggregate. Haulage was by 66604 and 66603.

METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

New trams 3121 to 3123 are now in service. Tram 3124 arrived at Queens Road depot on 30th March. The new TMS signalling at Timperley was tested on Sunday 14th March but it was not commissioned. Hopefully when the new signalling is commissioned we will see the end of the 10mph speed restriction for inbound trams north of Deansgate Lane crossing, which has been in place for around 20 years. The former BR crossover at Old Trafford, once controlled by the Warwick Road ground frame, was removed over the weekend of 10th and 11th April. Engineering work is to take place at Cornbrook on Saturday 15th May and Sunday 16th May. Trams will run between Altrincham and Old Trafford with a replacement bus service between Old Trafford and Piccadilly station. It is rumoured that the Altrincham to Bury through service may restart in July. Trams are still running every 10 minutes on every line during the day on Monday to Saturday and every 20 minutes in the evening. They run every 15 minutes on Sundays. During Monday to Saturday daytime trams leave platform 1 at Altrincham at 01, 11, 21, 31, 41 and 51 minutes past each hour.

TRAM AND TRAIN PAYMENT EXTENDED TO 21ST JUNE

If you are a Greater Manchester resident and paid the £10 for tram and train last year you may not be aware that the payment has been extended to 21st June. You can renew the payment from seven days before that date or you can wait until just before you plan to start using the tram or train again. The payment lasts for a calendar year from when you renew. You can renew at bus station Travelshops (including Altrincham station booking office) or by ringing 0161 244 1000.

FARES NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

There was a 2.6% national rail fare increase on 1st March. The popular Wayfarer ticket increased in price to adult £14.70, English National Concessionary Travel Scheme pass holder (Pensioner or Disability) £9.70, child (aged 5 to 15) £7.35 and group (up to four people no more than two of whom are adults) £29.40. The GM Rail Ranger ticket increased to £7.40 for adults and £3.70 for children. It is still off-peak all day on Fridays on Avanti West Coast with no restrictions on the use of off-peak tickets. Rail Travel Vouchers which expired during the pandemic have had their validity extended by six months. The validity of national railcards such as the Senior Railcard has not been extended (unfortunately). Northern may introduce flexible season tickets on the Mid Cheshire Line by the end of 2021. These cater for people who work fewer than 5 days a week. There is a need to install validators for these on station platforms.

NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

The lift on platforms 2 and 3 at **Altrincham** is now working after a long period of being out of use. There were engineering closures between Stockport and Chester on 28th February and 7th, 14th and 21st March for work on a new pumping station next to Stockport Road bridge in Timperley to combat a recurring problem of flooding in that area. During those closures work also took place on the signalling system between Greenbank and Cuddington. The bridge which carries Greek Street over the railway just south of **Stockport** station is nearing the end of its life and is to be replaced by a new bridge to the south of the existing structure at Easter 2024. The new bridge will provide passive provision for the widening of the cutting to provide two additional running lines on the west side of the existing railway. These could be used by Metrolink, tram-train or conventional rail services. TfGM has proposals for tram-train services from Stockport to Manchester Airport and from Stockport to Altrincham but it would be difficult to path these between the existing freight services. There would certainly be a need to reinstate double track between Cheadle Village Junction and Sharston Junction (near Northenden Junction). Also the town of **Cheadle** was recently awarded £13 million from the Government's Towns Fund. The fact that Cheadle is a marginal Parliamentary seat is probably entirely coincidental! £9 million of the £13 million has been earmarked for the provision of a new station at Cheadle and a business case will now be worked up. The site of the new station will almost certainly be at or near the site of the former Cheadle (London & North Western Railway) station, which closed as a wartime economy measure on 1st January 1917. This is in the centre of Cheadle village next to the Alexandra Hospital. The hospital currently uses the former Cheadle coal yard site next to the station site for car parking but I understand that this land is only leased to the hospital. Transport for Wales ran a class 153 single carriage train along the Mid Cheshire Line on 31st March for route learning (or route refreshing). The class 195 which ran along the Mid Cheshire Line to Chester (mentioned in the last issue) was apparently a gauging trial and some issues were encountered (although the train did make it to

Chester and back!). If anyone has any further information about this it would be welcome. A BR maroon totem sign from **Knutsford** station was sold for £2,700 at a recent Great Northern railwayana auction.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

The popular Sunday Dalesrail train from Blackpool via Preston, Bamber Bridge, Blackburn and Clitheroe to Carlisle and return via stations on the Settle & Carlisle line restarts with the May timetable change. It is possible to connect into the train at Blackburn by catching the 07.55 train from Manchester Victoria. Special cheap fares apply on Dalesrail so it will be best to buy a ticket to Blackburn and then a Dalesrail return fare from there to your destination. Full details about Dalesrail including times and fares can be found at: [DalesRail 2021 | Community Rail Lancashire](#). The railway will be closed at Miles Platting Junction (between Manchester Victoria and Rochdale/Stalybridge) from 31st July to 15th August while work takes place to re-align the curve onto the Stalybridge line for higher speeds as part of the Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade. 22 new Northern trains of classes 195 and 331 were stored on 5th April because of a yaw damper bracket issue. At the time of writing this has yet to be resolved. The reintroduction of the Liverpool to Manchester Airport via Warrington service has been deferred as a consequence. Also some class 319 electric trains have been reinstated. The Government is due to publish its **Integrated Rail Plan** for the North of England in late May (safely after the local elections!). This should outline how HS2 will dovetail with the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) line between Liverpool and Leeds, in particular the arrangements at Manchester Piccadilly where the two will intersect. The HS2 station is planned to be on the surface alongside the existing trainshed. NPR could be located in an underground station (as preferred by many Northern politicians) or NPR trains could have to reverse in an expanded HS2 station (as favoured by the Treasury because it will cost less). We may also learn more about the alignment of NPR between Liverpool and Manchester Airport via the centre of Warrington (possibly using part of the Warrington Bank Quay Low Level line) and between Manchester and Leeds. Transport for the North wants the new line to serve the centre of Bradford but this would be very expensive compared with running via (say) Huddersfield because of the amount of tunnelling involved.

IN MEMORIAM

MCRUA member **Robert Wilson Jones** of Timperley has died. MCRUA member **Paul Mottram** from Chorlton died on 25th January 2021. MCRUA Committee member **Richard Bragg** from Knutsford died on 29th March. Former Altrincham driver **Jimmy Lamb** died in March at the age of 95. In his younger days Jimmy was the fireman for driver Jack Flint at Northwich steam shed. Jimmy retired in 1990 not long before the conversion of the Altrincham line to Metrolink. Former relief signalman **Ray Gillibrand** died recently. As you may know a relief signalman works a number of signal boxes to cover when the regular signalmen (or signallers as they are called these days) are on a rest day or otherwise not available.

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 (the website of Transport for Greater Manchester)

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 for bus, train and tram).

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)

www.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).

www.railwayherald/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 is on Facebook. Type MCRUA in the search box to find our page with our latest news and discussion.

MCRUA MEMBERSHIP

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.**