

# MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

No. 114

SUMMER 2022

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](http://www.mcrua.org.uk). We are also on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Mid-Cheshire-Rail-Users-Association-MCRUA-124008736132899>.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

## FROM THE SECRETARY:

TAKE NOTE: The Annual General Meeting of the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association will take place on Monday 13th June 2022 at 7.30pm for 8pm in the Jubilee Room, 18-24 Stanley Road, Knutsford, WA16 0GP, some 5 minutes' walk from Knutsford Station on the other side of the main A50 Toft Road. Suitable trains are the 1839 from Piccadilly arriving at Knutsford at 1924 and the 1900 from Chester arriving at Knutsford at 1944. Return trains at 2126 for Piccadilly and 2145 for Chester. Please check train times before you travel (times as published for post May 15th 2022). The meeting will be followed by a presentation given by Stephen Forde, the Community Rail Officer for the Mid Cheshire Line. The agenda for the meeting and copies of the minutes of the 2021 AGM will be available at the meeting or from the Secretary in advance by email ([secretary@mcrua.org.uk](mailto:secretary@mcrua.org.uk)). If you don't have access to email and would like copies please contact the Secretary (his address is below). The Committee welcomes new members to the Committee, in particular it is looking for people to take-on the social media and publicity platforms. Please speak to any Committee member for further details.

## AGM matters:

Members can take part by post or email by voting to accept the critical parts of the Annual General Meeting by returning the voting paper - or by sending a simple email to the Secretary ([secretary@mcrua.org.uk](mailto:secretary@mcrua.org.uk)) by MONDAY 6th JUNE.

Current Committee:

Chairman Michael Battman

Vice Chairman Vacant

Secretary Paul Wilkinson

Treasurer Simon Barber

Membership Secretary Paul Wilkinson

Committee members: Judie Collins, Andrew Macfarlane, Christopher Lodington, David Miller, Michael Ross.

Co-opted Committee member: Ralph Warrington - now standing for election.

Constitution:

Following the retirement of three members of the previous committee, and the effects of COVID, we found the constitution to be restrictive to the current operations of the MCRUA. We therefore want to amend the following paragraphs:

6. The Association shall be governed by a Committee. The Committee shall consist of between (delete 10) replace as 6 and 20 members, elected at the Annual General Meeting. At the meeting of the Committee following the Annual General Meeting, the Committee shall appoint (by ballot if necessary) a Chairman, a Secretary and a Treasurer from amongst its number. These shall be the Officers of the Association. No person may hold more than one such position. Such persons shall hold office for one year, but may be re-elected.

9. If the positions of Chairman, Secretary or Treasurer remain unfilled, or the membership of the Committee falls below (delete 10) replace with six, for a continuous period of (delete three) replace by six calendar months, a general meeting must be called with the purpose of either filling those positions or suspending or disbanding the Association.

Please indicate your acceptance or otherwise of the below points and return the enclosed slip to The Secretary, 48 Romana Square, Altrincham WA14 5QB by post or a simple yes/ no via email to [secretary@mcrua.org.uk](mailto:secretary@mcrua.org.uk) . You may also add any comments to your reply.

1. I accept the changes to the constitution. YES NO

2. I accept the re-election of the committee as shown to continue for a further year to the next AGM in 2023. YES NO

The Financial Report will be presented by the Treasurer Simon Barber on the night of the AGM. If you are not planning to attend the AGM but would like a copy of the report please email the Secretary at [secretary@mcrua.org.uk](mailto:secretary@mcrua.org.uk) or write to him at 48 Romana Square, Timperley, Altrincham, WA14 5QB.

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Mike Battman**

It does at last seem that the country and the railways are getting back to a new normal following the last 2-years of Covid; infection levels remain high, but the vaccinations appear to be working well for most people and we are entering the 'live with it' phase, although life is not back to normal for those with difficult medical conditions. From a railway point of view the passenger numbers are steadily improving with Northern at over 70% of their pre-covid passenger numbers. However, the improvements are not consistent, Southeast Trains is only just over 50%. Also, the distribution throughout the day is changing; the increase in work from home has meant a significant decrease in rush hour usage and a reduction of passengers on Mondays and Fridays in particular. This is balanced by an increase in leisure usage of the railways. If the railways are to flourish maybe they will have to rethink their strategy, perhaps places like Southport, Harrogate and Chester should have more trains on Saturday and Sunday than mid-week. New cheaper family and group tickets need to be developed to encourage the likes of a family of 4 to use the train rather than drive.

We have seen a draft of the December 2022 timetable; most of the peak hour extra trains will be reinstated although the timing of one of the evening services is poor leaving only a 12-minute gap followed by a 48-minute gap. We are currently in discussions about this with Northern, ideally trying for a near 30-30 break or if that is not possible, we are suggestion that the first train be semi-fast calling at only the busier stations. In local news, the proposed new station at Cheadle has moved to the planning stage and it appears that if funding is available the station will happen. The plans show the single platform on the Alexandra Hospital (north) side of the line. MCRUA generally support this station but have concerns that it is on a single line section of our line, and we do worry about the increase travel time caused by an additional stop.

Northwich Station rebuild is also progressing but slowly and we have not been afforded access to the proposal despite requesting it. The council are arguing for an 'Access for All' solution which we totally support but it does bring greater costs which could be a problem. However the ticket office has now reopened and we expect the ticket machines to be shortly commissioned. The new shelter at Greenbank should be open by the time you read this and we have been promised improvements to the car park. Defibrillators have been installed at Altrincham and Navigation Road stations. Altrincham Station's broken windows and roofing works have been 'signed off' so should be repaired soon. Have you seen the great work that Friends of Altrincham Station have carried out on Platform 4, poems and a library in the waiting room? Further decorations are planned for the Queen's Jubilee celebrations. There are proposals for an Amazon Locker to be installed at Greenbank station (a plan to install one at Navigation Road station is not now happening). We have responded to the request by Northern for MCRUA's comments.

### **MAY 2022 TIMETABLE**

There are only a few very minor timetable changes on the Mid Cheshire Line in the new timetable which started on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May. The May timetable can be found on the Northern website here: <https://www.northernrailway.co.uk/travel/timetables>. Search for timetable N17, which is on page 2 and select the May to December timetable. More significant changes will be made in the December timetable. On other lines, Avanti West Coast have increased their Piccadilly to Euston service back up to three trains each way per hour although there are still some gaps. Wilmslow regained its through trains to Euston some time ago. Also Transport for Wales have extended nine of their Manchester Airport-Piccadilly-Warrington Bank Quay-Chester services back to Llandudno.

## **DECEMBER 2022 TIMETABLE**

There is an indicative version of the December 2022 timetable for the Mid Cheshire Line on the Northern website at <https://www.northernrailway.co.uk/about-us/stakeholder-hub/timetables/manchester2022> (click on “the routes”). Basically there are significant changes to most timetables across Greater Manchester in an attempt to alleviate the problems of the “Castlefield Corridor” between Manchester Piccadilly and Castlefield Junction, west of Deansgate station. The indicative timetable shows an hourly service on the Mid Cheshire Line on Monday to Saturday as now with times towards Manchester largely unchanged but **trains are shown as leaving Piccadilly at 10 minutes past the hour** so half an hour different from today. Most of the peak hour extra trains are reinstated but trains towards Chester leave Piccadilly at 10 past the hour throughout the day so we lose the “extra” train towards Chester in the morning peak (currently trains leave Piccadilly at 07.08 and 07.41). This will inconvenience some schoolchildren and commuters.

## **MEMBERSHIP MATTERS by Paul Wilkinson**

MCRUA MEMBERSHIP 2022 Thank you for your continuing support.

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

21xxx your membership has run out on 1st March 2022. A renewal form is attached.

22xxx (or higher) your membership has been renewed, thank you - do nothing.

The membership year runs from 1st March each year. The subscriptions for 2022 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 the 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](mailto: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 by Andrew Macfarlane**

The last train from Chester and the last two trains from Piccadilly are still being replaced by buses every six weeks due to planned engineering work. This happened from Monday 9<sup>th</sup> May to Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May (inclusive) when the 22.52 train from Chester to Piccadilly and the 22.42 and 23.41 trains from Piccadilly to Chester were each replaced by two buses. The first bus replacing each train starts from Chester and from Piccadilly at the normal train time, calls at or near each station normally served by the train but then stops to set down only from Knutsford onwards. The second bus replacing each train starts from Knutsford at 23.25 and 00.25 to Chester and at 23.37 to Piccadilly calling at all stations. This bus replacement will happen again from Monday 20<sup>th</sup> June to Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June (inclusive).

## **MUSIC TRAINS ARE BACK IN 2022! by Michael Ross**

We have a programme from May to October, starting with Chester to Plumley and the Golden Pheasant on Wednesday 25 May as part of national Community Rail Week. On Friday 10 June, the Music Train runs from Chester to the Angel in Knutsford as part of Knutsford Music Festival. Then from Wednesday 13 July and every month until October it runs from Chester to Plumley and the Golden Pheasant. Plus we will have Music Trains from Altrincham to Alexanders in Chester (hopefully in July and September) and lunchtime Music Trains for groups from Chester to the Railway Inn in Mobberley.

Although we can now run Music Trains again, COVID has not gone away and is still a risk. I know that some people will not want to travel for the time being. And it is always possible that train services might be affected by staff shortages. There is therefore a small possibility that a Music Train might have to be cancelled at short notice. In that case mailing list subscribers will receive an email and a note will be put on the Community Rail Partnership website and its social media accounts.

There is no charge for the Music Train, though there is a collection on the way back for the band and you will need a train ticket. There is music on the train both ways and at the pub. No need to book unless you

are a group – just get into the rear carriage. Music Trains from Chester leave Chester at 19:00 and the return train arrives back in Chester at 23:15. You can also get on or off the train at the intermediate stations along the way.

### **FREIGHT NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane**

The new slate waste traffic from Llandudno Junction to Earles Sidings (near Hope, Derbyshire) is probably going to start fairly soon. A conveyor has arrived at Llandudno Junction yard and the sidings at Llandudno Junction have been reconnected to the main line. The trains will be operated by GB Railfreight but we still do not know which way they will go. The most direct route would be via Chester, Northwich, Altrincham, Northenden Junction, Cheadle Heath, Hazel Grove and New Mills South Junction but there is no freight traffic currently between Mickle Trafford (outside Chester) and Hartford CLC Junction so a less direct route may be chosen, perhaps to save on route learning costs. Time will tell. Sidings are being installed this spring alongside the Buxton to Hindlow branch to serve Hillhead Quarry, which has a contract to provide stone for HS2. The previous branch into Hillhead Quarry was closed on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1973.

### **FARES NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane**

The “Great British Rail Sale” in April/early May proved popular with more than 1.3 million tickets sold across the country. Many £1.50 single fares (e.g. Altrincham to Chester) were available on Northern. Hopefully the offer will be repeated. The prices of TfGM System One tickets increased from 6<sup>th</sup> March. There was also a national rail fare increase of 3.8% on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022. The “Book with Confidence” easement, introduced during Covid, had been due to finish on 31<sup>st</sup> March this year but has been extended to 30<sup>th</sup> September. This means that until that date passengers will be able to make changes to the date and time on their tickets free of charge whether they hold an Advance, Off-Peak or Anytime ticket or they can exchange an unused ticket for a Rail Travel Voucher or eVoucher valid for 12 months from the date of issue.

### **NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane**

MCRUA is very pleased to report that Northwich station ticket office reopened in the week commencing 18th April. The ticket office is open from 06.15 to 13.15 on Monday to Friday and from 07.15 to 14.15 on Saturdays. It is closed on Sundays. Also a new waiting shelter is soon to open on the Manchester-bound platform at Greenbank station. There was only a two-hourly service on the Mid Cheshire Line on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> April due to Covid-related sickness. Altrincham Interchange won the Cheshire Best Kept Stations 2021 Best Staffed Station Award. Knutsford and Greenbank were Highly Commended. After pressure from a MCRUA member there is once again a bus service between Altrincham station and Dunham Park as from 24<sup>th</sup> April. The new service is the 280, which runs hourly. Previously the Altrincham-Warrington CAT5 bus passed Dunham Park but had to be diverted away months ago because height signage was changed on the bridge under the Bridgewater Canal at Dunham (even though the buses could still get under the bridge!). One of the new Transport for Wales class 197 diesel trains did test runs along the Mid Cheshire Line on 24<sup>th</sup> February. On 5<sup>th</sup> May a planning application was submitted to Stockport Council for the new Cheadle station. Northern appear to have stopped producing printed pocket timetables (a shame), although these are available from Altrincham ticket office. On 5<sup>th</sup> March Pathfinder Tours ran the “The Lancheshire” Railtour from Westbury, which visited the Weaste branch and the Northenden bin terminal. It was unable to cover the Middlewich line due to a trespass incident at Sydney Bridge outside Crewe but it then did do the Hartford curve.

### **METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane**

The points at the city end of Deansgate-Castlefield Metrolink station were repaired over the weekend of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> March and the third platform at Deansgate-Castlefield was brought back into use from Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March. The Trafford Centre service continues to turn round in the reversing siding at Cornbrook. This service will be extended to Crumpsall once Metrolink have sufficient drivers to do so. The bay platform at Crumpsall may see use in August when there will be a partial closure of the Bury line for several weeks while extensive repair work is carried out on Whitefield tunnel. Metrolink carried its highest number of passengers ever in one day on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, when more than 114,000 people used the network on the day of the Greater Manchester Marathon. New trams have now arrived up to no. 3141. Family day tickets remain available from Metrolink ticket machines (only) after 09.30 on Monday to Friday or all day at weekends. You need to select the zones you plan to travel through and then press “One Day Travelcard”

then plus one next to “Family” and you then press the yellow square on the right of the screen. You can pay by contactless bank card (it is the right-hand one of the two possible readers). Family tickets (which cover up to two adults and up to three children under 16) offer a very significant saving compared with buying individual tickets.

### **LOCAL RAIL NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane**

Graham Brady, MP for Altrincham and Sale West, has been informed by Grant Shapps, the Secretary of State for Transport, that the Government will not be proceeding with the construction of the Golborne Spur (or Golborne Link) of HS2, which would have diverged from the HS2 Manchester line south of Manchester Airport and passed through Warburton and Lowton St Mary’s on its way to join the West Coast Main Line south of Wigan. The Golborne Spur is included in the Phase 2b Bill for HS2, which was deposited in Parliament on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022, so it will presumably be removed from the Bill during its passage through Parliament. An unfortunate consequence of the December 2022 timetable is that Stockport will lose its through services to Salford Crescent, Bolton, Wigan, Southport, Preston and Blackpool. The existing Hazel Grove to Blackpool North service becomes a Manchester Airport to Blackpool North service (making that service half-hourly). The existing Alderley Edge to Southport service is split in two becoming Alderley Edge to Piccadilly with a separate service from Oxford Road to Southport. The currently-disused viaduct into the former Manchester Central station, opened in 1892, is being converted by the National Trust into a garden open to the public. The viaduct was built by Manchester engineering firm Heenan and Froude, who also constructed Blackpool Tower. The first phase of the garden, which will be similar to the “High Line” in New York, is due to open in July. The bogies for the new trains for HS2 are to be built at Crewe Works.

### **NEW TWITTER ACCOUNT**

There is a new Twitter account, @FOAInterchange (the Friends of Altrincham Interchange) which should be worth a look if you do Twitter. You will find a picture of a very famous person opening the library on platform 4!

### **A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS**

The following members have joined since the previous issue of the Rail Report:

Mr C Poole of Hartford      Mr R Edwards of Sandbach

We were sorry to learn of the death on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> March of long-standing member Mr Malcolm Dickin of Poynton who was passionate about all things transport. Andrew Macfarlane attended Malcolm’s funeral at Stockport Crematorium on 14<sup>th</sup> April.

### **MID CHESHIRE LINE PEOPLE**

We welcome **Stephen Forde** as the line’s new Community Rail Officer (CRO) for a six-month temporary contract, which started in the new year. Stephen was previously the CRO for the Manchester-Crewe line. Congratulations to **Roy Norton**, who worked at Stretford station and later for many years at Altrincham station, on recently celebrating his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### **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  
National Public Transport Enquiry Line

0151 236 7676 (08.00 to 20.00 every day)  
0871 200 22 33 (07.00 to 22.00 every day)

## USEFUL WEBSITES

[www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://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](http://www.northernrailway.co.uk) (includes details of forthcoming engineering work under “Travel” and then “Improvement Works”)  
[www.networkrail.co.uk](http://www.networkrail.co.uk) (includes a link to download the National Rail timetable)  
[www.eastmidlandsrailway.co.uk](http://www.eastmidlandsrailway.co.uk) (to buy any GB rail ticket using a credit or debit card)  
[www.tfgm.com](http://www.tfgm.com) (the website of Transport for Greater Manchester)  
[www.metrolink.co.uk](http://www.metrolink.co.uk) (shows any current problems with the tram service and details of future engineering work)  
[www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info) (a national public transport journey planner for bus, train and tram).  
[www.transportfocus.org.uk](http://www.transportfocus.org.uk) (the website of Transport Focus, the statutory body for rail and bus users).  
[www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk) (the website of Railfuture, the independent, national, voluntary body for rail users)  
[www.traintimes.org.uk](http://www.traintimes.org.uk) (an unofficial website which provides rail information derived from official sources in a user-friendly format).  
[www.brfares.com](http://www.brfares.com) (lists all available fares on the National Rail network).  
[www.railtourinfo.co.uk](http://www.railtourinfo.co.uk) (lists special trains (both steam and modern traction) on the main line).

## YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

CHAIRMAN Mike Battman, 25 Deansgate Lane, Timperley, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 6SF.  
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**Mid Cheshire Rail Link Campaign Sub-Committee.** Chairman: Stephen H Dent. Telephone: 07710 288824. Email: [stephenhdent@outlook.com](mailto:stephenhdent@outlook.com).

### MID-CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Community Rail Officer: Stephen Forde.

Community Rail Partnership address: The Council Offices, 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 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](http://www.mcrua.org.uk/membership). Alternatively, you may pay by standing order, details available from the Membership Secretary [membership@mcrua.org.uk](mailto: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.**