

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

No. 116

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

**** A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL MEMBERS AND FRIENDS *****

CHAIR'S REPORT by Mike Battman

After my very pessimistic and critical last report I thought it is only fair that I try to produce a more optimistic read this time. If one ignores the strike days, there does seem to be a general improvement with fewer cancellations. Loadings also seem to be improving and Northern is reporting about 80% loadings in rush hour and 100%+ loadings outside rush hour when compared with pre-pandemic.

The demand for weekend travel in the north is almost as strong as weekday. If an agreement can be agreed with the unions that Sundays are part of the working week; then a Sunday service like Saturdays with one train an hour in each direction on our line is deliverable.

So, 11th December 2022 sees the introduction of the new timetable which sees the reintroduction of most of the additional rush hour services. The timings are not the same as pre-pandemic especially the Chester bound trains which have significant differences, and two evening trains are running close together, not a good idea.

Northern have promised that the practice for services to be removed from the timetable as late as 22:00 the previous evening will end. Trains may still be cancelled late in the day BUT they will remain in the timetable and appear on the Customer Information Screens as cancelled. This means that any delay-repay claims will be valid.

Sadly, there is no resolution to the rear coach of 4-coach trains being locked 'out of use'. MCRUA are continuing to discuss with Northern about this practice; ideally the introduction of 3-coach Class 195's on our line ... but don't hold your breath.

Good news on the stations includes the repairs to platform 4 at Altrincham enabling the scaffolding to be finally removed. Northwich Station re-build has been granted planning permission although a start date has not yet been agreed and sadly, it will not include the reinstatement of the missing section of the canopy. Finally, money has been allocated for the resurfacing of Greenbank Station Car Park, although again no start date has yet been confirmed.

Finally, although they are the rail travellers' nightmare, but bus replacement services' timings will soon be appearing on the Customer Information Screens. Have a great holiday period.

DECEMBER 2022 TIMETABLE

As mentioned in the previous issue, Acton Bridge gains an all-day hourly service from the start of the December timetable. Also as mentioned in previous issues from the start of the December timetable on 11th December most Mid Cheshire Line trains will leave Manchester Piccadilly at 10 minutes past the hour on

Monday to Saturday so half an hour different from today. They will leave Altrincham at 36 minutes past the hour going towards Chester. Also Mid Cheshire Line trains will generally leave Chester at 56 minutes past the hour, 6 minutes earlier than at present. They will leave Altrincham going towards Piccadilly at 57 minutes past the hour, 3 minutes earlier than at present. Most of the peak hour extra trains are reinstated but trains towards Chester leave Piccadilly at 10 past the hour throughout the day so as mentioned in previous issues we lose the “extra” train towards Chester in the morning peak (currently trains leave Piccadilly at 07.08 and 07.41). Also please note that the 17.08 from Stockport to Chester does not call at Cuddington or Delamere (because the following train is close behind). The last train from Piccadilly to Chester on Monday to Saturday is much earlier than before the timetable change at 23.13 on Monday to Friday and 23.21 on Saturdays. Sunday services are largely unchanged.

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 on Monday to Thursday evenings due to planned engineering work. This bus replacement will happen from Monday 16th January to Thursday 19th January (inclusive). In the new timetable starting on 11th December the affected trains are the 22.52 from Chester (no change from the previous timetable) and the 22.10 and the 23.13 from Piccadilly. The first bus replacing each train starts from Chester and from Piccadilly at the normal train time and calls at or near each station normally served by the train. The second bus replacing each train starts from Knutsford at 22.52 and 23.56 to Chester and at 23.36 from Knutsford to Piccadilly calling at all stations.

CHANGE OF MCRUA MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Members are asked to note a change in MCRUA Membership Secretary from Paul Wilkinson to Ralph Warrington. Ralph's postal address is 4 Egerton Moss, Ashley, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 0QE. The email address remains the same: membership@mcrua.org.uk . Paul continues as MCRUA Secretary: secretary@mcrua.org.uk .

FREIGHT NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

It is good to report that a freight train ran via Delamere on Wednesday 19th October. It was a Penmaenmawr (North Wales) to Hunslet (Leeds) stone train operated by GB Railfreight. The section of our line between Mickle Trafford and Hartford CLC Junction (west of Greenbank) has not been used by regular freight services for many years (we think not since the Hull Saltend to Mostyn Docks acetic acid tanks finished in early 2002). The use of the Delamere route by this train perhaps augurs well for the forthcoming Llandudno Junction to Earles Sidings slate waste traffic to run via the Mid Cheshire Line. The operators of the new Lostock Energy from Waste plant at Northwich, which is currently under construction, have said that they will look into the possibility of using rail to bring feedstock to the plant. In particular they are looking for contracts where local authorities currently use rail to transport their household waste and which are coming up for renewal, ideally in the range of 50 to 150 miles from the plant.

FARES NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

TransPennine Express had a Club 55 offer between 11th November and 10th December. The Penalty Fare fine on National Rail services is to increase from £20 to £100 as from 23rd January. The charge is £50 if paid within 21 days. There is a danger that innocent passengers could be unfairly penalised to a much greater degree than currently. It is possible that Northern's Ticket Vending Machines could be modified to sell Rover and Ranger tickets from January. It is not clear whether this will include Wayfarer tickets, which are still available from ticket offices and from conductors on board trains (please obtain a Promise to Pay from a Ticket Vending Machine if boarding at an unstaffed station). You may be interested to know that there have been changes to bus fares in Greater Manchester. There is now a flat fare of £2 for a single bus journey of any distance and the System One day ticket for any bus (which includes areas outside GM like Glossop and Wilmslow) has been reduced to £5. You don't have to book in advance to use the train! You can buy a walkup ticket from a ticket office prior to boarding. For example the walk-up Off-Peak Return from Piccadilly to Euston is £98.10 (£64.70 with a railcard). This is valid on any train on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. On Monday to Thursday the

ticket is valid on the 09.35 from Piccadilly and any later train. On Monday to Thursday you cannot return from Euston before 09.26 or between 15.01 and 18.44.

NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

Train services on the line became more reliable after the end of October due to agreement being reached in an ongoing dispute over the rosters for the May 2022 timetable. However we are still seeing cancellations later in the day on Sundays. Sunday working remains voluntary. A reminder that printed pocket timetables for the Mid Cheshire Line can be obtained from the ticket office at Altrincham station. Work was carried out on the canopy on platform 4 as scheduled in October and the scaffolding has now all been removed. Work is due to start in week commencing 5th December to refurbish the interior of the building on platform 4 at Altrincham prior to the building being let out. This unfortunately includes the staff office (the former ticket office) so the platform 4 staff are now based on the bus station side of the station. They still visit platform 4 as part of their duties but we unfortunately no longer have a staff presence on platform 4 for most of the day as we did previously. A waiting room area will be provided in the platform 4 building after the work has been finished. Planning permission for the work to rebuild Northwich station has recently been granted and the actual work is due to start in the New Year. The ticket office at Northwich station will be closed while the work is carried out.

METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

Metrolink services returned to normal on Wednesday 30th November after engineering work in Piccadilly Gardens to replace a set of points and a crossing. The work was delayed by a month due to a delay in sourcing track components. From 24th October to 29th November all trams from Altrincham ran to Bury via Market Street. They were retimed to leave Altrincham two minutes earlier than previously and this "two minutes earlier" has continued after the resumption of normal service. So Bury trams now leave Altrincham at 05, 17, 29, 41 and 53 minutes past the hour from platform 2. Piccadilly trams leave Altrincham at 11, 23, 35, 47 and 59 minutes past the hour from platform 1. As from 30th November the Metrolink service from The Trafford Centre now runs through to Deansgate-Castlefield. New Metrolink trams 3146 and 3147, the last of the batch of 27 new trams ordered from Bombardier (now Alstom) in July 2018, were delivered to Queens Road in September and entered service in October. The carriage of dogs on Metrolink was extended beyond the three-month trial and may become permanent.

GOVERNMENT COMMITS TO HS2 TO MANCHESTER AND CORE NORTHERN POWERHOUSE RAIL

In his Autumn Statement on Thursday 17th November Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt said the Government were committed to building HS2 to Manchester and "core" Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR). Core NPR is the plan to build a high speed line from east of Warrington to south of Manchester Airport, where it would join the HS2 line to Manchester and then a further section of high speed line leaving HS2 from Manchester at Ardwick to Marsden, where it would join the existing Trans Pennine route to Leeds. The line between Liverpool Lime Street and Warrington Bank Quay Low Level (the "Fiddlers Ferry line") would be upgraded as part of the NPR scheme. Of course there will be a General Election within two years and a change of Government is entirely possible.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS

Network Rail is carrying out engineering work to improve platforms 13 and 14 at Manchester Piccadilly between Tuesday 27th December and Monday 2nd January. From New Year's Eve (31st December) until 2nd January the platforms will be closed entirely while work takes place. The 6.5 mile line between Lostock Junction (west of Bolton) and Wigan North Western is currently being electrified. Platforms at Westhoughton, Hindley and Ince are being extended to cater for 6-car trains. The scheme includes the installation of 450 overhead line equipment stanchions and modifications to 17 bridges and two level crossings. Ladies Lane bridge adjacent to Hindley station is one of the bridges to be rebuilt to provide clearance for the overhead wires. Lifts are also to be installed at Hindley station. The £78m electrification project is funded by the

Department for Transport and is now expected to be completed in 2025. There is to be a 26-day engineering blockade at Stalybridge in March 2023 for remodelling and resignalling as part of the TransPennine Route Upgrade. Currently the main route from Stalybridge towards Manchester is the Guide Bridge line. The remodelling will change that so that the Ashton route towards Manchester Victoria becomes the main route (as it was prior to the previous remodelling!).

DECEMBER 2022 TIMETABLE CHANGES ON OTHER LINES

There are significant changes locally in the December timetable starting on Sunday 11th December. The Alderley Edge to Southport service becomes Alderley Edge to Manchester Piccadilly with a separate service from Manchester Oxford Road to Southport. Hazel Grove to Blackpool North becomes Hazel Grove to Piccadilly with the Manchester Airport to Blackpool North service increased to two per hour. The local service on the Manchester Airport line reverts to half-hourly with trains approximately half an hour apart. Local services between Manchester Oxford Road and Liverpool via Warrington Central are reduced to hourly in the off-peak and will no longer call at Deansgate in the off-peak. The Cleethorpes to Manchester Piccadilly TPE service (which may be locomotive-hauled with class 68 diesel locos and Mark 5 coaches) is extended to Liverpool Lime Street via Warrington Central calling at Urmston and Irlam (the service will call in the Liverpool-bound direction at Irlam from 2nd January). Seven of the Transport for Wales Manchester-Cardiff or Cardiff-Manchester services will be operated with locomotive-hauled coaches (Mark 4s) hauled by class 67 diesel locos with restaurant cars for first class and business class. These include the 08.30 and 16.30 from Manchester Piccadilly and the 12.49 from Cardiff Central. Four of the new trains run on Saturdays. Avanti West Coast have recruited more drivers so there will be an increase in the number of trains between Manchester Piccadilly and London Euston to three trains per hour each way from 11th December.

MID CHESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP JOB ADVERT

We're Recruiting!

Would you like to work with the community to support the Mid Cheshire Line? We have a great opportunity to join the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership CIC. We need a Community Rail Officer to build on the achievements of this award winning partnership. You will primarily be working from home and out and about on the line. Mid Cheshire CRP is committed to flexible working so job shares, and applications from all sections of the community are welcome. We are looking for someone with a range of skills and experience who can work flexibly, with a mix of volunteers and professional colleagues, we welcome applicants with backgrounds in business, arts, community development, regeneration, and related fields. Job shares, and applications from all sections of the community are welcome.

- Starting Salary £28,500 per annum (pro rata if part time)
- 20 Days Leave (pro rata if part time) + Bank Holidays
- 37 hours per week (part time working will be considered for this role) For further information and to discuss the role please contact:

steve.forde@midcheshirerail.org.uk

<https://www.midcheshirerail.org.uk>

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR TRAIN ALTERATIONS

As in previous years there are no train services on Christmas Day or Boxing Day (Metrolink does run on Boxing Day). The last trains on the Mid Cheshire Line on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve are:

19.10 from Manchester Piccadilly to Chester. 19.56 from Chester to Manchester Piccadilly.

Train services could be affected by industrial action starting at 18.00 on 24th December and before 06.00 on 27th December.

ALTRINCHAM LECTURE SERIES PROGRAMME

The Altrincham Winter Lecture Series continues to take place at Altrincham Methodist Church Hall, Barrington Road, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA14 1HF. This is a short walk from Altrincham Bus/Rail/Metrolink

Interchange in the direction of Manchester. There is also ample car parking around the church. Talks are on the second Friday of the month, starting at 7.30pm. The forthcoming programme is:

Friday 13th January. "Built in Britain: The Independent Locomotive Manufacturing Industry in the Nineteenth Century" by Dr Michael R Bailey MBE.

Friday 10th February. "Steam in North Wales and the Borders since 2010 - Main Line and Narrow Gauge" by Ian Pilkington.

Friday 10th March. "Colour-Rail" by Paul Chancellor.

Admission is £4.00 (free for members of the Altrincham Electric Railway Preservation Society). There is a sales stand selling quality second-hand books and DVDs at very reasonable prices.

STEPHENSON LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY PROGRAMME

The Stephenson Locomotive Society continues to meet at the Friends' Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, on the other side of the Central Library from St Peter's Square Metrolink station. Meetings take place on Saturday afternoons at 2pm. Non-members are welcome. There is a voluntary donation of £3 towards the room hire. The forthcoming programme is:

Saturday 21st January "Bahamas – The Story of a Locomotive" by Pete Skellon.

Saturday 18th February "Is the Tender Half-full or Half-empty?" by Dr. Robin Coombes.

Saturday 18th March "Into the Jaws of Death – Working and Dying on Britain's Railways c1890-1939" by Dr. Mike Esbester.

Sat 15th April "Over the High Alps – Rhaetian Railway's World Heritage Line" by Dr. Michael Bailey MBE.

8E RAILWAY ASSOCIATION PROGRAMME

The 8E Railway Association (8E was the code for Northwich steam shed) continues to meet at the Gladstone Club, Station Road, Northwich (a short walk from Northwich station in the direction of the town centre) on the second Tuesday of the month from September to May at 7.45pm. Non-members are welcome. Admission for non-members is free if you are attending for the first time, £3 on subsequent visits. The forthcoming programme is:

Tuesday 10th January 2023 Annual General Meeting followed by presentation by Jon Penn.

Tuesday 14th February 2023 Merseyside Electrics by Charles Roberts.

Tuesday 14th March 2023 Edge Hill Motive Power Depot by Dennis Flood.

A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBER

The following member has joined since the previous issue of the Rail Report: Mr S Mee of Altrincham.

IN MEMORIAM

We are sorry to report that former MCRUA member Robert Carrington had a very serious stroke on 27th October and died in hospital on 30th October. Robert lived for many years in Handforth, then in Gatley and more recently in Stockport. He came on many of our special trains. MCRUA member Eric Stuffins from Timperley died in September.

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.lnr.uk which has live train running information and ticket sales for London Northwestern Railway, i.e. Liverpool-Crewe and very cheap tickets to London. 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 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.railtourinfo.co.uk (lists special trains (both steam and modern traction) on the main line).

YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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MID-CHEESHIRE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

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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. 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, 4 Egerton Moss, Ashley, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 0QE.**