

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

No. 117

SUMMER 2023

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>.

***** THIRTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE*****

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING FROM THE SECRETARY:

TAKE NOTE: The Annual General Meeting of the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association will take place on Monday 3rd July 2023 at 7.45pm in the Golden Pheasant, Plumley Moor Road, Plumley, Knutsford WA16 9RX - just a few minutes from Plumley Station. Suitable trains are the 18.10 from Piccadilly arriving at Plumley at 18.58 and the 18.56 from Chester arriving at Plumley at 19.35. The agenda for the meeting and copies of the minutes of the 2022 AGM will be available at the meeting or from the Secretary in advance by email (secretary@mcrua.org.uk). If you don't have access to email and would like copies please contact the Secretary at 60 Romana Square, Altrincham WA14 5QG. After the formal AGM business MCRUA Treasurer Simon Barber will speak on the current position with the association's campaigns. The Committee welcomes new members to the Committee. The Committee meets every 6 to 8 weeks, usually in the Golden Pheasant at Plumley or the Railway Inn at Mobberley, to discuss current topics of concern to passengers and to try to progress our campaigns. Please speak to any Committee member for further details.

CHAIR'S REPORT by Mike Battman

11th December 2022 saw the introduction of the new timetable which included the reintroduction of some of the additional rush hour services; but only in the Manchester direction in the morning and Chester direction in the evening. Despite pressure from MCRUA and others there is little chance of the service being further enhanced in the near future. Northern's performance has greatly improved since January. However, the strikes and infrastructure failures are making it hard for Northern to fulfil their obligations. The infrastructure failures, in the form of track circuit, point and/or signalling failures are becoming way too familiar. One speculates, that the planned transfer of all our line's signalling to the Manchester Rail Operating Centre [which is not happening any time soon – Ed] could have led to a reduction in maintenance of the cabling, etc.

We are being advised that passenger usage is at about 85% of pre Covid figures and about 110% at weekends. The demand for weekend travel in the north is almost as strong as weekday. If an agreement can be reached with the unions that Sundays are part of the normal working week; Northern have confirmed that a Sunday service similar to the current Saturday service with one train an hour in each direction on our line is deliverable. 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. Promise to Pay (P2P) are causing distress to some passengers. The P2P tickets are available from all ticket machines and should be on the Home Screen. BUT, it has transpired that at stations such as Altrincham and Northwich the P2P tickets are only available when the ticket office is unmanned, the option being 'switched off' when tickets can be bought. This can lead to a lengthy walk at the likes of Altrincham Interchange. Progress on the stations includes the redevelopment of the buildings on platform 4 at Altrincham Station, which has finally started. Northwich Station re-build has also started. Money has been allocated for the resurfacing of Greenbank Station car park, although again no start date has yet been confirmed. Finally, congratulations go to Altrincham Interchange on winning the 2022

Cheshire Best Kept Station award at the ceremony in Hartford in early March. Also, well done to Mouldsworth and Hale for being Highly Commended.

Secretarial Role

Paul Wilkinson our Secretary is standing down after the AGM. We are actively seeking a replacement, the duties include minute taking and distribution of papers before meetings. Also receiving and distributing mail (mostly, if not all, electronic). If anyone is interested please contact the chair at mcruachair@gmail.com

MAY 2023 TIMETABLE

A new national rail timetable begins on Sunday 21st May and runs until Saturday 9th December. There are only very minor changes on the Mid Cheshire Line:

The 23:13 SX Manchester to Chester is timed to run a minute later from Stockport, Altrincham and Hale but otherwise is the same timing as now (including from Navigation Road).

The 06:30 SX Chester to Manchester runs a minute later from Mouldsworth to Hale.

We would have liked to have included a new pocket timetable with this newsletter but these are no longer produced by Northern, presumably as a cost-saving measure. Printed timetables for the Mid Cheshire Line (guide 17) are still available from the TfGM Travelshop/booking office at Altrincham station.

A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER

We welcome Sarah Muir from Cuddington as the new Community Rail Officer for the Mid Cheshire Line. Sarah took up her new role on 3rd April and we wish her well.

GOOD NEWS FROM CHESHIRE BEST KEPT STATIONS by Judie Collins

Friends of Altrincham Interchange were extremely pleased to win the top award at the CBKS ceremony at The Grange in Hartford. They are a very small team of volunteers with much to do and would welcome more help. They have art and green projects in gestation including the North West in Bloom judging and look forward to visiting other Friends Groups. Hale and Mouldsworth were highly commended so well done the Mid Cheshire Line.

MUSIC TRAIN CANCELLED

The music train which had been planned to run on the evening of Wednesday 17th May from Chester to Plumley and back has been cancelled due to the ASLEF overtime ban.

LATE NIGHT ENGINEERING WORK by Andrew Macfarlane

The next bus replacements due to planned engineering work will happen from Monday 22nd May to Thursday 25th May (inclusive). Northern have changed the way this is done as from 22nd May. The 22.10 from Piccadilly will still run as a train but it will run semi-fast from Altrincham, calling only at Knutsford, Northwich, Greenbank and Chester. So passengers for any station not served by the train will need to change at Altrincham onto a replacement bus. The replacement bus will start from stand A in Altrincham bus station at 22.45 calling at or near all stations to Chester. The 23.13 train from Piccadilly and the 22.52 train from Chester will be replaced by buses. The bus replacing the 23.13 from Piccadilly starts from Piccadilly at 23.13 and calls at all stations. The 22.52 from Chester is replaced by two buses. The first leaves Chester at 22.52 and call at all stations. A second bus leaves Knutsford at 23.36 calling at all stations to Piccadilly. MCRUA will be monitoring how this new system works.

RETRO RAILTOURS DAY TRIP TO PAIGNTON

Retro Railtours are running a special train from Huddersfield to Paignton and back with haulage by a class 50 diesel locomotive on Saturday 27th May. The train will call at Stalybridge, Reddish South, Stockport, Wilmslow and Crewe and then at Exeter St. Davids, Torquay and Paignton. The Standard Class return fare is £119. More details including how to book can be found at www.retrorailtours.co.uk or by ringing 0161-330-9055. If you have a query send an email to info@retrorailtours.co.uk.

FREIGHT NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

The Lostock to Tunstead empty hoppers were unusually diverted via Warrington Bank Quay and Manchester Piccadilly on 5th January, possibly due to a spectacular bus fire (in which no one was hurt) on Ashley Road in the centre of Hale village. A new flow of stone from Tunstead to Leyland (the former British Leyland sidings) via Altrincham and Northwich started on 9th January.

FARES NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

All Ranger and Rover tickets (including Wayfarer tickets) are now available from all Northern Ticket Vending Machines. To purchase a Wayfarer ticket you touch the “Ranger and Rover tickets” icon on the first screen. The Adult and/or Concession Wayfarer may then appear on the “Most Popular Ranger and Rover Tickets from this Station” screen. If not, you touch “G” on the keypad and then scroll through all Ranger and Rover tickets beginning with “G” until you get to “Greater Manchester Adult Wayfarer” and “Greater Manchester Concession Wayfarer”. Wayfarer tickets increased in price from 5th March and are now Adult £16.20, Concession (anyone with a Pensioner or Disabled Persons National Travel Pass) £10.70, Child (aged 5 to 15) £8.10 and Group (up to four people no more than two of whom are adults) £32.40. Also you can now select any starting station for your ticket at Northern Ticket Vending Machines. There was a national rail fare increase of 5.9% from 5th March. Greater Manchester System One tickets increased in price from January 2023.

TICKETING HINTS AND TIPS by Andrew Macfarlane

If you plan a journey using a journey planner (e.g. on the National Rail website) and it says “No fares available for this journey” which is often the case for future journeys on Avanti West Coast to London you can still buy a flexible “walk up” ticket (for example an Off-Peak Return when valid) on the day from a ticket office and use it on that train. Tickets from Knutsford, Mobberley, Ashley, Hale, Altrincham and Stockport to Manchester are to “Manchester CTLZ” or “Manchester Central Zone”. This covers onward travel on Metrolink from Piccadilly station to New Islington, Cornbrook and Victoria station and onward travel by train from Piccadilly to Oxford Road, Deansgate and Manchester Victoria stations. If you are using routes operated by Cross Country it is often cheaper to use split ticketing (e.g. splitting at Cheltenham or Birmingham New Street). If you need to pay with cash on the train you need to obtain a “Promise to Pay” from the ticket machine before boarding. Otherwise a Penalty Fare of £100 (£50 if paid within 21 days) could be payable. “Promise to Pay” is now easier to find on Northern ticket machines and easier to obtain than it was previously.

NORTHERN £10 DAY TICKET OFFER HAS RESTARTED by Andrew Macfarlane

Northern have restarted their £10 day ticket newspaper offer for travel on the whole Northern network after 08.45 on Monday to Friday or all day at weekends and on bank holidays. Tokens can be collected from local newspapers (e.g. the Manchester Evening News) from 8th May to 20th May. Two tokens are needed for each day’s travel and day tickets can then be bought for up to four people. Child day tickets are £5 each. Weekend tickets for up to four people are also available for £17.50 for adults and £8.75 for children. Travel is from 8th May to 14th July. Further details are here: www.northernrailway.co.uk/tickets/newspaper-offer.

NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

A community orchard is being established inside the triangle of lines west of Northwich station. We should hear the outcome of the “Access for All” application to provide funding for lifts at Northwich station at the end of the year. The class 150 and class 156 trains used on the Mid Cheshire Line are to be withdrawn and replaced between 2026 and 2029. Their replacements will be specified by Northern. A road vehicle hit the bridge over the M6 between Knutsford and Plumley in the early morning on 23rd March. This caused disruption to the morning peak train service until the bridge could be declared safe. Classical music is to be played from speakers at Lostock Gralam station to deter anti-social behaviour. A special train “The Buxton Brush” will be running along the Mid Cheshire Line and the Middlewich line towards Crewe in the late afternoon/early evening on Saturday 8th July.

£7.5m REVAMP OF CHESTER STATION ANNOUNCED

The Chester Chronicle reports that plans for a £7.5m revamp of Chester railway station have been rubber-stamped. Back in December the paper reported that Network Rail had submitted a listed building consent proposal to Cheshire West and Chester Council to carry out a series of changes and improvements as a result of some parts of the Grade II* listed station being “in a poor state of repair”. The plans include a new customer information and ticket desk, customer information screens, ticket machines, a changing places toilet, concourse seating and signage. Work carried out at the station will also see the refurbishment of the platform 4/7 toilets and waiting room as well as the concourse toilets. A new concourse clock and CCTV will be installed along with new benches across platforms 3, 4b and 7, a water refill unit in the toilet lobby area, and cycle locking stands and a repair station located by the western concourse entrance. The major revamp forms part of the long-term ‘Gateway’ vision to turn the area of the city around the railway station into a ‘destination for business, living and tourism’. The partners leading the regeneration project - including

Cheshire West and Chester Council, Network Rail and individual landowners - unveiled its draft 'Strategic Regeneration Framework' (SRF) in which it revealed Transport for Wales was providing £7.5m of funding to enhance the concourse and improve customer facilities at the railway station. Funding for more strategic improvements in the future - including an extra northern platform, a new railway junction and electrification of the line [not clear which line – Ed] - is being sought from the Department for Transport. The ultimate aim of the SRF is to create an improved Chester Railway Station experience and an enhanced 'gateway' into the city centre. Ideas for improving the Station Square include increasing its size for use by both pedestrians and cyclists, removing street clutter and including landscaping. New bus stops are also proposed around Station Square in order to improve access to the station. In a report recommending approval, council case officer Charlie Cullen said: "Having reviewed the information submitted with the application, the Conservation and Design Team concluded that the proposed works have been sensitively designed to better reveal historic elements of the station and that the proposed additions have been well considered in terms of placement and siting, design, colour scheme, and scale. On this basis, they consider the proposals would cause no harm to the significance of the listed building. One of the above representations raised concern over the retention of the commemorative panels within the station. The agent has confirmed that these panels will remain in place and that they will not be affected by the proposed works. Another representation raised concern over several aspects of the proposed signage. As noted above, the Conservation and Design Team consider the entirety of the proposal to be well considered and that it would not harm the significance of the heritage asset. This view is shared by the planning officer, including with reference to the proposed signage. This assessment covers the impacts of the proposal on the significance of the Grade II* Listed building and its setting. The additional comments regarding the proposed signage (such as the capitalisation) fall outside the scope of this assessment, to which they are not relevant". He concludes: "It is considered that the proposal has demonstrated special regard to the desirability of preserving the Grade II* listed building, its setting and features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. As such, it is considered there would be no harm to the significance of the heritage asset".

METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

The carriage of dogs on Metrolink has now been made permanent. A pilot scheme is being worked on to allow bicycles to be carried on Metrolink. It remains to be seen if this proves to be workable. Metrolink does run to a timetable and the times can be found by using the journey planner on the Traveline website www.traveline.info. The stops are shown as (e.g.) "Sale (Manchester Metrolink)". The TfGM website www.tfgm.com shows the times of the first and last trams for each stop. Metrolink replacement buses between Timperley and Altrincham now take a circular route and only call at Navigation Road when running from Timperley to Altrincham. They run from Altrincham direct to Timperley. This is due to risks associated with crossing the road outside Timperley station and the difficulty of turning buses round there.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS

On 20th March it was announced that the Avanti West Coast franchise (the West Coast Partnership) had been extended until 15th October 2023. The TransPennine Express franchise expires on 28th May 2023. Northern are to stop using class 319 electric trains from the December 2023 timetable change. These trains were built for the Thameslink route in London and were new in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Class 323 electric trains will be transferring from the West Midlands to replace them from this summer. Every £1 spent in subsidy for Northern has been shown to be worth £2.50 in benefits. The commissioning of the re-signalling of the Basford Hall area and the Independent Lines at Crewe has been put back to Christmas 2024. This will see the abolition of the signal boxes at Basford Hall Junction, Crewe Sorting Sidings North and Salop Goods Junction with control of the area passing to the Manchester Rail Operating Centre at Ashburys. First class accommodation is being withdrawn by London Northwestern Railway.

MAY 2023 TIMETABLE CHANGES ON OTHER LINES

The longstanding Sunday "DalesRail" service from Blackpool North to Carlisle via Preston, Blackburn and the Settle & Carlisle line run by Northern will not operate in summer 2023. It is hoped that the service will be reinstated in summer 2024. The Transport for Wales Chester to Liverpool service via Frodsham and Runcorn had been due to revert to hourly from the May timetable change but will now be remaining as every two hours. Also the Northern service between Chester and Leeds via Warrington Bank Quay and Manchester Victoria will operate additionally on Sundays from May in order to provide more capacity between Manchester and Leeds during work on the Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade. The hourly Cross Country service

between Manchester Piccadilly and Bristol returns from May, with two trains each way extended to and from Paignton. This will increase the service between Manchester and Birmingham back to two trains per hour.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT by Ralph Warrington

MCRUA Membership 2023 - Thank you for your continuing support.

Please check your membership number shown on the address label (or in your email address line). If it starts: 21xxx your membership ran out on 1st March 2022 and you forgot to renew for 2022! A renewal form is attached/enclosed..

22xxx your membership has run out on 1st March 2023. A renewal form is attached/enclosed.

23xxx (or higher) your membership has been renewed, thank you. You need do nothing further regarding your membership for this year.

The membership year runs from 1st March each year. The subscriptions for 2023 remains unchanged. There are five classes of membership of the Association:

Individual (under 21years old) - £2.00

Individual (21 years and older) - £8.00

Family - £11.00

Voluntary body (including town and parish councils) - £25.00

Corporate (including borough councils) - £100.00

We continue to offer the option for you to transfer your membership to payment by Standing Order, to renew your membership automatically each year. Standing Order guarantees that you are exempt from membership price increases for the first five years of your SO membership. We are as yet unable to offer Direct Debits, sorry. 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 option of receiving the Rail Report by post. To reduce costs however, members can OPT IN to receive the Rail Report and other notices electronically, by email. You can change your membership 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 very much appreciated. Our membership numbers are not as great as your committee would like, principally because the bodies who we deal with in order to affect improvements to the rail service take our size into account when dealing with us. The bigger an Association we are, the more likely we are to be taken seriously and to improve the train service. We would encourage you to mention MCRUA and what we do when you can, maybe to people who you see regularly on the platform when travelling the line. Thank you.

A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Darren Millington, Northwich

James Warrington, Timperley

IN MEMORIAM

We are sorry to report the passing of three MCRUA members: David Young from Didsbury in December 2022, James Jones from Knutsford in June 2022 and Malcolm Jones from Altrincham in April 2022.

MID CHESHIRE LINE PEOPLE

Congratulations to long-standing MCRUA member David Mardon, who lived in Hale for many years, on recently celebrating his 90th birthday. Ian Helliard, who has worked in the ticket office/Travelshop at Altrincham for many years, left Transport for Greater Manchester after his last shift on 26th April. We wish him well for the future. Grateful thanks to Bev Robinson of the Friends of Altrincham Interchange for her work in decorating Altrincham and Navigation Road stations for the Coronation and for all the other work she does including the poetry boards and the planters. Bev has been given the much-deserved Altrincham Coronation Champion award for her enthusiastic and tireless work.

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 current and future timetables and details of forthcoming engineering work under “Travelling With Us” and then “Timetables”)
- www.networkrail.co.uk (includes a link to download the National Rail timetable)
- www.lnr.co.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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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.**