

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

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SUMMER 2024

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>.

2024 MCRUA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2024 AGM will be held at the Golden Pheasant pub and restaurant near Plumley station on Monday 8th July at 6.45pm. All members are encouraged to attend. The pub is a short walk from Plumley station. Suitable trains are the 17.54 from Stockport and the 17.56 from Chester. Suitable return trains are at 20.35 to Manchester and 20.56 to Chester. There are no matches in the Euro 2024 football tournament that evening! If you would like a copy of the accounts for 2023-2024 in advance please email our Treasurer Simon Barber at simon@antrobus.net in the week before the meeting.

CHAIR'S REPORT by Mike Battman

As we head towards the end of the first half of the year, it is sad that we seem to be suffering from a rise in the number of trains being cancelled. In April the 0630 from Chester to Stockport was cancelled more often than it ran; the 1708 from Stockport to Chester is on the same diagram, hence if one is cancelled so is the other. The 2210 from Piccadilly also seems to be cancelled far too often. There are rumours of some light at the end of the ASLEF strike with some of the onerous changes to conditions being rescinded by the Rail Delivery Group. It is nearly 2 years since the action began, it does need sorting, at least, if the rumours are true, then talks have restarted. Despite the regular disruption overall passenger numbers are holding up with numbers greater than pre-Covid on our line. The introduction of parking charges has gone ahead at both Cuddington and Mouldsworth stations despite the 'consultation', we wrote a vigorous complaint about the charges, and we are aware that a similar objection was sent from Cheshire West and Chester Council. Both were ignored. We have now received feedback from Northern which we are considering. You will not be able to use cash and payment is through the RingGo system which must be done on line or by using a mobile phone. The introduction of charges at Delamere has been postponed, again there is no explanation, but one wonders if it is related to The Forestry Commission. The Northwich station rebuild seems to be stalling and it has been announced that Network Rail will now carry out the fit-out to Northern's specification. At this moment in time, we do not know when we can expect the buildings to be completed. The first steam train down the line for some time was supposed to happen on Saturday 25th May, however this excursion has been postponed until 28th September. Watch this space! Finally, Northern have appointed a new MD. Tricia Williams has taken over from Nick Donovan, we wish her well.

[RHS Tatton Flower Show](#)

We are excited to announce that the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership will have a show garden at the RHS Show at Tatton in July. They have a 'Long Border' and the CRP, ably led by Harry Allen, is organising plants, materials and labour to build, man and disassemble the garden. The Show is open from 17th until 21st July; we'd love to see members visiting our garden, call in and say hello. This will be the last time for 3 years that the show is held at Tatton.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS WANTED

We continue to try to recruit new committee members following a couple of retirements. We meet approximately every 6 weeks on a Monday afternoon or evening at The Golden Pheasant at Plumley. It is not too onerous; meetings are planned around train times and the social pint and rail chatter is very enjoyable. If you are not sure, you are very welcome to come along as a guest to see what you are letting yourself in for!

If anyone is interested, please contact the chair at mcruachair@gmail.com

ASLEF OVERTIME BAN

The drivers' union ASLEF have started an overtime ban on Northern, which will run from 1st June to 27th July. Services on the Mid Cheshire Line were particularly affected on the first Sunday of the overtime ban, Sunday 2nd June. This is a separate dispute from the national industrial dispute involving ASLEF. We hope that both disputes can be resolved as soon as possible.

SUMMER 2024 RAIL TIMETABLE

There are only very minor changes in the new timetable for the Mid Cheshire Line, which started on Sunday 2nd June. A few trains are retimed by the odd minute.

SUNDAY AND LATE NIGHT ENGINEERING WORK by Andrew Macfarlane

Sunday trains will be replaced by buses between Stockport and Chester all day every Sunday from 23rd June to 28th July (inclusive). This is for work to improve drainage near Northenden Junction (between Stockport and Altrincham). This period unfortunately includes the Sunday during The Brit Fest event at Ashley Hall, Sunday 7th July. MCRUA highlighted that the engineering work meant bus replacements during the Sunday of The Brit Fest weekend but Network Rail said they could not accommodate the event. The Metrolink Altrincham line will be running on Sunday 7th July and there will be buses to the Ashley Hall event from Altrincham station (as there will be throughout the event). There will also be the usual late night bus replacements due to planned engineering work from Monday 15th July to Thursday 18th July (inclusive). These late night bus replacements continue to take place every six weeks. The 22.10 from Piccadilly still runs as a train but it runs semi-fast from Altrincham, calling only at Knutsford, Northwich, Greenbank and Chester. So passengers for any station not served by the train need to change at Altrincham onto a replacement bus. The replacement bus starts from stand A in Altrincham bus station at 22.50 calling at or near all stations to Chester. The 23.13 train from Piccadilly and the 22.52 train from Chester are 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 train from Chester is replaced by two buses. The first leaves Chester at 22.52 and calls at all stations. A second bus leaves Knutsford at 23.36 calling at all stations to Piccadilly. From Monday 1st July to Thursday 4th July the 23.13 train from Piccadilly to Chester will leave Piccadilly two minutes earlier at 23.11. All other times are unchanged.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT by Ralph Warrington

2024 continues to be stable in terms of member numbers. Thanks to those who are paying by Standing Order, an increasingly popular option - contact me if you would like details. Please do encourage your fellow commuters, passengers and rail enthusiasts to join MCRUA, as the more members we have, the more "clout" we have with Network Rail, Northern and all the other bodies we deal with. With a general election upon us, we will no doubt become "interesting" to the prospective parliamentary candidates, who we will of course lobby for improvements in Mid Cheshire. We still have members from 2022 who haven't renewed, as well as from 2023. Please renew ASAP, thanks. A renewal form is enclosed or attached if you have not yet renewed. A warm welcome to the following new member: Ms. Angela Marinari, Plumley and to the following re-joined members: Mr. Henry Brooks, Ashley Ms Sybil Crossman, Plumley.

STEAM-HAULED SPECIAL TRAIN ALONG THE MID CHESHIRE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

As Mike Battman mentioned above, the steam-hauled special train which had been due to travel along the Mid Cheshire Line on Saturday 25th May has been postponed to Saturday 28th September. 45596 *Bahamas* is due to haul the Railway Touring Company's special train "The Mancunian" from Manchester Piccadilly (departing at 10.30 approximately) and Stockport (departing at 11.00 approximately) via Altrincham, Northwich and Chester to Llandudno Junction and Holyhead and back. Details including fares, approximate return times and how to book can be found on the Railway Touring Company website here:

<https://www.railwaytouring.net/the-mancunian-05-05-24> or they can be reached by phone on 01553 661500.

FREIGHT NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

The first modified DB Cargo class 66 diesel locomotive, 66651, entered service on the Tunstead to Lostock (Northwich) limestone hoppers in week commencing 22nd April. More details can be found in this article:

<https://www.railadvent.co.uk/2024/04/first-modified-class-66-locomotive-enters-service.html>

TRAIN JOURNEYS - LOOKING FOR GOOD VALUE by Simon Barber and David Miller

MCRUA members will be aware that train ticketing has become extremely complex, so much so that even experienced travellers can find it hard to buy the best value ticket for a given journey. It's even harder if it is a journey you do not make frequently. As the general election approaches we are starting to hear more about proposals for simplifying the ticketing system, which is welcome. So far, however, we have only heard statements about desirable outcomes - "ensure all travellers get best value", "enable touch in and touch out for every journey". We are not hearing how these outcomes can be achieved and it is not easy. Transport for the North (TfN) had an early project to deliver integrated and smart ticketing across the north of England. This project ran for five years (2016-21) without delivering a comprehensive solution, after which no more funds were made available. Five years is the length of a whole parliament, so what chance is there of a national solution? It's not just the complexity of today's fares which makes it difficult, but simple problems like the existence of advance tickets. If politicians make promises that everyone will get best value for their journeys, are the politicians willing to reduce every fare to the level of the cheapest advance ticket? Of course they aren't, so some passengers who 'touch in and touch out' would pay more than today. Simplification of ticketing is urgently needed, because the complexity deters people from using the railways, but it will create winners and losers. That's not an easy sell, so expect any future ticket simplification project to proceed very slowly, like the last one.

In the meantime, we have to make the best of what we have. Here are some ideas for Mid Cheshire passengers based on recent experience. If you have other suggestions, please let us know, either via the Editor, or via our Facebook page.

If you want a cheap trip to London, consider travelling from Crewe. London NorthWestern Railway (LNR) operate an hourly service from Crewe to London which takes only about 30 minutes longer than Avanti's direct trains. You can buy an LNR-only off-peak return ticket for £52.70 (£34.75 with a railcard). It's valid on the 0913 and later LNR trains from Crewe (not before) and is valid to return on the evening peak trains, unlike Avanti off-peak tickets (which cost more). There's an even cheaper ('super off-peak') ticket if you know you won't return between 1600 and 1900 from London; and there's an 'Off-Peak Day Travelcard' version for little extra which includes unlimited travel on London Underground Zones 1-6. The most reliable way to find these tickets is to buy from the LNR website, or at LNR stations. Car parking at Crewe - like at all Avanti stations - is expensive at £12.50 per day on weekdays, but on Saturdays, it's the cheapest place - £5.50 per day. On weekdays, and Sundays, you're better off parking at the Cheshire East car park on Railway Street, which is right next to the main Avanti car park entrance. This is £7.50 on weekdays, and free on Sundays. If you're travelling from any Cheshire station to Liverpool South Parkway (the station for Liverpool John Lennon Airport), be sure to specify 'Liverpool South Parkway' when buying the ticket. Do not specify 'Liverpool Stations' which is a prominent option on ticket machines. 'Liverpool stations' refers to the city centre stations. South Parkway is a shorter journey than the city centre and the tickets are cheaper. If you are travelling to the city centre, a 'Liverpool stations' ticket gets you to any of the central stations. Usefully, this includes James Street (for the waterfront). Keep your ticket when leaving the train at Lime Street and you can go to the underground platform and take a train to James Street for no extra.

A more complicated facility applies to Manchester. If you travel to Manchester from Knutsford or any station between there and Manchester, your ticket will show "To Manchester CTLZ". It will entitle you to continue your journey by Metrolink tram from Piccadilly to any stop within the Metrolink City Zone, and to travel to Manchester Oxford Road or Deansgate. The Metrolink City Zone is bounded by New Islington, Cornbrook and Victoria tram stops and is also called Zone 1. From any other station on the Mid Cheshire Line, your ticket will show "To Manchester Stations", which means Piccadilly, Oxford Road or Deansgate stations only. Going to Deansgate involves a long walk at Piccadilly and a long wait so you may find the free bus route 1 more convenient. If you're travelling east on the Mid Cheshire line and intending to change onto Metrolink at Altrincham, you can buy through tickets to Metrolink zones, if you know the zone you're travelling to (e.g. zones 3 and 4 to travel to Sale or Stretford; zones 1-4 to travel to city centre stops). But don't do this if you are a railcard holder. Metrolink does not recognise railcards, so you'll lose the railcard discount for the rail portion of your journey if you buy a through ticket. Instead buy a rail ticket to Altrincham, using your railcard. Then buy a tram ticket at Altrincham, or, the modern way, use a bank card (or your smartphone) to 'touch in and touch out' before boarding and after alighting from the tram.

For any long journey, it's worth looking at 'split ticketing' before making your final decision about tickets. This is well explained on the websites dedicated to it; see for example, www.ticketysplit.co.uk or splitticketing.co.uk,

which explain the advantages and disadvantages. The National Rail site also has a page that explains split train tickets. They are completely legitimate, but be aware of how they work. Finally, please remember that all train operators now require you to buy a ticket before you board the train, either from a ticket office, ticket machine, smart phone or online. The only exceptions to this are if a station has no ticket machine (for example, Lostock Gralam or Mobberley) or ticket office, or if the ticket machine does not take cash and you have no other way to pay (you need to obtain a "Promise to Pay" from the ticket machine). This case apart, it's no longer acceptable to say "I'll pay on the train". This is very different from years ago when the Mid Cheshire Line and others were operated by 'PayTrains' and passengers were asked to pay the conductor. PayTrains are history. Please don't run the risk of a fine by not buying your ticket before boarding. Editor's Note: A very good website for rail fares is www.brfares.com, which shows all available rail fares between any two stations and it also has details of Ranger and Rover tickets. First class fares are shown first and then standard class fares. You can also apply railcard discounts and details of ticket restrictions are provided. Return fares may be cheaper than buying Advance singles and they offer more flexibility.

ALTRINCHAM LINE 175TH ANNIVERSARY

20th July marks the 175th anniversary of the first public train from Manchester Oxford Road to Altrincham on 20th July 1849. The line was opened by the Manchester South Junction and Altrincham Railway.

NEWS FROM THE LINE by Andrew Macfarlane

It has been announced that the building collapse at Northwich station in May 2021 was due to vegetation growing out of the structure. Work on the roof of the building on platform four at Altrincham had been completed by 21st May. The function room on platform four at Altrincham is now the "Flourish Hub" including yoga and crafts. The new facility opened on 23rd April. Tactile strips near the platform edge and a yellow line had been installed at Mobberley and Lostock Gralam stations by 9th April. Free buses will be provided from Altrincham and Knutsford stations to The Brit Fest event at Ashley Hall on 5th, 6th and 7th July. Free buses will also be provided from Altrincham station to the RHS Flower Show at Tatton Park from Wednesday 17th July to Sunday 21st July. There is also a free minibus to the show from the Knutsford Gate entrance to Tatton Park at the north end of King Street (the end of King Street furthest from the station). King Street is the road which passes under the railway just east of Knutsford station. Paper timetables for the Mid Cheshire Line (guide 17) are available from Altrincham station ticket office.

NOW MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY FROM CHESTER TO LONDON

Avanti West Coast began using their new bi-mode class 805 trains on the service between Holyhead/Chester and London Euston as from Sunday 2nd June. Unlike the previous Voyager trains, which were diesel-only, the new trains use diesel between Chester and Crewe and then use the overhead electric wires between Crewe and Euston, the lion's share of the journey.

MID CHESHIRE LINE STATIONS WIN AWARDS AT CHESHIRE BEST KEPT STATIONS

Friends groups at three Mid Cheshire Line stations, Hale, Greenbank and Delamere won awards at the **Cheshire Best Kept Stations awards evening** in March. The event was an opportunity for volunteers and others connected with community rail to socialise and celebrate all the fantastic projects across the county.

RECENT HAPPENINGS by Judie Collins

Transport for Greater Manchester held a thank you event for Friends of Stations including the Mid Cheshire Line at Altrincham Town Hall attended by Northern, Network Rail and TfGM and Trafford's Mayor on Friday 26th April. Presentations were positive with the exception of the continuing vandalism and anti-social behaviour at stations. Repairs take forever and police were called out to Altrincham twice last week (the week beginning 27th May). Award season is upon the Mid Cheshire Line - Cheshire Best Kept Stations, North West in Bloom and Community Rail Network entries are welcome. Our Community Rail Officer's welcome get together at the Golden Pheasant in Plumley on Thursday 23rd May showed that the general election will include several new MPs because of boundary changes and retirements and MPs interested in the Line are very helpful.

METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

A track crossing outside Victoria station which had been out of use since 22nd January was reinstated on Monday 6th May and Metrolink services via the second city crossing returned to normal as from Tuesday 7th May. Work will take place to renew track on London Road between Piccadilly station and Piccadilly Gardens from Saturday

22nd June to Tuesday 9th July. Altrincham and Bury trams which normally terminate at Piccadilly station will run between Altrincham and Bury via Market Street. The Ashton service will run to Piccadilly station and the Eccles service will run to Piccadilly Gardens. Track relaying will take place between Brooklands and Sale on the Manchester-bound line on Sundays 30th June and 14th July. This is to remove a longstanding speed restriction. Replacement buses will run between Piccadilly station and Altrincham.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS

The former station house at Dunham Massey on the Lymm line is up for sale for £695,000. The station closed from 10th September 1962. The bridge which carries the Calder Valley main line over the M62 motorway at Castleton near Rochdale is to be replaced during a blockade between 6th and 24th September. Replacement buses will be provided between Manchester Victoria and Rochdale. Northern local trains between Manchester Piccadilly and Sheffield are currently diverted via (and stopping at) Stockport due to a landslip in the Hague Bar area between Marple and New Mills Central. This would tend to contradict the rail industry's often repeated claim that there are no spare paths between Piccadilly and Stockport. First Group has announced plans to run six trains per day each way between Euston and Rochdale via Manchester Victoria under the Lumo brand. Trains would be electric between Euston and Manchester Victoria and would then be battery operated to and from Rochdale. Services, which could start in 2027, would call at Rochdale, Manchester Victoria, Eccles, Newton-le-Willows, Warrington Bank Quay and London Euston. Virgin have also applied to run similar "Open Access" services on the West Coast Main Line. It remains to be seen if there are sufficient paths for all of these services to run (also including the Grand Union plan for a Stirling to London Euston service).

NORTHERN'S WHATSAPP SERVICE by Simon Barber

What is the easiest way to check when your next train is, or whether it's on time? If you're already at the station, and it has a customer information screen (CIS), that's usually the answer. But what if there is no CIS there, or what if you haven't yet left for the station? Some members will be familiar with the Real Time Trains website, realtimetrains.co.uk, which is very good, though it needs a certain amount of railway knowledge to make full use of it. Increasingly, I find that the quickest and simplest way to check train running is to use Northern's WhatsApp service on my smartphone. If you don't already use WhatsApp, do consider it. It is free, it doesn't have ads and it doesn't fill your phone with junk. To use the Northern service, add Northern to your contacts list with their phone number 07870 606060. Then start a WhatsApp conversation with them. You can message 'hello' to Northern and it will reply with a useful menu of options. However, if you know what information you want, it's even quicker. For example, a frequent journey for me is Plumley to Altrincham. There's no CIS at Plumley, but all UK railway stations have a three-letter code name and I know that these two are PLM and ALT, so I send the message 'plm to alt' to Northern and it replies immediately with the scheduled trains in the next two hours, and what time they are expected to arrive. Likewise 'alt to plm' for the return. Even better, it also shows trains not operated by Northern, which is useful if you're on a line with more than one train operator. Well worth trying!

8E RAILWAY ASSOCIATION PROGRAMME

The 8E Railway Association continues to meet at the Gladstone Club off Station Road in Northwich, which is a short walk from Northwich station. The postcode for the venue is CW9 5RB. Meetings take place on the second Tuesday evening of the month from September to May and start at 7.30pm. Free refreshments are provided at the break. Admission is free to members. Non-members are charged £3 except on their first visit, when admission is free. The forthcoming programme is:

Tuesday 10th September John Hooley "Boat Trains and Channel Packets" and "The Blood and Custard Era on the Southern".

Tuesday 8th October Graham Nicholas "The P2 Prince of Wales. Building Britain's most powerful steam locomotive".

Tuesday 12th November Ted Buckley "Navigation Road and All That". Local scenes from the 1960s.

Tuesday 10th December Ian Pilkington "Steam in North Wales and the Borders since 2010".

MID CHESHIRE LINE PEOPLE

We welcome Christine, the new cleaner at Altrincham, who started in April.

IN MEMORIAM

Member Mr R D Clayton of Timperley died in December. Longstanding former member Chris Smyth from Knutsford died on 15th March. Two other longstanding former members, Ian Foster from Alderley Edge and David

Mardon from Hale died in April. Ian was 100 and David was 91. Ian had been active in the Friends of Alderley Edge Station. He was a former signalling engineer with GEC.

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)
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
Northern Customer Services	0800 200 6060 (0800-2100 Monday to Sunday)
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)
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).

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).

<https://www.realtimetrains.co.uk/search/detailed/> Real Time Trains. Shows actual train running at any given location on the national rail network. Useful for seeing if your train is running and if it's on time!

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

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.**