

MID CHESHIRE RAIL REPORT

No. 124

AUTUMN 2025

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>.

CHAIR'S REPORT by Mike Battman

As we move towards the end of the year, the railway's year-long celebration "Railway 200" is well under way, and the Mid Cheshire Line stations are showing their support. All the stations have the Railway200 bunting, most have red, black and white planting schemes. The history boards will be coming soon. The most noteworthy event on our line was the fabulous Baton Relay Walk, where a knitted baton in the shape of an oil lamp, was carried from Manchester all the way down the line to Chester, calling at every station on the way. Northern and Piccadilly staff started us off and we were met at Chester by Pete Waterman and the Chester Town Crier. On the way we had two MPs, a mayor, many local councillors and the Court Leet graced us with their presence at Altrincham.

Northern's services along the Mid Cheshire Line remain improved with fewer cancellations but still too many. The reliability of the service is affected by train failures, infrastructure failures and staffing issues. The first two are out of Northern's hands, but with 40-year-old stock and ageing infrastructure we should not be surprised. When we are graced with 4-car trains, the back carriage is still locked out due to some short platforms. Modern stock can better control door openings. Our line should be a priority to receive newer trains. Northwich Station ticket office fit-out is happening again, Network Rail are completing their works, and we understand that Northern will follow afterwards. Northern have committed to working with The Friends Group at Northwich. They will share details of their proposals and invite input. Meanwhile at Altrincham the long-awaited toilets have opened in the car park behind platform 4.

Chester Station has gained a bar, The Chester Tap, a great addition which appears to be doing well, if my visit on a Saturday afternoon is anything to go by. It does serve coffee and tea as well as alcoholic beverages. The August Stockport Blockade went to plan with the railway reopening on time. Looking further ahead, there is going to be disruption at Ardwick Junction about a mile to the south of Piccadilly. As we understand it, there will be no trains out of Piccadilly going south for 9-days in February 2026. Platforms 13 and 14 will remain open but they will become a terminus. We will publish more details when we get them.

ARDWICK JUNCTION AND MANCHESTER PICCADILLY MAIN STATION CLOSURE 14th TO 22nd FEBRUARY by Andrew Macfarlane

Mike has mentioned this closure above. Basically Ardwick Junction and the main section of Manchester Piccadilly station are to be almost completely closed for nine days from Saturday 14th February to Sunday 22nd February (into the early hours of Monday 23rd February). This is for the renewal of the crossover "ladder" at Ardwick Junction and for the refurbishment of a set of points outside Piccadilly station. The track possession will be given up to allow container trains to travel to and from Trafford Park on one running line (the down slow line) at certain times. Only platforms 13 and 14 at Piccadilly will remain in use during the blockade. Trains from the South will turn round at Stockport. This will unfortunately not include the Mid Cheshire Line service, which will only run every two hours between Chester and Altrincham (hourly at peak periods on Monday to Friday). This is presumably due to the limited number of trains which can be turned round at Stockport. The Mid Cheshire Line service is the only Northern service which is not being turned round at Stockport. MCRUA will be pressing strongly for a proper dedicated rail replacement bus service to be provided between Altrincham and Stockport to connect into trains to the South. We also hope that rail tickets will again be valid on the Metrolink Altrincham line between Altrincham, Navigation Road and Manchester city centre. Members may remember that the Mid Cheshire Line service was diverted to Manchester Victoria via Denton-Ashton Moss when similar engineering work took place around 20 years ago. This is no longer possible because Manchester Victoria is much busier than it was then and also Northern conductors have lost route knowledge of that diversionary route because empty coaching stock trains via that route are now operated by the driver only.

LATE NIGHT ENGINEERING WORK by Andrew Macfarlane

There will be late night bus replacements due to planned engineering work from Monday 1st December to Thursday 4th December (inclusive). These late night bus replacements continue to take place every six weeks. On this occasion the 22.10 train from Piccadilly to Chester will not be affected and will call at all stations. 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 bus leaves Chester at 22.52 and calls at all stations. A second bus leaves Knutsford at 23.36 calling at all stations to Piccadilly.

APPEAL FOR A SOCIAL MEDIA & PUBLICITY OFFICER

MCRUA are actively looking for a volunteer Social Media & Publicity Officer to handle our website and our presence on the likes of Facebook and Instagram and generally publicising the association. Does any one of you have the interest and skill set to match who could fulfil this role, we'd love for you to get in touch. You can almost define your own role; the Committee would feed you with information to be distributed. If you are interested, please contact our Chair Mike Battman to discuss the opportunity at mcruachair@gmail.com.

CAN WE CONTACT YOU BY EMAIL?

As many of you will know, we have started sending out emails to keep members informed about what is going on between issues of the newsletter. We did this recently to inform members about both the weekend blockade at Stockport in early October and a flash sale of cheap tickets by Northern. There are some members who receive the Rail Report by post and have not given us permission to email them (in many cases we do have your email address). If you did not receive the email about the October Stockport blockade and would like us to keep you informed by email, please email our Membership Secretary Ralph Warrington at membership@mcrua.org.uk to give your permission for us to email you with relevant news items. You can of course also change your preferences at any time if you wish to switch between receiving the Rail Report by post or by email. We encourage members to switch to receiving the newsletter by email because that saves us money on printing and postage.

REPORT FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY RALPH WARRINGTON

I am pleased to report that our membership numbers have stabilised and our numbers are healthy, though numbers continue to slowly decline at present, no doubt as a result of belt-tightening in these straightened times. Of course, the more members we have the better, as it gives us a stronger voice when we represent rail users to the rail companies and the agencies of government, so please encourage others to join. As well as receiving a copy of this Rail Report (and if you are reading a friend's copy - please consider joining us to receive future editions), members get advance notice of future events that we are planning - look out for these this year. We try to keep the membership fees as low as possible, and we feel that membership represents good value for money, particularly if you pay by standing order, as this shields you from any increase for five years. We also have good value corporate and voluntary body membership, which I'm pleased to say has been taken up by most of the Parish Councils along the line, a great indicator that they value the Mid Cheshire Line and the positive benefits it brings to all those that they represent.

RAILWAY EXHIBITION IN NORTHWICH FOR RAIL 200

Members may not have heard that the Weaver Hall Museum and Workhouse in Northwich is hosting an exhibition called "A Celebration of the Railways in the Northwich area" which has been set up by the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership and MCRUA member Trevor Booth. The exhibition is on until 4th January 2026. The museum is at 162 London Road, Northwich CW9 8AB. This is from the museum's website: Railway 200 celebrates the 200th anniversary of the modern railway – a once in a generation opportunity to explore rail's crucial role in national life. The exhibition has been created to mark this significant historical and social event by the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership (CRP) and local railway historian Trevor Booth. It commemorates the building of Northwich Station, the town's iconic viaduct and shines a light on the fascinating lives of the railway workers and the Station Adoption Groups, who keep their local stations looking their very best. The exhibition features copies of historical photographs from Trevor Booth's personal collection that capture the history of the railway in the local area. The exhibition is presented by the Mid Cheshire CRP as part of Railway 200 and is kindly supported by The Friends of Weaver Hall. <https://events.westcheshiremuseums.co.uk/event/a-celebration-of-the-railways-in-the-northwich-area/>

ALTRINCHAM STATION FEATURES IN CHESHIRE LIFE MAGAZINE

Altrincham station features in the November issue of "Cheshire Life" magazine. The interesting and copiously-illustrated article was written by MCRUA member John Hulme. Thank you John!

REPORT FROM THE MID CHESHIRE LINE COMMUNITY RAIL OFFICER SARAH MUIR

Mid Cheshire Line Baton Relay walks for Railway 200 successfully completed

The Mid Cheshire Line Baton Relay walks which drew participation from station volunteers, CRP Board members and people from communities along the Mid Cheshire Line have been successfully completed and the feedback from participants has been very positive. The event which took place over 6 days and started on the 22nd September involved walking from Manchester Piccadilly to Chester station from station to station on routes closely following the Mid Cheshire Line. Special guest Pete Waterman and Chester town crier David Mitchell came down to welcome the walkers when they arrived at Chester station. The group celebrated with a few refreshing drinks in the Station Tap whilst the town crier proclaimed their achievement to the surrounding tables. The CRP plans to build on the success of this event by publishing the walking routes and planning future walking events. Photos of the event can be found on the CRP website www.midcheshirerail.org.uk

Railway 200 History exhibition at Weaver Hall Museum and Workhouse

The exhibition on the history of the railways in Northwich for Railway 200 is now on display at the Weaver Hall Workhouse and Museum. The content for the exhibition was produced by railway historian Trevor Booth and with the support of myself (CRO Sarah Muir) and Richard Hall of Cheshire West Museums. It will be available to visit till January 2026. More content on the area's railway history can also be found under the railway 200 section of our website www.midcheshirerail.org.uk

Station News

Delamere and Mouldsworth

These station groups have both worked with local schools to produce art work for these stations. I am looking to get funding to have the artwork printed on di bond panels for installation at these stations over the coming months.

Northwich

The Northwich volunteers have planted some purple crocus bulbs to mark the End Polio Now campaign. The bulbs were funded by Northwich Rotary which supports the campaign, and they should flower next spring on the grassy bank in the station car park. Work is being carried out on refitting the ticket office although I have not had word of when it will be open.

Altrincham

An aerial photo of Altrincham Interchange has been installed in September in the bus station concourse at the bottom of the stairs. Friends of Altrincham Interchange volunteer Bev Robinson first came up with the idea and contacted Altrincham based photographer Andy Mallins who created the image and asked for permission to display it. I arranged the printing and installation with funding kindly provided by TfGM.

Navigation Road

The artwork produced by young people from the nearby scouts and Explorers groups for the Northern platform is now at the point of being signed off for printing and then installation. The project is to mark Railway 200 and allowed the scouts to explore the Mid Cheshire Line to gather inspiration for their artwork. Funding was kindly provided by TfGM, Northern, Community Rail Network and the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership. A celebration will be held in the scout's hut with a date to be arranged soon.

Stockport

I have been in talks with the Crewe to Manchester and SE Manchester CRO's John Kenny and Gillian Renshaw about progressing with the planned bee friendly garden for Stockport station. We are currently making funding applications to raise the money needed to create the garden in the large shrubbed border at the end of Platform 3.

Manchester

I attended Network Rail's Community Day recently. There was an update on their recent community-based projects, the planned Ardwick Blockade early next year, which will cause disruption on the Mid Cheshire Line and their efforts to combat invasive species.

Railway history boards for the Mid Cheshire Line

The content for the Mid Cheshire Line history boards has now been sent to the designers. It is hoped these panels, which feature the history of 12 of the line's stations, will provide something of interest for rail users to read. Funding has kindly been provided by TransPennine Express and Community Rail Network. I'd like to say a big thank you to railway historian Trevor Booth for his work on this project.

TALK ON KNUTSFORD STATION AND THE CHESHIRE LINES RAILWAY

The Friends of Knutsford Heritage Centre are presenting a talk on Knutsford Station and the Cheshire Lines Railway by MCRUA member Trevor Booth on Saturday 21st February from 2pm to 4pm at the Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road, Knutsford (a short walk from Knutsford station). Tickets are £14 per person (£10 for Friends of Knutsford Heritage Centre). Tickets are available from Knutsford Heritage Centre (open Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 11am to 4pm) or you can book by email to info@knutsfordheritage.co.uk. The ticket price includes light refreshments.

FARES AND TICKETING by Andrew Macfarlane

Wayfarer tickets are still available from stations from Northwich eastwards towards Manchester. As many members will know, these cover train, bus and Metrolink services across a very large area as far as Buxton, Grindleford, Greenfield, Littleborough, Darwen, Chorley, Parbold and Warrington. Wayfarer tickets can be purchased from ticket offices and from ticket machines at stations. Please press the “Ranger and Rover tickets” icon on ticket machines. There is a Concessionary version for holders of any English National Concessionary Pass (Pensioner or Disabled) and a Child version (for children aged 5 to 15). Further details can be found at: <https://tfgm.com/tickets-and-passes/wayfarer-adult>.

Cheap fares are available between Manchester Piccadilly and London Euston by combining Transport for Wales (TfW) and LNwR or Northern and LNwR (changing at Crewe in both cases). These are walk-up fares which do not need to be booked in advance. The LNR/WMR & TfW only Super Off-Peak Return is £45 (£29.95 with a Railcard). You can come back up to one calendar month later. These tickets are only valid from 10.30 to 15.49 and after 19.29. The LNR & Northern Super Off-Peak Return is also £45 (£29.95 with a railcard) and is valid between 10.30 and 16.00 and after 19.00. Equivalent Off-Peak Return fares are also available which do not have the afternoon restrictions. These cost £56.50 (£37.60 with a Railcard) and enable departure from Piccadilly from 06.30 and from Euston from 08.45 on Monday to Friday. There are no restrictions on the use of the Off-Peak Return tickets at weekends.

NEWS FROM THE LINES by Andrew Macfarlane and David Miller

As many members will know, some trains on the line are formed of four coaches (two 2-car trains coupled together) but due to some short platforms on the line the fourth coach is always locked out of use. This has been the case for a couple of years now. There is a clear need for Northern to publicise the fact that the fourth coach is locked on information screens and by other means – posters, announcements and so on. The fourth coach is likely to remain locked for several more years until trains with selective door opening (or three-car class 170s) are cascaded to the line when Northern receives new trains. The three-week Stockport blockade in August for the replacement of the Greek Street overbridge was completed on time. There were complaints about the lack of a dedicated rail replacement bus between Altrincham and Stockport with passengers having to use service buses with a journey time of anything up to 1 hour 45 minutes. This will be more of an issue during the forthcoming Ardwick Junction blockade from 14th to 22nd February because main line trains will be turning round at Stockport and not serving Manchester Piccadilly. A further blockade took place on 4th and 5th October for more work on the Greek Street bridge (to remove the central wall between the tracks). More work will take place on Christmas Day and Boxing Day but this will not affect trains because there are no train services on those days. The 1958 “Edgeley Station” mosaic on the parapet of the Greek Street bridge was lost during the rebuilding but there will be a recreation of the mosaic on the parapet of the new bridge when it reopens to road traffic next year. New customer information screens were installed at Stockport station during the August blockade.

Avanti West Coast have started running a late night empty coaching stock train via the Middlewich line between Chester and Crewe. This is to maintain driver route knowledge of the diversionary route via Middlewich. Avanti West Coast will be diverting passenger trains between Crewe and Chester via Middlewich on Saturday and Sunday 15th and 16th November due to engineering work. The steps at Delamere from the Chester-bound side to the main road have been replaced and look very nice, in comparison with the tatty bit of fence by the road. Hardwood has been used so it looks very forestry-like. The contractors' compound has gone, as has the fence round the locomotive planter. On 30th September the Thomson Street footbridge over the line south of Stockport station was renamed as the Driver John Axon bridge in memory of John Axon, the hero of the Chapel-en-le-Frith runaway accident on 11th February 1957. John Axon was awarded the George Cross posthumously following his death in the accident. His actions on that day meant that a number of lives were saved. Some of the new class 730/2 electric trains began to be used on the Birmingham-Liverpool service from 21st July. A lot of gardening is being carried out at Northwich station by the Friends of Northwich Station. A new freight train operated by Freightliner started running on Saturday 26th July from Llandudno Junction to Earles Sidings (Hope Derbyshire) conveying slate waste for the manufacture of cement. The loaded train goes a long way round via Crewe, Stoke, Chesterfield and the Dore curve but the empty train from Earles Sidings to Llandudno Junction does run via Hazel Grove, Cheadle Heath, Altrincham, Northwich and Chester. A Hull to Llandudno Junction special charter train ran via Cheadle Heath, Altrincham, Northwich and Chester in both directions on Saturday 2nd August operated by West Coast. Congratulations to the Friends of Altrincham Interchange for being awarded the 2025 It's Your Neighbourhood Award of Outstanding - Level 5 by the Royal Horticultural Society and North West in Bloom for Altrincham Interchange.

METROLINK NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

The canopy on the original 1931 building at Navigation Road Metrolink station (where the ticket machines are) is to be renewed on a like-for-like basis in 2026. Metrolink tram times can be found by using the journey planner at www.traveline.info.

LOCAL RAIL NEWS by Andrew Macfarlane

Some of the LNwR Crewe to London Euston services are now formed of two of the new class 730 5-car electric trains, which are too long for bay platform 7 at Crewe so they are having to use platform 12, which has few facilities. Also many passengers travelling from Manchester Piccadilly to London Euston change at Crewe onto the LNwR service because it is a lot cheaper than using Avanti West Coast. Up to now they have been able to have a cross-platform interchange at Crewe off the Manchester-Cardiff TfW service arriving in platform 6 onto the LNwR service in platform 7. They now have to cross the bridge to platform 12 if the LNwR service is formed of class 730 units. From the December timetable change all of the LNwR Crewe to Euston services will be scheduled to be formed of class 730 units so all of those trains will use platform 12 at Crewe. LNwR have applied to extend their London Euston to Crewe service to Manchester Victoria via Warrington Bank Quay, something which MCRUA very much supports. If the train was to call at Hartford it would provide a faster service to Manchester than from Greenbank. It would also provide a rail service between Hartford and Warrington for the first time in many years. The service would also provide a cheaper way to get from Manchester to London than by using Avanti West Coast. The extension to Manchester Victoria may happen in 2026. Several issues need to be overcome, including the limited power supply to the overhead wires north of Crewe, pathing on the largely double track section between Winsford station and Weaver Junction and occupying a whole platform at Manchester Victoria with a 10-car train for a period before the train returns to Euston. The hourly Liverpool to Chester Transport for Wales service via Runcorn and Frodsham is to be extended to Llandudno from May 2026.

Members may not be aware that every other Manchester-Cardiff train is scheduled to be formed of a locomotive (class 67) and five Mark 4 coaches. These are the trains which leave Manchester Piccadilly on the even hours (08.30, 10.30, 12.30 and so on). Trains on the odd hours from Piccadilly are scheduled to be class 197 diesel multiple-units. It is pleasing to report that the Settle & Carlisle line is again to be used for diversions from the West Coast main line in January, for the first time since 2014. There is a 16-day blockade south of Penrith from the end of service on 31st December to 15th January to replace a bridge over the M6 motorway at Clifton & Lowther. From 1st to 4th January, due to a further blockade at Preston, a two-hourly Avanti West Coast shuttle service will run between Wigan North Western and Carlisle via the Farington Junction-Lostock Hall Junction curve, Blackburn and Settle to Carlisle. The trains will be formed of pairs of class 805 bi-mode trains. From 5th to 15th January the two-hourly shuttle service will run from Preston to Carlisle via Farington Curve Junction, Blackburn and Settle. Much more work is planned on the West Coast main line and on bridges on the M6 motorway in the next few years so these diversions will hopefully be the first of many.

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 sandwiches 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 9 th December | Russell Hatt | “Railways in North Cheshire”. |
| Tuesday 13 th January | AGM and Paul Tench | “Railways across Africa”. |
| Tuesday 10 th February | John Hooley | “A Midlands Miscellany”. |
| Tuesday 10 th March | Steve Blakemore | “Canadian Rocky Mountain Steam Express 2004”. |
| Tuesday 14 th April | Paul Shackcloth | “People and Places 7”. |
| Tuesday 12 th May | Ian Crowder | “76077: The Forgotten Standard”. |

ALTRINCHAM WINTER LECTURE SERIES PROGRAMME

The Altrincham Electric Railway Preservation Society (AERPS) continues to hold a series of winter railway lectures at the Altrincham Methodist Hall, which is on the corner of Barrington Road and Woodlands Road and is a short walk from Altrincham station in the direction of Manchester. The postcode of the venue is WA14 1HF. Lectures start at 7.30pm. There is plenty of parking around the venue. Please drive clockwise around the church. The car park barrier rises automatically. Admission is £4 for non-members of the AERPS. The forthcoming programme is:

| | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Friday 9 th January | John Hooley | “A Midlands Miscellany”. Steam in the Midlands in the 1950s and 60s. |
| Friday 13 th February | Paul Shackcloth | “People and Places 8”. Images of the steam railway with people visible. |

MCRUA MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We welcome Tom Cawley from Cuddington as a new member of MCRUA.

MCRUA COMMITTEE NEWS

We welcome Phil Dutton of Northwich to the role of MCRUA Treasurer. Simon Barber has stepped down from the role of Treasurer after 13 years (thanks Simon!) but he remains on the Committee.

DISCLAIMER

Opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the MCRUA Committee.

USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS

| | |
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| National Rail Enquiries | 03457 48 49 50 or 0207 068 0500 |
| 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.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.tfgm.com (the website of Transport for Greater Manchester).

www.tfgm.com/tram-improvement-works shows details of planned engineering work on Metrolink.

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.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!

YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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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.

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