

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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promoting quality public transport.....

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31st December 2021

Dear Chris and Lucja,

December 2022 timetable – delivering the outputs of the Manchester Recovery Task Force

1. Introduction

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views as follows to this consultation. Our comments are aligned to the detailed timetables provided for the consultation (where we have comment to make) and also reflect the comments and suggestions we made in our submission to the MRTF team in March 2021. See Appendix.

1.2 The proposals exhibit a set-back for passengers who have been led to expect that travel by train will, as investments in the railway are made, incrementally provide a viable alternative to the car. Longer journey times involving long connectional periods at interchange stations are hardly likely to present train travel as an attractive proposition. We fear that the proposals will damage the progress that has already been made.

1.3 We are generally concerned that the timetable appears to be fundamentally set in stone, other than some flexibility with detailed calling patterns. There are various connectional issues (e.g. Blackburn see below) and the curtailment of some late evening services is a concern.

1.4 The arguments around the merit of a regular interval service are well founded. Rail passengers rate reliability very highly (in fact usually it is their first requirement) and such service patterns help to provide that. However, as

services enter a congested network such as central Manchester, the ability to maintain those regular intervals can be severely compromised

1.5 For example –

- Additional movements of empty stock or light engines
- The impact of late running services presenting at key junctions (and so losing their slot)
- The consequences of delays at platforms; in a tightly timed timetable, even a short delay in boarding can have wider consequences
- The addition of freight trains (which will not operate every hour at the same time) and which can be liable to late running.
- Choices and sometimes errors in train regulation by signallers.

can all disrupt neat timetable planning.

1.6 We feel though that other issues around customer service, market development etc. have been somewhat ignored. One key aspect of the, possibly, too great an emphasis on regular interval services – as developed under MRTF – is that market opportunities will be adequately developed. There were already shortcomings in how the railway industry forecasts patronage. In the post Covid 19 business environment; leisure travel has shown a faster recovery than business and commuting. Forecasts of leisure travel trends have been shown to be grossly inadequate in the past.

1.7 In our original submission we said that “the crux of the matter is the need for investment on the Castlefield corridor”. We noted that the paper referred to developing infrastructure interventions and this should not be lost sight of, going forward.

1.8 We have concerns about the proposed increased interchanges at Salford Crescent. Whereas cross platform interchange is often convenient, facilities on the one narrow platform at this station are sparse with no toilets.

2. Manchester- Stalybridge/ Huddersfield – Leeds.

2.1 We trust that Greenfield and Mossley will see the 2 trains per hour in the peaks and evenings extended to all day as soon as possible.

2.2 Destinations beyond Leeds on the Standedge route are not shown in this timetable – can it be assumed that they are one Hull, one Scarborough, one Middlesbrough/Saltburn, one Newcastle/ York (or two Newcastles). There appears to be just one train to Manchester Airport via the Ordsall Chord (the Redcar service, extended by then to Saltburn?).

3. Manchester – Bradford Interchange – Leeds

3.1 It is disappointing that our strong advocacy of a through Calder Valley to Manchester Airport service has not been realised. This would help to fulfil

demand from the centres of population en route, not only to Manchester Airport but also south Manchester and onward connections. This line is probably the busiest corridor without an Airport link. A Bradford – Manchester Airport service was a commitment of the Northern franchise in 2016.

3.2 The above proposal would have given the Ordsall Chord two trains an hour rather than just one train, which is a sorry return on the most recent and valuable heavy investment in local rail infrastructure.

3.3 Also, we are very concerned that busy stations in Greater Manchester, including the 2nd busiest unstaffed station in the conurbation, Mills Hill, have seen a reduction in frequencies. The Manchester-Rochdale corridor is seeing expansion of house building, notably in the Castleton area

4. Manchester – Blackpool/ Preston

4.1 We favour South Cumbria – Manchester Airport services to be routed via Wigan and Bolton, to give a through fast service from the important Wigan area to Manchester and the Airport.

4.2 The proposal for 2 trains per hour between Blackpool and Manchester Airport is misguided. Manchester, yes, but not the airport. The second service should be diverted to Manchester Victoria, ideally going beyond there, possibly to Stalybridge. A spin-off benefit would be to directly link Tameside (Stalybridge and Ashton) to Bolton and beyond. The path freed up over the Castlefield corridor could then be used by a Calder Valley to Manchester Airport service as referred to above.

4.3 We also support the view that Farnworth should have a 2 trains per hours (tph) service but accept that 1tph at Mosses Gate and Kearsley is sensible.

4.4 See the comments regarding Blackpool-Colne/Leeds in section 14. The awfully inadequate service to Blackpool South (a line with a much larger catchment population than that via Poulton). In the days before the regrettable closure of Blackpool Central, this was the main route to the town. The wealth and population of Lytham St. Annes deserves a much better rail service. The Fylde Council suggestion of converting it to a tramway is NOT the answer. The line needs through services to Manchester again – the inadequate ‘branch line’ service it has now is grossly inadequate.

4.5. We also have some concerns about congestion issues on the 2-track Bolton route, a particular challenge between Bolton and Manchester, with the series of junctions from Salford Crescent to be traversed. There is certainly a service imbalance between the Bolton route and other corridors.

5. Manchester - Warrington – Liverpool

5.1 There will be an hourly only service east of Warrington, including a poor 2-hourly off-peak service for Glazebrook, Chassen Road, Humphrey Park and

Trafford Park. However, it is good to see Irlam and Urmston getting 2tph, with some faster journeys to Manchester and beyond, and to Liverpool.

5.2 Warrington West drops down to 1tph to Manchester, but retains 2tph to Liverpool (it does however get some peak time calls in the TPE Cleethorpes service, so that helps to cancel out the loss).

5.3 We support GMCA's request for extended calls at Deansgate especially at times to attract leisure users.

6. Manchester – Sheffield

6.1 We are somewhat disappointed at the loss of Manchester Airport service from S. Yorkshire and this needs to be reviewed. We do though welcome the regular clock-face all stations stopping service on the Hope Valley.

7. Manchester – Clitheroe

7.1 We comment in paragraph 14.1 below on connections at Blackburn, particularly with Preston services.

7.2 It is pleasing to note that as far as can be seen it appears that additional stops at Moses Gate, Farnworth and Kearsley will not be in the Clitheroe service. We advocated their omission because of journey time considerations.

8. Manchester – Wigan – Southport

8.1 We welcome a Southport to Manchester Oxford Road service but believe that it should run to at least Piccadilly to give a wider choice of convenient city destinations and connections for passengers – and certainly in the peak. Also the resultant timetables look generally unbalanced in terms of routes, calling patterns and timings.

8.2 We have previously referred to the potential of the Atherton line as a potential first-class alternative to the Bolton route with substantial potential. We agree with GMCA that the Atherton line should not take a significant backwards step that risks overcrowding and an inadequate weekend service.

8.3 In this context, one service that should be diverted from Bolton to the Atherton line is the faster Southport to Manchester Airport service, providing that route also with a direct service to Manchester Oxford Road and Piccadilly. This is important for access to work and higher education, connections into other services beyond Piccadilly and (of course) employment at Manchester Airport. Bolton already has an adequate number of services to the Airport. The retention of the slow Southport service via Bolton would link the intermediate stations with another important commercial centre (and a university).

8.4 Also, Walkden station is the nearest one to the Royal Horticultural Society, Bridgewater, yet the potential for this connection is overlooked in these

proposals. Again, we refer to the need for future services to take note of market trends. Within a few years RHS Bridgewater will be the largest tourist attraction, in terms of visitors in the North West.

9. Manchester – Crewe/ Stoke on Trent

9.1 We welcome the retention of the Stockport (Piccadilly) to Crewe direct stopping service.

10. Manchester – Buxton/New Mills/Rose Hill/Hadfield/Glossop

10.1 It is regrettable that Buxton services will have returned to hourly off peak. Similarly, Hadfield/ Glossop services will also remain at 2tph rather than a restoration to 3tph. We supported Rose Hill Marple trains calling all stops every 30 mins (as in Option C) therefore it is somewhat disappointing that Rose Hill will be served by a mixture of hourly and half-hourly intervals. There is a particular omission to serve education flows, as emphasised by GMCA.

11. The Castlefield Corridor

11.1 We share GMCAs concerns regarding the lack of connectivity between South Manchester/Stockport and Salford Crescent, bearing in mind the education driven travel market to and from Salford Crescent.

12. Morecambe – Lancaster

12.1 We understand that the service from Leeds to Morecambe is to be enhanced. We can't find this included in the timetable as presented.

13. Cumbrian Coast and Lancaster/Windermere to Manchester Airport

13.1 The pattern of northbound services to Barrow and Windermere, departing the Airport at xx29 and Piccadilly at xx.50 means that (assuming the current Avanti timetable), apart from three daytime trains, northbound trains between the Airport and Barrow will leave Preston at 33 minutes past the hour and so will miss the xx.38 arrival from London. This does not apply to trains from Manchester Airport to Windermere which will still leave Preston at xx.45 and make the connection from London.

13.2 This pattern is continued right up to the end of service. This effectively brings forward the last train of the day from Manchester Piccadilly to Barrow and other points north of Preston by 35 minutes to 2129 (Airport) and 2150 (Piccadilly). (Currently 2225 ex-Piccadilly). Not only is this inconvenient for Theatre and Concert-goers or those attending other evening events, it also means that the connection at Preston out of the VT 20.30 London-Preston train is broken, thereby bringing forward the last train of the day from London to points north of Preston by 80 minutes (19.10 ex-Euston in the current timetable - 19.30 in pre-Covid days). The 2150 (2129 ex-Airport) should be retimed so as to maintain the connection, which is well used.

13.3 The 16.12 Lancaster to Barrow school train will leave Lancaster at 15.48, breaking the connection from the 14.29 Manchester Airport to Windermere train leaving a two hour gap in Manchester Airport to Barrow journeys.

13.4 It is disappointing that the evening service between Manchester and Scotland continues to be inferior on Saturdays compared to Monday to Friday. Combined with the Northern service, the position for the evening service to Lancaster as proposed will be -

Ex-Manchester Airport M-F	Saturdays
1829 NT Barrow	1829 NT Barrow
1904 TPE Glasgow	1904 TPE Oxenholme
1929 NT Barrow	2103 TPE Preston (with an 11 minute onward NT connection to Barrow)
2004 TPE Edinburgh	2129 NT Barrow
2103 TPE Glasgow	
2129 NT Barrow	

13.5 The absence of through trains between 1904 and 2129 should be noted, especially as the latter train has been subject to planned curtailment at Preston for several periods of the current and previous timetables on Saturdays.

13.6 A similar situation applies to southbound services, with the proposed 2007 Edinburgh - Manchester running SX and perpetuating the situation whereby the last train from Edinburgh is two hours earlier on Saturdays than during the week. Later southbound services introduced in 2019 do not seem to be proposed for reinstatement.

14. Blackpool – Colne/ Leeds

14.1 We support Community Rail Lancashire's comments, particularly the issue of connections at Blackburn (BBN). Preston (PRE) is Ribble Valley's nearest city and transport connection hub yet connections to and from PRE at BBN will be a significant deterrent for those wishing to travel by train. Clitheroe (CLH) to PRE - current 6 minutes at BBN becomes 27 minutes, whilst PRE to CLH goes from 10 minutes at BBN to 33 minutes. We consider any connectional change greater than 15 minutes as a significant barrier for most people. A bus journey from the Ribble Valley to Preston is possible but Preston rail station is around half a mile from the bus station and linking buses are not obvious.

14.2 Connections at Preston with Avanti are not ideal. We do not have any information on any potential changes from Avanti in this respect.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,

John A Moorhouse John Moorhouse, Company Secretary.