

CONFERENCE REPORT

Thursday 12th June 2011
Masonic Hall, Southport

Conference kindly supported by First TransPennine Express

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, Chris Dale welcomed delegates to Southport and thanked First TransPennine Express for its kind support. He described some of the work of TravelWatch North West since the last conference.

There had been numerous consultations to respond to and meetings to attend, all of which had the effect of heightening the profile of TWNW. He, together with John Moorhouse, had appeared before the House of Commons Transport Select Committee and other issues included:

- Ø West Coast Main Line route utilisation
- Ø Rolling stock RUS
- Ø Railway Stations RUS
- Ø WCML franchisee liaison
- Ø Information Licensing in rail franchises (ORR)
- Ø Civil Aviation Consumer representation (ORR)
- Ø National Taxi Users Asscn.

In addition work was ongoing with other regions to try and widen the national coverage of the TravelWatch movement. This is important work particularly in the light of forthcoming cuts to Passenger Focus and the regional gaps that will be left as a consequence.

2. The Role of the Traffic Commissioner

Mrs. Beverley Bell, Traffic Commissioner North Western Traffic Area

Mrs. Bell began by commenting on the high value she placed on the work of TravelWatch North West and congratulated the Chairman and Board for the work it carries out. She believes that TWNW is a unique organisation being the only fully independent organisation representing the voice of passengers. She emphasised that the work it carries out must not be underestimated as its responses to consultations was viewed as extremely important by government departments. She remains hopeful that the movement can be expanded to cover the whole of the country.

She went on to describe her new role as Deputy Senior Traffic Commissioner, a position she is holding for an undefined temporary period, but this gives her direct access to senior Civil Servants and it is her intention to use her influence to the full.

She went on to discuss the Competition Commission's Enquiry findings, which had laid its views on the line quite bluntly. A great deal was happening and too often the passenger view was not represented. She emphasised that she needed to hear from passenger groups so that she can use her position to argue for them. By the end of 2011 VOSA will have abolished the position of the Bus Compliance officer and so there will be no monitoring regime. The Regulator can enforce matters on to operators but must have issues referred.

Local Authorities are cutting back on many support services and infra structure such as maintenance of bus lanes and real time information so it is a worrying time. She will be meeting with DfT in early July and will debate what its future plans will be over regulatory matters.

Mrs Bell believes strongly that buses need to serve the needs of passengers first and foremost but difficult, unpopular and tough decisions may have to be made. A Bus Punctuality Group has been set up in the North West with representation from Operators, (large/small/urban/rural), and a transport lawyer, and is initially looking at routes by type and service to determine what is achievable.

In discussion Mrs Bell asked if there is contentment with new competition emphasising that there must be a robust system to counter the powerful lobby of the motorist (which is also a good tax revenue earner for government).

She will be happy to share intelligence from her endeavours but does need to receive views that she can articulate to the DfT.

3. Stagecoach Bus in Merseyside

Les Burton, Operations Director, Stagecoach, Merseyside

Mr. Burton began by describing the operation of Stagecoach Bus. It has 30,000 staff and 8,000 buses. When it took over operations on Merseyside it found an old fleet of vehicles and a de-motivated staff. It was necessary to adopt a number of principles to modernise the organisation and meet the needs of modern day customers.

The company believes that the Customer is the most important element of the equation and research has shown that they put frequency, quality and comfort of bus services ahead of fares. By adopting a customer care attitude the industry has come a long way. Safety is also a vital item and now all buses have CCTV which costs around £24,000 per vehicle, so is a big investment. Vandalism does, however remain a real problem.

The challenges that had to be overcome on Merseyside were the need for a new fleet of buses, deep evaluation of the system which had an outdated historic base, to convince the workforce of long term goals, tackling smoking and drug abuse on buses, and to recruit more new drivers.

These challenges were met by the introduction of consolidated services such as those serving Kirkby, termination of the last cross city service, simplifying the

network into a single entity, modernising the bus fleet, invoking good employee relations, route branding and identifying new markets and opportunities. By tackling these issues head on the company has now moved into profit.

Recognising the importance of being environmentally friendly all buses are now Euro 3 emission compliant and the latest are Euro 5 compliant. Bio diesel is used across the entire fleet.

Good examples of recognising a market opportunity were the Open Golf Championship at Hoylake, when a Park & Ride operation used 80 vehicles and carried 28,000 passengers in one day (the resultant experience being carried forward to the 2012 Championship at Royal Birkdale) and a joint enterprise with East Midlands Trains that offered a successful exercise in integrated ticketing for the Grand National.

For the future further investment in the fleet is planned in particular for Routes 14, 10 and 53. Additionally debit card readers and smart card technology is being introduced despite Liverpool having the distinction as the most cash focussed city in the country.

In discussion the issue of cuts was raised and whilst this was a difficult issue there is a moral obligation to preserve peak period services and examine the “troughs” but much research and evaluation is required. The company wishes to introduce more hybrid buses but the cost being 50% above a conventional vehicle is a challenge. It was acknowledged that the Network Map could be simplified and discussions with Merseytravel will hopefully begin to address this for the future.

4. Merseyrail Update

Rudi Boersma, Media & Corporate Affairs Manager, Merseyrail

Mr. Boersma described the history of the Merseyrail concession that began in 2003. Merseytravel holds the franchise and the operational concession is undertaken by Abellio/Serco (formerly Ned Railways). They have been the concessionaire since 2003 and are the 4th since the 25 year franchise began in 1994. The partnership works well and enables a mutual long term vision to be adopted and applied.

The network carries 110,000 passengers each weekday on 800+ trains from 67 stations (62 of which are staffed and 36 of which have free car parks), on a clock-face timetable. The average fare is £1.50 and the average journey is 6.5 miles. Unlike other UK rail operators, fares are pegged at RPI for the duration of the franchise.

In the early years the system had suffered poor punctuality and reliability, cleanliness issues, safety and security problems, 20% ticket-less travel and low staff moral and motivation. Now, through recognition of the issues and appropriate investment PPM is 95% (best in UK), 40% passenger growth and a 93% passenger satisfaction have been achieved. Ticket-less travel is down to 1.5% together with 100 % secure car park recognition and anti social behaviour has been tackled and substantially reduced. An above benchmark level of cleanliness on trains and stations has also been recorded.

New features have included the introduction of staff led projects, an example of which is the Fast Lane for Guards. This provides passenger facing train staff with sufficient information systems access to answer passenger questions on all related

subject matter whilst in transit. Also the introduction of the Dutch inspired MtoGo ticket and retail points at stations has been a success.

Future challenges are headed by Liverpool Central station which hosts 55,000 passenger per day travelling on the 12-14 trains per hour that serve it. It is a poor environment and suffers from overcrowding. Plans are afoot to widen the Northern Line platforms and improve the escalators in the next 5 years, and undertake some cosmetic improvements and better access with work commencing this summer. At an average age of 33 years the train fleet of 55 units is now the oldest in the country and now presents some reliability issues. Due to the age, difficulty is being experienced in sourcing parts and efforts are being made to procure a new fleet and also acquire some units from other sources.

In terms of future management of the system it is hoped that the government's Localism initiative will be beneficial. There has been a long held aspiration to have integrated management of all aspects of the system in a self contained network. Currently a sum of £30 million is paid to Network Rail so there are many legal issues to overcome but work is in progress to achieve a pilot status by 2013/14 as recommended in the McNulty report.

Localism may also help in future aspirations to extend the network to Wrexham, Skelmersdale and the replacement of the Burscough curve.

5. Sefton's Coach Welcome Scheme

Steve Christian, Tourism & Visitor Service Manager, Sefton MBC

Mr. Christian introduced the newly adopted branding of Southport as "England's Classic Resort". This had been adopted in the light of the need to meet changes to holiday habits which are identified as:

- Ø Rising customer expectations
- Ø Competition from overseas destinations
- Ø Short Break holidays
- Ø Shopping as a leisure activity
- Ø Renaissance of Liverpool and Manchester
- Ø Customers now "Cash Rich/Time Poor"
- Ø Competitive business and conference market

£200 million had been invested in the resort over the last decade to improve and upgrade facilities and 3 new 4* hotels had been built. Work goes on with a new Arts & Cultural Centre, and regeneration of retail quarters to make the resort's environment more attractive and appealing.

Coach and tour operators have been identified as a lucrative market to Southport worth an estimated £6.61 million per year to the resort's economy. It has been noted that numbers of coaches arriving has risen from 2885 in the year 2000 to 5252 in 2010. This has followed on from a progressive policy to welcome coaches and much work has been undertaken in liaison with operators and group travel organisers.

To identify the market it was segmented into 3 categories - Day Trips, Short Breaks in regions (to feature an excursion to Southport) and Short Breaks in Southport itself. To service the business a number of facilities have been put in place viz:

- Ø Dedicated Coach drop off points
- Ø Secure coach parking
- Ø Driver facilities
- Ø Drivers "Passport" Incentive scheme featuring special offers
- Ø Group Discounts to events and attractions
- Ø Meet & Greet service
- Ø Discount book for passengers
- Ø Dedicated Travel Trade Officer

Liaison is ongoing with promotions at Trade Shows, a regular Newsletter, dedicated and targeted information brochures, public relations and selective advertising.

Sefton BC has been commended with many industry awards for its efforts in Southport and comments from the audience echoed this view and suggested that other destinations in the North West could learn much from the example.

6. A New Voice for the Taxi Passenger

John Austin, Vice-Chair, National Association of Taxi Users

The National Association of Taxi Users (NATU) was formed last year following a research project that identified taxis as public transport. The abolition of DPTAC and the Warboys London taxi serial rape case also drove the initiative to form the association

NATU campaigns for the provision of good quality taxi services throughout the UK and to make it easier to find out information and book taxis. It is engaging with many leading transport organisations as it believes that predicted future growth in the taxi market will require some formal quality standards and good consumer representation.

Good taxi services do exist but there are also many problems which NATU is working to. These include:

- Ø Further development and expansion of the Website www.taxiuser.com
- Ø A Quality mark for taxi operators
- Ø Wider awareness of aims
- Ø A formal constitution

Identified consumer concerns and variables include:

- Ø Vehicle conditions
- Ø Overcharging, confusion over fares and use of meters
- Ø Driver standards, knowledge and communication skills
- Ø Complaints –who to? how to?
- Ø Criminality assurance
- Ø Hackney/PHV difference –postcode discrepancies
- Ø Licensing
- Ø Sufficient provision of taxi ranks
- Ø Integration with other transport modes
- Ø Provision of accessible taxis for disabled users

NATU is also encouraging more consistent driver training and customer care standards and with this looking to build up experience of delivery of these aspirations to the industry and, as a consequence, the consumer. It is also encouraging local authorities to feature taxi provision in published and displayed information sites as well as on websites.

As taxi buses are replacing bus transport in some areas growth in use is expected. However a problem is posed as shared taxi buses are presently placed under 2 different licensing regimes. Rural taxi buses have been strongly advocated but this has weakened following the abolition of support organisations.

To support multi modal transport NATU promotes the use of the website www.traintaxi.co.uk which lists up to 3 taxi firms for every rail station. Metro and tram stop in the UK.

7. Open Forum

A number of advance written questions had been received but as the subject matter could not be addressed due to there being no related representatives present, the Chairman undertook to pass them on to the relevant companies at the earliest opportunity. As there was insufficient time available further verbal questions could not be taken.

The Chairman raised the issue that the Open Forum was often curtailed due to lack of time and non attendance of operator companies and asked delegates if the session was still relevant. He indicated that some members of the Board had questioned the effectiveness of the session and whether it was of any further value to delegates. Delegates responded that the session was extremely useful and needed to be planned into the conferences to allow more time for discussion. The Chairman undertook to discuss the issue further with the Board at its next meeting.

8. Next Conference

Thursday 13th October, 2011. Lancaster

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Adrian Dunning	North West Transport Roundtable
Alan Salter	Manchester Matters
Allan McLean	Virgin Trains
Barry Drelincourt	
Beverley Bell	Traffic Commissioner NW
Brian Grey	
Caroline Donaldson	First Group
Cedric Green	North Cheshire RUG
Charles Agate	
Chris Dale	TravelWatch NorthWest
Chris Holmes	
Chris Jarvis	Institute of Transport Administration
Colin Barnett	Bus Users UK
David Burton	South East Lancs Rail Action Partnership
David Butterworth	TravelWatch NorthWest

David Evans	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
David Koring	Shropshire Council
David Squire	Warrington Borough Transport Ltd
Derek Tasker	Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Association
Gabriel Drew	East Cheshire RUG
Geoff Kerr	
John Moorhouse	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Austin	National Association of Taxi Users
John Culshaw	Mattersons Cranes
John Hart	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Hobbs	North Cheshire RUG
John Murray	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Owen	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Ryan	Wirral Transport Users Association
John Warner	Kendal & District Bus User Group
Ian Stuart	
Keith Pennyfather	
Ken McKelvie	Ramblers Association
Ken Swallow	Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport NW
Les Burton	Stagecoach Merseyside
Malcolm Conway	Lakes Line Rail User Group
Malcolm Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association
Martin Taylor	Arriva Merseyside
Martyn Davies	Merseytravel
Michael Wrigley	Support the Oldham Rochdale Line Association
Mike Perkins	Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Association
Neil Caldwell	Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport NW
Paul Byrne	
Paul Fawcett	TWNW
Peter Lamkin	Wrexham Birkehead Rail Users Association
Philip Harrison	
Phillipa Sudlow	Confederation of Passenger Transport NW
Preva Crossley	Friends of Hindley Station
Richard Rollins	TWNW
Robert Barlow	Agito Transport Planning LLP
Roger Tripp	
Rudi Boersma	Merseyrail
Russell Oakes	CILT Merseyside & Warrington
Russell Warhurst	University of Chester
Sandra Dutson	RoadPeace NorthWest
Shelley Usher	Stagecoach Merseyside
Steve Christian	Sefton MBC - Tourism Dept
Terry Durrance	Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Association
Tom Lunt	
Tony McDonough	Merseytravel
Tony Potts	Copeland RUG
Tony Young	TWNW