

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

Thursday 20th October, 2022, Merseytravel, Liverpool

Conference kindly supported by Merseytravel, Merseyrail, Arriva North West and Cumbria LEP

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, David Butterworth, welcomed delegates to the Conference and thanked Merseytravel, Merseyrail, Arriva North West and Cumbria LEP for their support.

He then referred to the current situation of the government and the consequent uncertainty for support of Public Transport where he envisaged many cutbacks in transport projects, particularly in the rail and bus sectors. He also highlighted the current inconsistency of rail services which is creating a lack of confidence amongst commuters, business and leisure travellers. He emphasised the need for train operators to continue efforts to secure service recovery and encourage passengers to return.

Finally he drew attention to the recently published TWNW report on Train Journey Experiences, which is available on the website.

2. Transport in the Liverpool City Region

Liam Robinson, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Air Quality, LCRCA

Liam opened his presentation by mentioning the Climate Change emergency which has to be addressed, particularly in respect of the threat to coastal regions. It is clear that, without action, the current Liverpool waterfront could be underwater within the next half century.

Significant public transport improvements are promised over the next 3 years. These include:

Rail

- Being Affordable – Smart ticketing; Integrated multi-modal fares; Special offers; Prices pegged to RPI.

- New Trains – Class 777 being introduced shortly.
- Accessibility – 60% of stations will be step-free.
- Safety and Security – On board staffing; Secure Stations; Secure Car Parks; spacious design principles.
- Sustainability – Alternative power sources.

Investigations are taking place to scope the expansion of the Merseyrail network to potentially Preston, Wigan, Warrington and Skelmersdale by the introduction of battery technology to power trains off the electrified network.

New stations are being built in the City Centre (Baltic Quarter), St. Helens and Kirkby.

Buses

- Deregulation has not worked and a regulated model (franchising) is being sought and a Business Case mirroring the London model is being worked up. This would result in a publicly controlled network.
- £2 single journey bus fare introduced anywhere in the City Region.
- Hydrogen Buses – Being introduced on Route 10 (Liverpool – St. Helens) in 2023.

Active Travel

- Cycling/Walking routes - £200 million investment to support 600 km (31 key routes)
- E-Scooters – Trial since 2020 successful; 27740 trips per week

Ferries

- Positive announcements coming soon.

3. The Importance of Bus on Merseyside

Matthew Goggins, Asst. Director for Bus, Merseytravel

The bus is critical in helping the Merseyside Region to function, supporting access to work, leisure, education, and healthcare. 82% of public transport is by bus with 100 million journeys per year. 25% of the Merseyside workforce uses the bus to commute.

To address challenges of the future face to face research interviews have taken place to reveal likes, dislikes, and suggested improvements. A “Bus back Better” Strategy has been adopted in the City Region Improvement Plan to address:

- Reliability and Journey time improvements
- Modal Integration

- Fares and values
- Emission levels

Current Projects and Programmes include:

- Bus Reform – Franchising System preferred option – decision Summer 2023
- Green Routes – 9 planned to feature reduced congestion, faster journeys, fewer cars, new passengers.
- Hydrogen Buses – 20 vehicles procured to be in service in 2023
- Fairer Fares offering better value

4. Rail in Merseyside

Jane English, Acting MD, Merseyrail

Merseyrail and the National rail network is experiencing a challenging period with recent adverse weather, industrial action and sickness levels. However the performance has now returned to pre-pandemic levels in Merseyside.

Some skip-stopping has had to be introduced at stations with the lowest footfall to help improve punctuality and total performance is now hitting 94%. Merseyrail reached agreement with the RMT in July and so can operate an hourly service on strike days as signallers are still affected.

17 new 777 class trains are currently being tested in the City Region and will have a battery powered option so that they can operate off the electrified network. They feature level boarding, more space, better internal visibility, and increased capacity and provide better comfort and ride.

A new ticketing system will be introduced to bring a London style, expanding the current limited range, and a tap-in tap-out and barcode facility. New stations are being built at Liverpool Baltic, Headbolt Lane and St. Helens following from the successful opening of Maghull North, and there is still an aspiration to connect Skelmersdale in the longer term. In addition a new Website will be launched in 2023 to provide and support updated ticket modernisation.

5. Transport for the North

David Hoggarth, Strategic Rail Director, Transport for the North

TfN is working across the North West with every Local Authority, sharing best practice. It is refreshing its Strategic Transport Plan in the New Year and will be seeking views by wide evidence-based consultation.

The North is leading the Rail Recovery with services during the April – September period level at 83% of pre-pandemic levels compared with 72% in London. Recently, however, there has been some fall-off due to seasonality and industrial action. For the future it will be necessary to identify new markets and exploit them to offer rail as a practical alternative.

The TfN Decarbonisation Strategy identifies modal shift as a priority which will require investment in electrification and general rail reform.

6. Transport and Social Exclusion

Kris Beuret, Social Research Associates

A Literature review was undertaken recently to identify people who felt socially excluded. The output was a geo-social database that can be viewed by sub-region to identify people who felt excluded from public transport and this revealed that 20% of people in the North are affected. Reasons for this are:

- Lack of knowledge of transport systems
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of technical expertise to access digital information and connectivity
- Older car drivers with no access to public transport
- Replacement of old cars often unaffordable
- Barriers to walking – poor pavements, indiscriminate parking, anti-social activity
- Landowners compromise accessible development infra-structure
- General Inclusion facilities in design

However it is noted that the socially excluded groups have the lowest carbon footprint.

7. Date of Next Conference

March 2023 in Manchester

Copies of the presentations are available on the TravelWatch NorthWest Website

www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk