

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

Tuesday 17th October 2023, County Hall, Preston PR1 8XJ
Conference kindly supported by Lancashire County
Council and Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, David Butterworth, welcomed delegates to the Conference and thanked all the supporters. He also welcomed the speakers.

Councillor Scott Smith, Lead Member for Highways and Active Travel, Lancashire CC welcomed every one and mentioned £34.1m investment in buses to improve infrastructure and frequency. Also £6m for cycling and walking. LCC engaged with TfN to speak with one voice with the aim of a devolved authority with transport powers. Redirection of funding arising from HS2 cancellation was not yet finalised .

2. The future of rail in the North West

Tony Miles Transport Journalist

Tony compared the situation in 1978 with today and the large increase in investment costs since then (at constant prices). Cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham would have repercussions for freight and promises of investment in the North were vague.

High subsidies particularly for Northern (40p per passenger mile) did not help the situation and 7 year franchises had hindered long term planning. There was a need to change thinking in this country and to persuade people that investment in public transport was a good thing. The mentality of the Serpell report was still in existence and there was a danger that a future conservative government could signal more rundown/ closures.

Craig Alexander, Great British Railways Transition Team

Craig outlined the deficiencies in a fragmented industry structure which did not allow for 'whole system' decision-making. There was a lot of opportunity for rail and reforms that unlock growth would -

1. Bring together track, train and talent.
2. Re-focus all parts of the industry on the customer.
3. Create a fresh culture, based on collaboration across the public and private sectors, enabling the best of both.
4. Give clear and accountable leadership.
5. Be responsive to local needs, with decisions made as close to the customer as possible.
6. Be more efficient and less siloed – joined up, whole system decisions.
7. Formulate long-term strategy for rail, underpinned by strategic objectives set by government

GBRTT would agree areas of focus to drive growth –

- Performance
- Pricing & simpler ticketing
- Capacity provision and utilisation
- Better customer proposition
- Communication and information

The promotion of 'brand rail' and its sustainability advantages to consumers and businesses would be key.

Mark Barker, Rail Reform Group

Mark outlined the aims of the Rail Reform Group to promote innovative thinking in rail policy and offer value for money. The role of railways had not been clear in the past. Historically there had been Beeching, the 1968 Transport Act which created PTEs, sectorisation and then privatisation based on franchising. The latter was somewhat controversial but he felt it had been reasonably successful. However, following Covid, cost control had become all important.

The HS2 curtailment had destroyed a decade of strategic thinking and would seriously impair freight as well as reverting to non-tilt slower and shorter trains to Manchester. Network North was vague and ill-informed and there was not enough clarity about the alternative Network North investment. Need for WCML improvement and other investments including electrification/ decarbonisation.

Mark remarked that the strikes continued to disrupt and they did not appear to be working. He added that ticket office closure proposals were ill considered and sales statistics were generalised. There was no evidence of a business case.

Fares increases were happening for rail yet petrol duty was frozen. Mark commented that over the years political influence had adversely affected rail. Wales and Scotland devolved governments were good for railways. There was a real need for English regional bodies to have more devolved powers and accountability.

Simon Reynish, Chairman CILT Policy Committee for the North

Simon outlined plans for CrossRail North a transport project designed to create modal shift from road to rail, reduce rail congestion in the major conurbations and benefit the environment. This would involve re-opening lines between Skipton and Colne, Carlisle and Galashiels, Workington and Teesport and Manchester and the East Midlands.

Q&A

John Carr – Need for a strategic plan for climate change (2050) and to join up with other agencies. A – a holistic view required of cost/ benefit analysis and government departments working together. Also the need to emphasise modal shift for health reasons and monitoring the benefits of decarbonisation.

Adrian Swift questioned how to achieve modal shift.

John Owen remarked on the relative reticence of the shire authorities in the TfN structure. They were not speaking up for rail passengers when for example the Lake District had been isolated from the rail system in early September. Tony Miles said they should uplift their media presence.

Richard Lysons bemoaned the length of time taken for new stations to be built and the cost. Mark Barker referred to a lack of expertise.

3. The future for our buses and integration

Andrew Varley, Public Transport Manager, Lancashire County Council

Andrew referred to the National Bus Strategy and Bus Service Improvement Plans – Lancs CC had received much less funding than bid for. He then commented on bus service enhancements that had been and were to be introduced.

A start had been made on Bus Priority Measures (in Preston) and whilst they took time to develop and deliver, more were planned. Ticketing and Integration initiatives included -

- £1 after 7pm
- Buy Saturday day ticket get Sunday free
- “Tap on Tap off” – equipment being rolled out to operators, local fare capping which will lead to multi-operator ticketing (Coral)
- “AnyBus Preston”, a multi operator day ticket funded through Transforming Cities Fund, which will lead to similar options being developed in other areas, through the BSIP.
- Skelmersdale Trainlink – integrated bus/rail ticket service to new Merseyrail Headbolt Lane station, in collaboration with Merseyravelly

An Enhanced Partnership (EP), with local bus operators, had been formally established on 7 April 2022. The legally established EP Scheme set out the obligations and requirements on both Lancashire County Council and

operators of local bus services in Lancashire with the aim of delivering the objectives of the EP Plan, but subject to funding. It would be a legally established partnership.

A Passenger Charter was currently in development as a Lancashire wide Passenger Charter, developed in partnership with local bus operators. TWNW would be consulted on it.

Andrew referred to a number of ongoing challenges including a shortage of drivers and the concessionary bus market not growing back to pre Covid 19 levels of patronage. He concluded with some positive comments about the future albeit with caveats about longer term funding.

Owen Wilson, Head of Major Roads, Transport for the North

Owen outlined the North's Strategic Transport Plan 2 (STP) - TfN's opportunity to speak with one voice on behalf of the north by providing statutory advice on strategic transport priorities to ensure a transport network fit for the future.

He described TfN's Analytical Framework (AF) which was assembled to provide robust and high quality evidence required by TfN programmes such as Northern Powerhouse Rail.

A Local Public Transport Model was being developed including bus service reliability data, bus accessibility data and an insight on potential for passenger growth. A Bus Forum (comprising local and national partners) was being launched to support development of TfN's Public Transport Model and provide feedback on TfN's emerging statutory advice; to promote engagement and sharing of information; to understand where road investment will support bus services.

Owen outlined 3 themes - The future of ticketing including multi modal ticketing, data and infrastructure including the integration of open access modes and future mobility including demand responsive transport. Work on Connected Mobility included

- Delivering a DRT Delivery Playbook to support authorities in developing and delivering DRT without duplicating effort
- Acting as a conduit to enable and pay as you go using the emerging national broker model developed in the West Midlands.
- Working to deliver an initial Fares Modelling Tool for end of FY23/24 to allow basic what-if modelling of fares structures.
- Developing the case for a CM Innovation Fund, of up to c. £12m to reduce duplicated spend in delivering ticketing, data and future mobility innovations.
- Articulating the need for the North, in tandem with Midland's colleagues, to work together to realise the benefits of the c.£100m announced for smarter ticketing in 'Network North'.

Q&A

Malcolm Richardson said that improvements to road surfaces would help buses and he also commented on accessibility issues. With regard to the latter, Andrew pointed to work being done at bus stops.

Terri Balon asked whether BSIPs included funding to help information for blind people in buses. Andrew replied that this was not part of BSIPs but all new vehicles would have this by 2026.

Paul Stubbins, North Lancashire Green Party, emphasised the need to enhance bus services in rural areas.

Adrian Swift stressed the need for real time information at bus stops. Andrew said that previous funding measures had prevented this but reinstatement was being progressed. He acknowledged there was still a demand for printed timetables.

Will Gibson referred to poor evening services in Lancaster. Andrew said there were funding constraints.

David Evans, BAFRUA, commented on the driver shortage problem allied to, low wages.

John Carr questioned the need for consultants when in the past much of this work was undertaken by staff. Andrew said internal staff were not now available.

7. Date of Next Conference

12th March 2024 – Masonic Guildhall Stockport

Copies of the presentations are available on the TravelWatch NorthWest Website

www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk