

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

**Tuesday 12th March 2024, Stockport Masonic Guildhall
Stockport SK1 3UA**

**Conference kindly supported by TransPennine Express
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.

David outlined some recent public transport journeys of variable quality. He opined that, in many respects, Britain's public transport was Britain's National Curate's Egg: "When it's good it's very good but when it's bad it's horrid".

Councillor Graham Greenhalgh, the Mayor of Stockport welcomed everyone and mentioned the loss of HS2. It was hoped that money saved would go towards more local links including Northern Powerhouse Rail. He also referred to the new BEE network and the soon to be opened Stockport Interchange which would be "Metro ready".

2. The Bee Network

Alison Chew, Deputy Director of Bus, TfGM

Alison described the bus franchising process. Tranche 1 covering Wigan, Bolton & Bury came into operation in September 2023. Tranche 2 - Oldham, Rochdale, and parts of Bury, Salford and north Manchester would follow on 24th March. Tranche 2 will see more frequent and earlier and later services; pre-franchise service reductions reversed, and plans were being developed to improve performance on the worst performing routes.

Night buses were to be piloted and there would be network reviews to develop the bus network.

By 2030, the aim was for buses to run at least every 12 minutes on key orbital and radial routes and to provide 90% of the entire Greater Manchester

population with a 30-minute frequency bus or Metrolink service on weekdays within 400m of their home. Other options (e.g. DRT) will be put in place in parts of the city region where this is not possible. Infrastructure improvements would include on-street bus improvements across 70km of high frequency, strategic bus routes across Greater Manchester by 2030.

Adrian Swift emphasised the importance of promotion to encourage more people to use buses. Terri Balon commented on the challenge of reliable announcements for sight impaired passengers. Alison asked her to email details.

Responding to David Culshaw Alison said it would take time to resolve initial quality issues with buses and drivers but there would be more new buses and increased focus on reliability.

3. Helping rail to find its feet in a post Covid world

Robert Fickling, Rail Strategy Advisor, TfGM

Robert presented slides detailing the pre Covid growth of rail in Greater Manchester, quality of service issues and the adverse effects of the 2018 timetable changes.

Since Covid there had been a massive drop in the rail business market and a crash in the season ticket market. Now people have the option to not travel at all – online shopping, Teams/Zoom. Rail travellers are much more cost sensitive, more willing to trade time of travel against choice.

Future planning should involve –

- A recognition that the rail market has changed.
- Stabilising the rail offer
- Fixing performance and flexibility of working
- Build in extra network capacity.
- Run services when people want to travel, not when it's convenient to run trains.
- Address the Fares challenge and the issue of the car becoming cheaper!

In all of this the vital importance of data was paramount.

4. Transpennine Express in 2024

Chris Jackson, Managing Director, TPE

Chris firstly covered stabilising the business, including getting the trains to run on time and restoring Driver Rest Day working. Driver training backlog had reduced from 5,000 days to 2,600 days but would take the whole of 2024 to clear. Restrictive terms and conditions still needed to be addressed.

Plans for the future included a deep clean of trains, new seat covers/carpets, improved on board toilets and repainting stations. Chris outlined measures to

win customers back and summarised the December 2023 timetable changes. June 2024 would see further building back including an increase from 34 to 40 trains on the Manchester/ Liverpool – Scotland corridor.

Outlining the TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU) plan, Chris said this would

- Deliver more frequent, faster train journeys between key towns and cities with six fast trains per hour between Leeds and Manchester
- Reduce journey times between Manchester – Leeds and York
- Give greener, cleaner travel on low emission trains.
- A better travel experience through improved, more accessible stations
- Electrifying the whole route between Manchester and York via Huddersfield and Leeds
- Installing a new digital signalling system
- Doubling the number of tracks from two to four between Huddersfield and Dewsbury

Chris outlined disruption that would take place in 2024 resulting from TRU and went on to announce the TRU related procurement process for a new fleet of multi modal trains. On West Coast there was an initiative (“Trilink”) to introduce digital signalling (ETCS) and a recently launched “West Coast Kitchen” catering improvement.

5. Community Rail in South Manchester

Keith Whitmore, Chairman SE Manchester CRP

There were 50 stations in the 2 South Manchester CRPs and a Management Group comprising Local authorities train companies, Network rail and CRN. Keith referred to working with schools, station groups, Cheshire Best Kept stations, Crewe Open days/Heritage Centre, etc.

2025 would be a key year for railways – “Year 200”. Many events would be planned including a Rail 200 train.

Q&A

The Chairman introduced the session by remarking on the myriad of fares possibilities between Stockport and Manchester amongst the different operators. It was an example of the complex nature of the train fares system across Great Britain. Chris Jackson agreed that there were complex fare options. However legal considerations meant that the Competition & Marketing Authority would not allow harmonisation of fares. There were upsides and downsides. A guiding mind (GBR) was needed. Robert Fickling added that more fares simplification meant more restriction of choice.

Responding to Dennis Harrison, Robert Fickling said that the Castlefield Corridor strategy was being reviewed. To comments about Piccadilly platforms 15 & 16, Robert stressed that they could not be built in isolation. Other parallel enhancements would be needed.

Friend of Reddish South had been long campaigning (17 years) for more trains. Robert Fickling commented on the lack of capacity at Stockport and other priorities. Resignalling would mean fewer trains through Stockport! Interestingly the DfT took into account reduction in fuel duty when considering new rail schemes.

Chris Jackson confirmed the ASLEF dispute was about pay. TPE would like to gain more flexibility with drivers' rosters.

Responding to Richard Lysons, Robert Fickling said blue collar worker routes were seeing greater commuters returning. Need for more white-collar commuters to come back.

Cllr Baynham spoke of the need for more trains at Hazel Grove and commented on the HS2 cancelation to Manchester. Chris Jackson agreed to lo at the Hazel Grove situation. More devolution to TfGM would allow more local decisions.

Stephen Waring commented on the underuse of the Ordsall Chord and the need for a service to Manchester Airport from the Calder Valley.

7. Date of Next Conference

Thursday 27th June Blackburn Cathedral

Copies of the presentations are available on the TravelWatch NorthWest Website

www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk