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Integration Between Rail and Bus at Rail Stations

A Report on Guidance and Convenience for Passengers



*Working for an integrated and
seamless public transport network
across the North West of England*

Integration Between Rail and Bus at Rail Stations

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Cover photo – Penrith Ticket Office (Ian Watson)

1. Introduction & Background

1.1 Integration between transport modes in this country is generally poor, especially when compared with continental examples. In 2016 TWNW carried out a survey to examine the reality of provision of guidance for passengers when changing from train to bus at rail stations and how easy it was to do this in that year, 42 mainly medium sized stations in the NorthWest were surveyed. During 2023 we felt it would be opportune to repeat the exercise at the same stations to ascertain if any changes had been made (both positive and negative) to the provision of guidance for passengers when changing from train to bus at rail stations. Due to internal issues the exercise was not completed until the Spring of 2024.

1.2 The stations surveyed in 2016 - a number of rail stations and some Metrolink stations in our region – were mainly medium sized with footfall ranging from about 100,000 to about 4,500,000. We looked at information/guidance displayed from stepping off the train to that displayed in the station concourse. We also looked at information about the proximity of bus stops/ stations and services offered from there. We assessed the use of car parks at the time of the visit and recorded information and facilities available at bus stops and similarly for bus stations.

2. Methodology

2.1 In all, 42 stations were surveyed in the autumn of 2016, mainly during daylight hours on weekdays. The stations were operated by - Northern (20), Virgin West Coast (10), Merseyrail (7), Manchester Metrolink (3), First TransPennine Express (1), Arriva Trains Wales (1)

2.2 In 2023/24 the same stations with some exceptions were revisited. The following table lists all the stations surveyed on both occasions with footfall figures for both occasions.

Stations	Footfall 2015/16 (source ORR)	Footfall 2022/23	Operator
Accrington	433,618	459,616	Northern
Altrincham	507,592 (Rail only)	247,514	Northern/Metrolink
Ashton-Under-Lyne	361,946	142,178	Northern
Barrow-In-Furness	631,364	539,732	Northern
Birkenhead Central	965,262	627,194	Merseyrail
Birkenhead Hamilton Square	2,017,478	1,294,758	Merseyrail
Blackburn	1,159,802	1,201,704	Northern
Blackpool North	1,764,014	1,908,778	Northern
Blackpool South	126,162	104,564	Northern
Bolton	2,866,316	2,499,322	northern
Burnley Central	128,614	100,182	Northern
Burnley Manchester Road	393,304	507,364	Northern
Bury	?	?	Metrolink
Carlisle	1,833,028	1,801,198	Virgin W Coast
Chester	4,620,230	4,121,592	Arriva Trains Wales
Clitheroe	240,112	287,170	Northern
Colne	96,946	66,808	Northern
Crewe	2,843,396	2,922,754	Virgin W Coast
East Didsbury	?		Metrolink
Kendal	215,398	152,530	Northern
Kirkby (Merseyside)	2,356,170	2,060,974	Merseyrail
Lancaster	2,033,538	1,830,070	Virgin W Coast
Liverpool South Parkway	1,893,958	1,812,630	Merseyrail
Macclesfield	1,614,316	1,183,784	Virgin W Coast
Maghull	1,812,534	1,164,994	Merseyrail
Morecambe	235,198	165,308	Northern
Oldham Central	?		Metrolink
Ormskirk	2,163,374	1,820,516	Merseyrail
Oxenholme Lake District	521,768	481,628	Virgin W Coast
Penrith	498,428	490,910	Virgin W Coast
Preston	4,621,590	4,236,536	Virgin W Coast
Rochdale	1,134,418	1,348,198	Northern
Southport	4,147,064	3,339,582	Merseyrail
St Helens Central	1,140,198	536,754	Northern
Stalybridge	1,128,900	619,346	TPennine Express
Stockport	3,586,032	3,142,678	Virgin W Coast
Warrington Bank Quay	1,110,400	1,125,816	Virgin W Coast
Warrington Central	1,801,788	1,102,550	Northern
Wigan North Western	1,380,716	1,182,964	Virgin W Coast
Wigan Wallgate	1,576,106	1,090,264	Northern
Windermere	419,710	316,224	Northern
Workington	184,880	190,886	Northern

3. Results

3.1 The following tables show for each station where **clear, easy to find** information about bus stops/ stations was provided and also where bus stops/ stations were located adjacent (within 200 metres) to the station. Comparison between 2023 and 2016 is shown.

3.2 Northern Rail

Station	Platform posters	Platform signage	Entrance posters	Entrance signage	Adj.bus stops	Adj.bus station
Accrington 2016	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Accrington 2023	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES
Altrincham 2016	NO	NO	NO	NO		YES
Altrincham 2023	NO	NO	NO	NO		YES
Ashton 2016	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Ashton 2023	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Barrow 2016	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Barrow 2023	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Blackburn 2016	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Blackburn 2023	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Blackpool North 2016	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Blackpool North 2023	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Blackpool S 2016	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Blackpool S 2023	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Bolton 2016	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Bolton 2023	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Burnley Central 2016	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Burnley Central 2023	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Burnley M Rd 2016	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Burnley M Rd 2023	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Clitheroe 2016	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Clitheroe 2023	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Colne 2016	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Colne 2023	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Kendal 2016	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO
Kendal 2023	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Morecambe 2016	NO	NO	YES	NO		YES
Morecambe 2023	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Rochdale 2016	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Rochdale 2023	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
St Helens Central 2016	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
St Helens Central 2023	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Warrington Central 2016	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Warrington Central 2023	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Wigan Wallgate 2016	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Wigan Wallgate 2023	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Windermere 2016	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Windermere 2023	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	
Workington 2016	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Workington 2023	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO

3.2.1 Information on platforms – Just 5 out of the 20 stations had clearly visible posters on platforms giving information about bus services, the same number as in 2016. These were standard “Continuing your journey” or “Onward Travel Information” posters with maps. There was little change in the way of signage from platforms to buses (up from 2 to 3 stations!), though there were noteworthy improvements at Blackpool South and St Helens Central.

3.2.2 Information in concourse /at station entrance – In 2016 it was good to find posters at 15 out of the 20 locations. Signage was again lacking with just 6 out of the 20 having clear signage to buses. In 2023/24, the former figure had regrettably declined to 12 out of 20 though the latter had improved somewhat to 9 out of 20. Information at Windermere has declined. In the words of the surveyor - “Not what we would like to see on offer to those arriving at the public transport hub of the second most visited tourist destination in England.”

3.2.3 Bus stops – Again as in 2016 at most stations some form of stops were adjacent and others reasonably close. Most stops had shelters, but comprehensive timetable information was patchy. There was no real time information.

3.2.4 Bus stations – Accrington, Altrincham, Ashton under Lyne, Bolton, Clitheroe and Warrington Central have bus stations within 200 metres (St Helens Central 250 metres). The adjacent Morecambe bus station is misnamed – having just 4 bus stops with shelters. Accrington is a fairly modern addition. At 6 stations (Barrow, Blackpool South, Colne, Kendal, Rochdale, Wigan Wallgate, Workington) there was a longish walk to the bus station (11-20 mins). Waiting and other facilities were mostly good or fair and comprehensive timetable information was available in the main.

3.2.5 In contrast to 2016 we now at last find real time information at the following bus stations –

- Altrincham
- Ashton
- Bolton
- St Helens
- Warrington
- Wigan

Some progress at last!

3.2.5 Specific comments

- Blackpool North – “For a station of this size and footfall the link to onward transport is poor. Buses serving the prom and points south can be accessed only after a walk of 180 yards in the wrong direction. No signage to indicate. Things may improve when the tram service starts.”
- Bolton - Bolton Interchange opened in 2017. “An excellent example of rail/ bus interchange linked to the station by covered walkway with lifts and good signage from the interchange to the rail station.”

- Barrow – “Passengers seeking connecting bus services face a 100-yard walk across the station forecourt car park to one of 4 stops, 2 on Holker Street and 2 on Abbey Road. However, there is no directional signage”. Information at the bus stops is non-existent or inadequate.
- Burnley Central – “A very unwelcoming station with no bus information entirely”.
- Warrington Central – “nothing related to buses at all at this station in complete contrast to Warrington Bank Quay. No signage to bus station even though (it) is very near”.
- Wigan bus station 1/4 mile from the rail stations was very good – “Excellent screens showing departures in real time also rail departures - also in real time (!) Also signage to train (sic) stations. Toilet 20p admission though.”
- St Helens – a new bus station is planned.

3.3 Merseyrail, Avanti West Coast, Transport for Wales, TPE, Metrolink

Station	Pfm Posters	Pfm signage	Entrance posters	Entrance signage	Adj bus stops	Adj bus stn
<i>Birkenhead Central 2016</i>	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Birkenhead C 2023	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	
<i>B'head Hamilton Sq. 2016</i>	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Birkenhead HSgr 2023	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
<i>Kirkby (Merseyside) 2016</i>	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Kirkby (Merseyside) 2023						
<i>L'pool S. Parkway 2016</i>	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
L'pool S. Parkway 2023	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES
<i>Maghull 2016</i>	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Maghull 2023						
<i>Ormskirk 2016</i>	NO	YES	YES	YES		YES
Ormskirk 2023						
<i>Southport 2016</i>	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Southport 2023	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
<i>Carlisle 2016</i>	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Carlisle 2023	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
<i>Crewe 2016</i>	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Crewe 2023	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO
<i>Lancaster 2016</i>	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Lancaster 2023	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
<i>Macclesfield 2016</i>	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Macclesfield 2023	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
<i>Oxenholme 2016</i>	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Oxenholme 2024	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO
<i>Penrith 2016</i>	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Penrith 2023	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
<i>Preston 2016</i>	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Preston 2023	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
<i>Stockport 2016</i>	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Stockport 2024	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
<i>Warrington B Quay 2016</i>	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Warrington B Quay 2023	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
<i>Wigan NW 2016</i>	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Wigan NW 2023	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
<i>Chester 2016</i>	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Chester 2023	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
<i>Stalybridge 2016</i>	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Stalybridge 2023	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
<i>Bury 2016</i>	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Bury 2023	NO	NO	*	*	YES	YES
<i>E. Didsbury 2016</i>	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	
E. Didsbury 2023						
<i>Oldham Central 2016</i>	NO	NO			NO	NO
Oldham Central 2023	NO	NO			NO	NO

Key – *Merseyrail stations*, *Avanti West Coast stations*, *Transport for Wales station*, *TransPennine Express station*, *Metrolink stations*.

Merseyrail

3.3.1 Information on platforms – Just four stations (Birkenhead Central, Hamilton Square, Liverpool South Parkway and Southport) were visited in 2023. Birkenhead Central & Hamilton Square had no information on platforms as in 2016. Liverpool South Parkway signage information was basically as in 2016, similarly at Southport.

3.3.2 Information in concourse / at station entrance – A similar picture to 2016. Southport suffers from its location hidden from the main street (Lord Street). “Apart from a couple of “How to find your bus” maps a) on the end of the arrival platform, and b) in the passageway towards the car park, there was no material mention of buses elsewhere within the station. The main route out of the station, through the short arcade of shops, did not contain signage indicating the route towards bus stops “.

3.3.3 At Liverpool South Parkway, the surveyor commented - “the existence of the bus station is outstandingly obvious, so no signage is necessary”.

3.3.4 Bus stops / bus stations – 3 stations had stops within 200 metres (Adjacent bus station at Liverpool South Parkway). At Southport there is a 5 minute minimum walk to bus stops on Lord Street but with no directional signage. It is pleasing that real time information is now provided at Liverpool South Parkway bus station, Birkenhead bus station and bus stops in Lord Street, Southport. A big improvement on 2016!

3.3.5 Car Parking – There is a very well used free car park at Liverpool South Parkway, but no dedicated station parking at Birkenhead Central and Hamilton Square. At Southport our surveyor noted a large car park at the side of the station, £3.90 for up to 2 hours and £4.95 for up to 24 hours. These costs could be reduced significantly by the use of an NCL App. The car park was not full at the time of visit.

Avanti West Coast

3.4.1 Information on platforms – only 3 (Oxenholme, Warrington Bank Quay and Wigan NW) out of the 10 stations had clearly visible posters (a slight improvement on 2016). The same 3 also only had any signage to buses. In both cases this information was on the southbound platforms only at Wigan NW.

3.4.2 Information in concourse / at station entrance – Several stations have seen a significant improvement in onward travel information in the form of a digital screen showing real time bus departure information from nearby bus stops. At 5 stations (7 in 2016) no signage was provided, though at Penrith, Wigan NW and Lancaster bus stops are adjacent to the station.

3.4.3 Bus stops – all stations except Stockport (where redevelopment was taking place) had bus stops within 200 metres. However at –

- Macclesfield (100 metres distant) - no information about this bus stop at the station.

- Carlisle (50 – 250 metres distant) – there was nothing to indicate which of the 7 stops to use.
- Warrington Bank Quay – one bus stop immediately outside the station was no longer in use and one was 50 metres away with confusing information. Other stops were 400 metres away.

There was no real time information at any bus stops.

3.4.4 Bus stations – no train station had an adjacent bus station, with 6 entailing a walk of more than 11 minutes. 7 bus stations were deemed to have good or fair facilities but without any real time information. However real time information was noted at the new Crewe bus station which opened in early May 2024. It is unfortunately a mile from the rail station.

3.4.5 Car Parking – all car parks were expensive (£12 a day typically on weekdays) and half were full at the time of inspection.

3.4.6 Other general & specific comments – Some of the Avanti stations have seen some improvement since 2016 e.g. Warrington Bank Quay and Wigan North Western. Some specific comments -

- Carlisle (visited Sep 2023) – “The word “Bus” does not appear anywhere on Carlisle Station – neither on signs, nor posters, nor notices”.
- Wigan NW – “In the station concourse is an electronic information finder showing real time bus information and the option of displaying the route to the bus station. Very good.” (There are similar displays at Crewe and Warrington Bank Quay).
- Preston – “Platform 4. The main platform for trains for the West Coast Line, Manchester and the Lake District. No information about buses was apparent on this platform”.
- Lancaster – “Platforms. Although there are signs to taxis, there is no prominent bus information. Station entrance. There is no bus information here. “
- Oxenholme – The weekday service is useful for connectivity with WCML trains. However, presently it is only hourly due to a lengthy temporary road closure. There is a note on the bus timetable at the stop outside the station, but no timings given”.

3.5 Others

Chester (operated by Arriva Trains Wales)

3.5.1 Information – As in 2016 no posters or signage was evident on the platforms at this busy station. In the concourse there is now a bus information electronic board, but this was not working on the day of the visit.

3.5.2 Bus stops/ bus station – there are stops just a few yards away. The bus station however is over half a mile distant. In contrast to 2016 there was a City bus link every 15 minutes (we were unable to ascertain the fares payable on this service). The bus station has bus and train information displayed but there is no real time information at either bus stops or the bus station.

Stalybridge (operated by TransPennine Express)

3.5.3 Information – on platforms, poster information was lacking though signage to buses was found. In the concourse a standard onward travel poster and map of town centre showing nearest bus stops and sign to bus station (exaggerated distance).

3.5.4 Bus stops/station – there are bus stops nearby, visible from the station entrance. The bus station is 400 metres away with little facilities. No real time information at bus stops or bus station.

Manchester Metrolink

3.5.5 Bus stops/stations – just two Metrolink stations were visited – Bury Interchange and Oldham Central. At Bury Interchange there were no signs to buses on the platform but the only way out was up steps emerging at the bus station. There were a lot of steps, and the escalator was not working on the day of visit (6th October 2023). The lift was working. The adjacent bus station, as in 2016, was still showing a general run-down appearance with 20p admission toilets and closed buffet.

3.5.6 At Oldham Central there was just a map of the town centre with advice to use Mumps Interchange or King Street for buses. The bus station 400 metres away had reasonable basic facilities under cover but no signage to Metrolink evident.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

4.1 In 2016 we said - “At a time when rail passengers are increasing in number and more of them are frustrated in finding a space to park their car at a rail station the availability of integration between rail and bus should be of increasing importance.” In both this survey and the one in 2016, we have looked at one aspect of integration – how easy it is to change from train to bus. Equally the reverse journey, changing from bus to train would bear similar investigation especially at bus stops/ bus stations relatively remote from rail stations. At most of the stations we visited there **was** information to be found about where to catch a bus but in general where information is lacking there has been little change since 2016.

4.2 There have been some material improvements though.

- At some Avanti stations - the introduction of a digital screen in the concourse showing real time bus departure information from nearby bus stops.
- New interchanges such as Bolton and improved bus stations such as Wigan have better facilities including real time bus running information.

4.3 Many stations were showing the same, dated information as in 2016. **We again recommend** that train & station operators and where appropriate Local Transport Authorities, including Combined Authorities and Unitary Authorities undertake a comprehensive review of all stations in our region to assess the

provision of this information. This review should aspire to maximising as far as possible the accessibility, standard and appropriateness of information at stations relating to the availability and location of onward bus service facilities.

4.4 This should include an assessment/ reassessment of

- Location of information and signage
- Clarity
- Comprehensiveness
- Accuracy

4.5 For more information about TravelWatch NorthWest visit –

www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk

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