

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

Thursday 27th June 2024, Blackburn Cathedral
Conference kindly supported by Avanti West Coast 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 started by referring to a journey from his home in Clitheroe to Blackburn Hospital. Public transport choices, with missed connections would have meant a journey time of 90 minutes by bus or train, whereas the car journey was 35 minutes, road congestion notwithstanding

TravelWatch NorthWest's role, to comment and hopefully urge improvements on matters such as connectivity, journey times, punctuality, comfort and facilities is not helped by poor integration compared to many European countries.

David concluded by saying that in 2016 TravelWatch NorthWest had surveyed bus-train integration and this exercise was repeated in late 2023 and early this year. There were some areas of improvement, but the underlying fact was that integration, was at best patchy. The report is available on the TWNW website.

Councillor Brian Taylor, the Mayor of Blackburn with Darwen welcomed everyone and expressed his appreciation of TWNW's work. He commented on the help that public transport gave to overcoming ill health arising from loneliness, giving the opportunity for people to get out of the house.

2. Avanti West Coast Update

Mark Osborne, Regional Growth Manager, Avanti West Coast

Mark outlined performance trends and service issues. Pendolino refurbishment was now complete and a Rest Day agreement with ASLEF now in place. The December 2024 timetable was being developed, including the phased roll out of a 2nd hourly Liverpool to London service.

Customer experience – trains were doing better than stations. He outlined the superfare single journey scheme and the Family Advance ticket. For a trial period, through tickets to Keswick were now available via Penrith and Stagecoach bus on to Keswick.

JM asked about running Anglo Scottish services further north than Preston when disruption occurred. Mark mentioned the possibility of new train crew depot at Crewe which would help with this. Peter Brown added that in this situation passengers for Lancaster could be directed to Preston bus station. David Simper suggested the Family Advance tickets could be extended to include the Blackpool Illuminations. Mark to look at.

Terri Balon commented on the unreliability of Click Travel. Mark to examine.

3. Network Rail's Plans

Danielle Lahan, Customer Account Manager

Danielle commented on improvements between Network Rail and Train Operators. She then gave an overview of Control Period 7 Delivery Plans. These included reducing delays by 20%, increasing capacity by 30% and reducing carbon emissions by 70%.

The West Coast Main Line North programme will be a major piece of work over the next few years, now affected by the government decision to cancel HS2 Phase 2.

Network Rail was looking at ways of minimising bank holiday disruption.

Stephen Waring asked about the London Centric nature of the NR regional organisation, with the TransPennine route in mind. A: Looking at the broader picture.

John Owen referred to bridge renewal work at Penrith and minimising bus substitution. A: working closely with operators.

Brian Haworth concerned about short platforms on Clitheroe line. A: Costly, will pass on.

Ian Conway asked about electrification of the Windermere line A: Will pass on. Cllr Sarah Courtney – electrification of Calder Valley line in conjunction with TRU? A: Will get back.

Peter Yates, Railfuture – does cutting carbon emissions mean more electrification? A: Will get back

Nigel Bird, WTUA, asked about capacity improvements. A: Castlefield Curve an example.

Malcolm Richardson commented on the need for more track capacity between Preston and Blackpool and for more platforms at Blackpool North. A: Looking at additional platforms at Preston.

Roger Barton, Goyt Valley RUG raised service issues including 1 train/hr not 2 to Marple. Buses on Sundays. A: Landslip issues. Will get back.

4. Your Local Bus Operator

Paul Turner, Commercial Director, TransDev Blazefield Ltd

Paul introduced himself and gave some background to Trans Dev Blazefield, describing the various operations in Lancashire. Overall, there had been good growth post Covid.

He outlined improvements under BSIP, infrastructure work and good results for customer satisfaction measures. Paul referred to new evening buses around Blackburn and recent investment in new WitchWay buses. There was also more potential for more integrated ticketing with rail.

5. Points of View

Responding to Margaret Mitchell, Paul said that the speed of response to a broken-down bus would depend on how far it was from the depot.

Responding to Peter Brown Martin Keating (Northern Rail) said that the rail industry was working with Lancashire CC on services in connection with the Eden project in Morecambe. The possibility of bidirectional running into Lancaster was being looked at.

Richard Lysons commented on the bus/rail integration report and buses being the poor relation. Martin pointed to the work that had been done at Accrington and planned for Burnley Manchester Road. Burnley Central which had ranked very poorly in the TOWNW report was also being looked at. Paul Turner commented that he would like to put bus timetables at stations.

Sarah Courtney stressed the importance of integration and commented on the boundary issues brought about by bus franchising in the Combined Authorities.

Ian Tate commented on the difficulty of changing at Manchester Piccadilly especially platforms 13/14. The Chairman referred to the incomplete project centred on the Ordsall Curve. Martin Keating accepted that the Castlefield corridor was a problem.

Stephen Waring pressed the case for a Carbon free railway.

6. Community Rail in Lancashire

Katie Douglas, Accessibility and Inclusion Officer

Katie outlined the background and aims of Community Rail and the work of Community Rail Lancashire.

She spoke in detail about 3 major projects –

- TrainEd - connecting the community to the railway and educate them about safety, careers and sustainability whilst giving them the confidence to travel.
- Feel Good Field Trips - providing 5,000 children 4-18 yrs with the chance to go on a free, enriching and educational day out.

- Try the Train - supporting people of all ages to become more confident accessing rail services and to encourage future independent rail travel.

Responding to Ian Stuart, Katie said that much contact with other CRPs was through the CR Education Network.

The Chairman reflected on the need for Community Bus Partnerships! Katie said that funding from outside the rail industry was being sought to take account of door-to-door journeys.

7. Promoting Rural Bus Links

John Carey, Dales & Bowland Community Transport

Dalesbus is a volunteer-run not for profit social enterprise established to manage public transport in the Dales, incorporated in 2007. To provide car-free access to the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Its mission is to remove social isolation, encourage healthy exercise increasing physical and mental wellbeing, remove pollution and congestion from the roads, promote sustainable tourism supporting the visitor economy, and provide local connectivity.

John presented an interesting set of slides showing the extent of coverage mainly in the Yorkshire Dales, including links with the Settle Carlisle Railway.

Challenges were –

- Growing and sustaining the network
- Reliance entirely on volunteer fundraising and grants
- No long-term funding and therefore difficulties in planning ahead
- Fare income is a fraction of the cost.
- The government £2 fare cap
- North Yorkshire County Council exclusion of certain services from ENCTS (the bus pass)
- Engagement with the Yorkshire Dales National Park and NYC
- Increased costs and difficulties in sourcing suitable operators
- Operational difficulties due to road closures, congestion e.g. Malham

Aiming towards a sustainable future –

- An awakening to the need for public transport
- A modal shift from the private car to public transport
- Climate emergency and the need for carbon reduction
- Car-free access to the National Park
- The integration ideal – bus and train
- Supporting the visitor economy
- Providing local connectivity

7. Date of Next Conference

Thursday 24th October Blackpool or Warrington.

Copies of the presentations are available on the TravelWatch NorthWest Website - www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk